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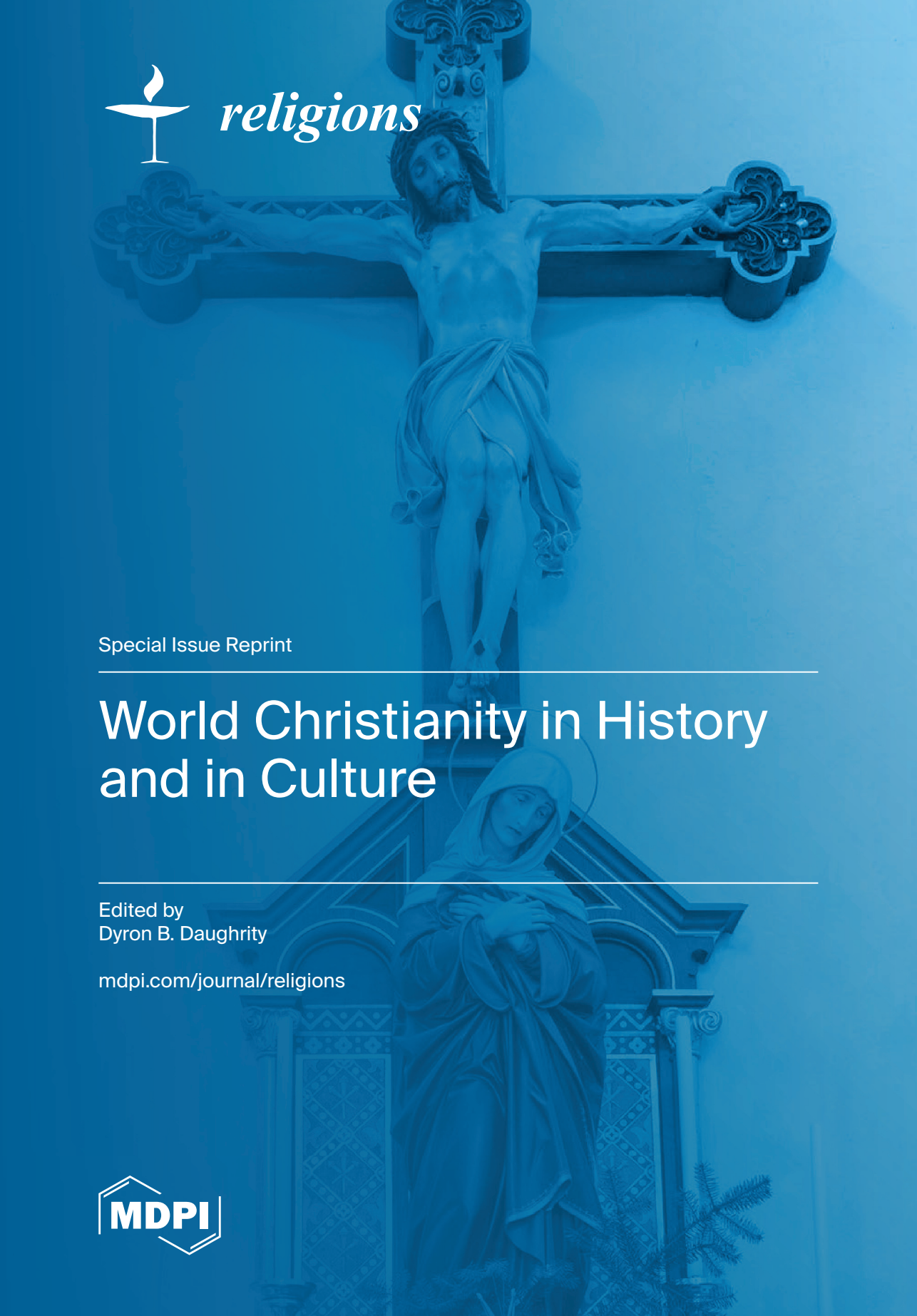

Special Issue Reprint

World Christianity in History and in Culture

Edited by
Dyron B. Daughrity

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World Christianity in History and in Culture

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Dyron B. Daughrity

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Contents

About the Editor . . . . . **vii**

M. Christhu Doss
Religions, Women and Discourse of Modernity in Colonial South India
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2022**, *13*, 1225, doi:10.3390/rel13121225 . . . . . **1**

Jayabalan Murthy
Christianity and Its Impact on the Lives of Kallars in Tamil Nadu Who Embraced the Faith, in Comparison to Those Who Did Not: Special Reference to Kallar Tamil Lutheran Christians in Tamil Nadu
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2023**, *14*, 582, doi:10.3390/rel14050582 . . . . . **22**

Jose Abraham and George Oommen
Inter-Weaving of Local and Global Discourses: History of Early Pentecostals in Kerala
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2023**, *14*, 312, doi:10.3390/rel14030312 . . . . . **32**

Tiasa Basu Roy
Christianity and *Liberation*: A Study of the Canadian Baptist Mission among the Savaras in Ganjam (Orissa), c.1885–1970
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2022**, *13*, 996, doi:10.3390/rel13100996 . . . . . **46**

Jacob Chengwei Feng
Holistic Wisdom from Abrahamic Faiths' Earliest Encounters with Ancient China: Towards a Constructive Chinese Natural Theology
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2023**, *14*, 1117, doi:10.3390/rel14091117 . . . . . **65**

Lei Li
Adapting Christianity to Hakka Culture: The Basel Mission's Activities among Indigenous People in China (1846–1931)
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2022**, *13*, 924, doi:10.3390/rel13100924 . . . . . **78**

Daowei (Joshua) Sim
Bringing Chinese Christianity to Southeast Asia: Constructing Transnational Chinese Evangelicalism across China and Southeast Asia, 1930s to 1960s
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2022**, *13*, 773, doi:10.3390/rel13090773 . . . . . **94**

Mohammed Girma
Mind the Doxastic Space: Examining the Social Epistemology of the Ethiopian Wax and Gold Tradition
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2023**, *14*, 1214, doi:10.3390/rel14091214 . . . . . **111**

Greg Gorsuch
A Christian Pluralistic Hypothesis: To Bonhoeffer and beyond—A World Christianity
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2024**, *15*, 19, doi:10.3390/rel15010019 . . . . . **124**

Elke B. Speliopoulos
A Home for the 'Wandering Aramean'—In Germany?
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2022**, *13*, 1176, doi:10.3390/rel13121176 . . . . . **138**

About the Editor

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Article

Religions, Women and Discourse of Modernity in Colonial South India

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Abstract: Colonial education and missionary discourse of modernity intensified struggles for continuity and change among the followers of Hinduism and Christianity in nineteenth century India. While missionary modernity was characterised by an emphasis on sociocultural changes among the marginalized women through Christian norms of decency, orthodox Hindus used traditional cultural practices to confront missionary modernization endeavours. This article posits that the discourse of missionary modernity needs to be understood through the principles of Western secular modernity that impelled missionaries to employ decent clothing as a symbol of Christian femininity. It argues that missionary modernity not only emboldened the marginalized women to challenge their ascribed sociocultural standing but also solidified communitarian consciousness among the followers of Hinduism and Christianity substantially. Even though Travancore state defended the entrenched customary practices, including women's attire patterns, with all its potency through authoritative proclamations, it could not dissuade missionaries from converting the marginalized women to missionary modernity.

Keywords: colonialism; Christianity; gender; Hinduism; missionary modernity; Nadars; Nairs; tradition

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1. Revisiting the Binary

The intricate interconnectedness between women missionaries and discourse of modernity in nineteenth-century India needs to be re-examined historically and critically in light of tradition-modernity binary (D. M. Menon 2002, pp. 1662–63). Influenced by the principles of secular modernity, missionaries identified themselves with and fostering the ideas of equality and respectability. In South India, Travancore in particular, the ideas of tradition and modernity were often perceived as polar contraries. Driven mainly by religious intents, missionary modernity struggled to transform the marginalized women through the Christian notion of decency. The defenders of tradition strived to retain some cultural practices of Hinduism in order to validate orthodox femininity in the nineteenth century (Gusfield 1967; Bendix 1967; Kothari 1968). When missionaries perceived the emerging Hindu cultural assertions as a serious impediment to their modernisation endeavours, they encouraged the marginalized women to confront traditional taboos including attire pattern (Kent 2004, pp. 54–77). The discourse of missionary modernity in Travancore was thus centred on the utilitarian aspects of colonial education, proselytization and public decency that emphasized superficial changes in the cultural life of the people, particularly with regard to clothing.

The missionary perception that Christians should never be 'filthy' or 'indecent' became an essential component of proselytization. Even though the Christian notion of decency was not made to be a part of the formal missionary pedagogy, it eventually became the unwritten syllabus of instruction in their educational institutions. Missionaries continued to believe that religious instruction and decency are closely linked to each other. They argued that it was Brahmanical Hinduism that divided people on caste lines and disseminated the ideas of purity and pollution. Hence, missionaries became critical towards the institution of caste itself that kept the marginalized women in a state of seclusion socially and culturally.[1]

Marginalized communities used education and conversion to Christianity as tools to challenge social and cultural hierarchy in the nineteenth century. As Uma Chakravarty argues, women were desperate in breaking their prison-houses largely through missionary education that provided the converts particularly from the lower castes with a means to access employment opportunities. This enhanced the possibilities of upward mobility though on a selective basis. Changing new identities impelled people from the lower castes challenge the symbolic world of status and privilege. For example, the struggle for attire decency in Travancore not only increased the numerical strength of Christian converts among the Nadars, but also propelled the women to fight for the same status, same modesty and same privilege to cover the breast in the same way as upper caste women did. Even though the very right to be 'modest' itself was generally attributed to caste status, Nadars went beyond missionary notions of decency in some senses (Chakravarti 2018).

The caste complexity in Travancore society not only enforced marginalized women to divulge their breasts but also exposed them to mental torment and psychological nuisance (Shaji 2017, p. 11). Missionaries were seemed to be radical than the colonial political administrators in challenging and changing believes, practices and customs of the Hindus (Beidelman 1982, pp. 2–16; Cox 1994). Covering female body appears to have equal hitches as uncovering of the body. Generally, the patriarchal society believed that the act of covering the female bodies was a form of dignity of female sexuality within the framework of family. This belief system provided men a kind of ownership right over women's bodies. Covering the body was also seen as an indication of the property right of the husband—the Nadar men (earlier Shanars) in this context. As Sonja Thomas argues, one of the most conspicuous features of the marginalized women in Travancore was the practice of bare-breastedness. Brahmin pundits in the nineteenth century had not only interpreted Hindu Smritis to justify the deep-rooted practice of bare-breastedness but also vindicated sexual ownership of the marginalized women. Consequently, the supposedly lower caste men and women were not permitted to cover their bodies in front of orthodox men and women (S. Thomas 2018, pp. 46–51).

The origin of the orthodox femininity discourse can be traced back to the ancient Indian lawgiver Manu who specified that a woman's father should protect her in childhood, her husband in her youth and her sons in her old age. For example, Indian feminist Pandita Ramabai argued that it was Manu who had created a cultural ecosystem where women were not only overlooked but also were seen as dependent creatures that can never be independent in thinking and action. This patriarchal perception continued during the early modern and colonial periods particularly, until the first half of the nineteenth century India where majority of the women hardly had access to education (Sarasvati 1888, pp. 50–60; Mondal 2017).

The discourse of missionary modernity was instrumental in making the nineteenth century India to be a battlefield for ideologies that addressed questions of identity, decency, femininity and respectability (Sen 2015). During this period, the question of how to represent the cultural past of a community was seen as a much-debated political, as well as cultural, issue. In Travancore, the controversy was characterised particularly by the discourse of tradition-modernity (Gottlob 2002, pp. 75–97; 2011, pp. 6–8). As Ranajit Guha argues, the British colonizers were keen on dislocating the people in India politically, ethnically, materially, culturally and religiously. The British officials and missionary agencies portrayed themselves as a 'superior' race, which followed higher ideals of Christianity. On the contrary, the colonized Indians were depicted as impoverished, 'inferior', 'superstitious' and 'barbarous' people (Guha 1997, pp. 1–3).

It is significant to note that postcolonial writings on social change scarcely used terms such as 'civilized' or 'barbarism' directly. Instead, these writings consciously employed usages such as modernity and tradition to give an impression of being unbiased when appraising the progress of individuals, communities and nations based on Western standards (Huntington 1968). However, the term modernity, as Dilip Menon contends, "comes to us masking both its origins within a distinct geographical space as well as an imagina-

tion almost entirely concerned with a description of change in the west." This suggests that modernity in the nineteenth century south India was neither a temporally nor a geographically grounded phenomenon. Even though there was an increasing suspicion towards the applicability of modernity as a natural historical process, colonial government and missionaries strived to make it appear as a natural historical process in South India (D. M. Menon 2002, pp. 1662–67).

If there was one particular narrative that dominated the entire colonial literature in nineteenth-century India, it was the discourse of change, commonly referred to as modernity. Partha Chatterjee argues that, in the nineteenth century, everything was changing, and nothing remained the same. The colonial government and missionaries were keen on altering the very foundations of Indian cultural ethos by creating a discourse of modern consciousness of the self (Chatterjee 1993, pp. 49–50 and 117–19). The missionary discourse of modernity led to a series of contestations and transfigurations in the spheres of education, religion, governance, body and public life. It often challenged the manner in which social affairs were conducted, though the modern way of doing things was not written on a clean slate (Kaviraj 2000). The impact of colonialism on Indian society, culture, mind and body was so deep and incomprehensible that it led to what Ashis Nandy called 'the psychological uprooting and cultural disruption' (Nandy 1983, pp. 51–52). The British colonists and missionaries endeavoured to break down the entire cultural framework of the Indian society through their civilizing mission (Marx 1853, p. 652; Srinivas 1962, pp. 2–18; Rudolph 1965, pp. 976–77). The Hindus were depicted as heathens, fornicators, idolators, adulterers, covetous, drunkards and extortioners.[2] Thus, missionary modernity was perceived as an ideological instrument for creating social and cultural changes (Shils 1961, pp. 3–9; Rudolph 1965, pp. 982–83).

The principles of Western secular modernity and modern institutional structures created various forms of transformation and cultural dislocation. The cultural dislodgment was conspicuous as there were perceptible vagaries in religious ideals, customs, attire and profession (Nandy 1983, p. 9). As a robust upholder of tradition, Travancore state played a crucial role in asserting its deep-rooted customs through proclamations that created upheavals among the marginalized sections. In fact, in some of his paintings, T. Murali, a twentieth century Kerala-based artist depicts the cultural complexities of Travancore state. In his painting on what he called the Shanar revolt that took place in the 1850s, he demonstrated how there were instances where the marginalized women with the help of missionaries asserted their rights to cover their upper body with clothes of their choice. His portrayal of Nangeli, an Ezhava woman who chopped off her breasts in protest against *mulakkaram* or breast tax imposed by the Travancore state, reveals how marginalized women experienced different forms of injustice that were directly linked to questions of identity, psychic and emotions (Nazeer 2015; Pan 2021). It also demonstrates how Travancore state was assertive in imposing dissimilar codes of conduct to be followed by women. It was women missionaries who were instrumental in challenging the ideology of the Travancore state and confronting the deep-rooted orthodox femininity. Even though the discourse of missionary modernity strived to transcend boundaries of religions, it was limited largely to those women who either converted to Christianity or to those women who expressed their willingness to be moulded by missionary ideals. Missionaries argued that the transition from orthodox femininity to Christian femininity is possible only through Christian norms of domesticity and decency. While divulging the upper part of female body was perceived to be a symbol of orthodox femininity, the very idea of covering the body was equated with the standards of Christian femininity.

The British Residents and missionaries in Travancore assiduously endeavoured to liberate the marginalized women from the orthodox femininity and other inherently overbearing cultural traditions of Travancore. They claimed that the atrocities perpetrated on women could be challenged only through an orderly, lawful, moral, civilizational and rational procedure of governance. As Partha Chatterjee argues, the practical implication of the

criticism of Hindu traditions and customs was essentially a colonial project of modernizing people in general and marginalized women in particular (Chatterjee 1997).

If the battles of Plassey and Buxar triggered the modernizing project of the British in the 1750s and 1760s, missionaries, liberals and the defenders of Western secular modernity through a superior racial and religious ideology further intensified the process missionary modernity. While modernization advocated a wider materialistic change at the institutional and personal level, Westernization believed in the idea that Western culture was the epitome of a good lifestyle that involves a drastic change in the behavioural aspects that are related to customs, including food and attire. In some instances, missionaries used both modernization and Westernization interchangeably to validate the claims of religious superiority in the nineteenth century. They used religion as an instrument of moral and material advancement in social structures, in minds, and in bodies of the colonized people. Missionaries believed that the material benefits of Western science, the advantages of economic progress, the cultural benefits of Western education and the moral benefits through Christian ethics would facilitate the Indian women to conform to Victorian norms of respectable dress, public decency, sexuality and family life (Narayan 1995). Thus, missionaries attempted to replace orthodox femininity with a Christian femininity.

As Ranajit Guha maintains, the colonial government and missionaries collectively sought to improve moral and material conditions of the people through social, cultural, educational, legal and ecclesiastical regulations (Guha 1997, pp. 33–34 and 80–81). As apologists of European civilization, a considerable number of European intellectuals argued that in an age of optimism British rule would be a necessary evil. They maintained that the colonizers were not a group of self-seeking, insatiable, ethnocentric vandals and self-chosen carriers of what Ashis Nandy says a cultural pathology, but ill-intentioned, defective historical instruments that instinctively worked for the upliftment of the neglected and deprived sections (Nandy 1983, pp. 33–35).

Missionaries provided greater security to those converted Christians, who had been disturbed by private persecution and legal spoliation. They were persuasive in their approach, which was applauded by some governor generals. For example, Governor General William Bentinck who had cordial relationship with missionaries remarked that the profession of missionaries was a holy one, which he felt was most gratifying. He specified that the sole objective of missionaries was religious conversion, whereas the fundamental principle of British rule in India was strict religious neutrality. Nevertheless, he ventured to give it as his firm option that in all the schools and colleges under the support of the government, the principle of religious neutrality cannot be too strongly enforced. He also advised the missionaries to expand the scope of education by all means as a platform to disseminate religious truth, though he was disinclined to support missionary proselytization publicly.[3]

There was a cordial relationship between missionaries of the London Missionary Society and a few local Hindu rulers who extended their monetary support to missionary educational establishments in Travancore. Enthralled by missionary education, these rulers even were willing to support English education unconditionally, though they were sceptical about missionary proselytization in the first place. For example, in December 1833, the Rajah of Travancore Rama Varma II visited a missionary school in Nagercoil of south Travancore. He specified that young women in Travancore were able to read, write and answer questions in both vernacular and English. He expressed that he was highly pleased with the missionary instruction given to his people. He even ordered INR 2000 to be paid to missionary of the London Missionary Society Charles Mault to make use of the money to construct a church.[4]

Despite cordial relationship between missionaries and a few Hindu rulers in Travancore, the continued missionary interference in the cultural life of the people generated discontent among the orthodox Hindus. While missionary encounters resulted in the reinvention of the self among the culturally conscious orthodox Hindus, marginalized women who had a soft corner for missionary propagated Christianity were willing to

be moulded by missionary teachings. However, it would be simplistic to assume that the religious teaching of missionaries was a separate watertight compartment that was completely delinked from the cultural project of colonialism. What is frequently referred to as the Western secular modernity was expanded further by certain Protestant missionary agencies, printing press, English education and colonial reforms (C. M. Bauman 2020, pp. 1–25). Most notably, colonial education not only attempted to cut the people off from their own culture and tradition but also made their own past esoteric to them as a history (Guha 1988, pp. 25–26).

The ways in which the defenders of tradition and advocates of modernity in the nineteenth century Travancore articulated their ideas need to be re-examined historically and critically. The recent interpretation that the nineteenth century struggles for attire decency in Travancore was a Shanar revolt and a seismic upheaval that 'demolished' all structures of power and dominance needs to be revisited in light of the theories related to tradition and modernity (Sheeju 2015).

2. 'Sheep in the Midst of Ravaging Wolfs'

Postcolonial studies have demonstrated how the globalization of Christianity, temperament of capitalism and ideologies of colonialism (re)shaped the discourse of tradition and modernity (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967, pp. 1–16; 29–49; Viswanathan 2000; D. M. Menon 2002, pp. 1662–67; Philip 2004, pp. 78–79 and 122–66; Barua 2015, pp. 12–13). These studies have suggested that there is an intricate interconnectedness between the industrial revolution, capitalism, imperialism, colonization and globalization of Christianity, which facilitated in the construction of modernity as a colonial form of knowledge (Philip 2004, pp. 1–28). The cultural transformation of the capitalist world economy, its widespread acceptance and the great intellectual, as well as cultural, synthesis of the long nineteenth century shaped the colonial and missionary institutional bedrocks (Wallerstein 2001, pp. 1–22). The colonial and missionary establishments endeavoured to modernize people either through mass conversions, also known as community movement or through character building education (Philip 2004, pp. 78–79 and 122–66). The missionary encounters with Hinduism had often underwired the connection between Christianity and British colonialism (Barua 2015, pp. 12–13). While a considerable number of the people from marginalized sections responded to missionary teachings positively, most of the orthodox Hindus challenged missionary discourse of modernity. The desirability of the marginalized sections towards Christianity in Travancore was partly prompted by the need to move away from the cycle of rigid social hierarchy, oppression and inequality and partly by the fact that Christianity allowed for their entry into a wider public sphere as individuals (D. M. Menon 2002, pp. 1662–67).

While missionaries as inquisitors were desperate to understand the cultural life of the people in Travancore, the colonial officials were reluctant from interfering into the cultural aspect of the people largely due to political reasons (D. M. Menon 2002, p. 1662). Some colonial officials and missionaries perceived that the aspects of tradition in Travancore were thematized and in some cases produced as instrument of rule by the dominant landowning class. The dominant sections, including Nairs, often perceived their cultural tenets as legitimate tools for political mobilization against colonial authorities and missionary politics. The orthodox Hindus and marginalized sections of Travancore equally tried to arbitrate new claims to status through well-established idioms of legitimation. When the Travancore state, through its decisive power over labouring populations, defended customs through official proclamations, its orthodox Hindus invoked the spirit of tradition to distinguish castes in public space and thus sustain their superior status claims, embodied in their dress code. Missionaries, on the contrary, used their religion to create a new identity among their converts (Jeffrey 1976, pp. 1–18; K. P. P. Menon 1924, pp. 95–99).

Missionaries perceived that Britain as a Christian nation had the highest form of civilization that had the capability to Christianize and 'civilize' its colonized people who were depicted as a 'race of extreme poverty'.[5] This demonstrates how the British missionaries

did not only define the social condition of the people through a materialist interpretation but also overlooked the cultural ethos through the ideals of Christianity. The discourse of modernity in colonial India was carried out through three distinct methods—proselytization by missionaries, legislative and administrative action by the colonial state—and dissemination of what the British called enlightened Western knowledge. These methods persuaded Indians to believe in the unworthiness of their way of life and to adopt the new forms of civilized and rational social British order (Chatterjee 1993, pp. 49–50 and 117–19; Viswanathan 2000; Dirks 2006, pp. 300–2).

This does not necessarily mean that the colonial government always supported missionary activities. A considerable number of colonial officials often expressed their apprehension that the missionary proselytization would be a serious threat to their political existence in India (Zupanov 2003, pp. 109–10). Nonetheless, as Britons and Christians, majority of the colonial officials had a sympathetic approach towards missionary proselytization.[6] Missionaries continued to develop a confrontational attitude towards Indian customs in order to intensify the process of modernization (Maclean 2008, pp. 125–26). The discourse of missionary modernity was a historical process wherein women missionaries attempted to modify the attire pattern of the marginalized women, advocating public decency and ensuring Christian civility. Missionaries were able to persuade the women who were more frequently the target of missionary reform initiatives. Missionaries asserted that they were all sharers in the great and blessed work of seeking to win souls for Christ from among India's women and indicated that women in Indian villages were exceedingly interested to interact with them.[7]

The itinerant Indian women preachers such as Yerraguntla Nagamma, Bangarappu Satyamma and others had a series of interactions with the fellow Indian women of the Telugu region in Madras presidency and introduced Christianity to them with a view to make superficial changes that are related to body, mind and soul (Taneti 2013, pp. 54–56). On the contrary, in some cases, there were instances of Indianization of Christianity to make conversion intelligible within the cultural meanings of the people. In South India, as missionary records indicate, women exhibited more penchants towards Christianity than men. In the case of converted Nadar women, missionary encounters through education sought to create a discourse of respectability that was contained, restrained, self-regulating and sexually chaste (Kent 2004, p. 240). When the colonial government was almost heedless about female education in the first half of the nineteenth century, missionaries used education as the first weapon to challenge the traditional gender stereotypes. Missionaries persuaded the converted women from the marginalized sections to work as local evangelists, teachers in missionary schools and henchwomen (Forbes 1996, pp. 32–60). The missionary education for the young women in Travancore propelled them to be critical of the traditional boundaries of gender, domesticity and orthodox femininity.

Missionary encounters with marginalized masses demonstrate how vernacular, and English education in colonial India were critical towards intra-gender inequality and caste rigidity (Oddie 1979, pp. 2–26) to create a consciousness for social upward mobility (Forrester 1980, pp. 3–23), and spiritual enhancement (Gladstone 1989, pp. 4–19). This is not to suggest that the missionaries themselves were completely fee from practicing social hierarchy at some level in both private and public spaces. In some cases, their writings and speeches emphasized more on equality before God than among people who were from dissimilar social backgrounds. Generally, missionaries advocated the principles of equality to condemn the rigid social structure of the Indian society and to reach out to potential converts (Viswanath 2014, pp. 15–19 and 40–99). Missionary criticisms were directed more against the Hindu beliefs, practices, rituals and customs than against labour extraction and occupational hierarchies (Kumar 2019).

The colonial officials and missionaries claimed that the Indian society was a culturally 'stagnant' society. As soon as the British established their political power in the second half of the eighteenth century, they realized the need for reforms and transformations in the Indian society. When missionaries attempted to disseminate Christian norms of equality

and decency among Hindus, the Travancore state and orthodox Hindus made initiatives to strengthen traditional attire pattern through commanding proclamations (Bayly 1984).

Thus, the marginalized women's encounters with missionary modernity and the missionary confrontation with the princely state of Travancore in the nineteenth century need to be situated within a broader context of colonialism, cultural hegemony and power dynamics. Colonial government and missionaries not only portrayed themselves as champions of respectability and instruments of change but also strived to win a reputation for common decency of life (Mateer 1871, p. 41; Devika 2005). For example, the struggle for attire decency was a missionary-induced struggle that provided the Nadar women a public space to advance their assertions of equality, justice, dignity and decency (Hardgrave 1968). In fact, from the 1820s until the first war of Indian independence of 1857, the direct missionary encounters with marginalized women were evidently noticeable where modernization endeavours had become the centre stage (Basu 1995).

It was a common practice in North India and in some pockets of South India that communities were structured around feudal landowning arrangements where the social status of a family was related to its ability to seclude and protect its womenfolk from potentially dangerous outsiders (C. A. Bauman 2008, p. 172). Travancore was, perhaps, one of the most culturally sensitive orthodox Hindu states, where the people practised their customs of orthodox Hinduism in a tangible manner. Travancore underwent a series of cultural conflicts after the political consolidation of the British and the introduction of Christianity by Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century.[8] The Syrian Christians who trace their history back to AD 52 continued to occupy a highly honourable position in the state as merchants, officials, and politicians (A. V. Thomas 1974, pp. 90–91). The state and caste Hindus hardly had any major ideological conflicts with the Syrian Christian community for ages. Nonetheless, the Protestant missionary encounters that were critical of the Hindu customs, traditions and practices could possibly have prompted the Travancore rulers to reinvent their judicial, administrative and legislative establishments through political and cultural mobilizations.[9]

There was a strong nexus between religion and politics in Travancore in the nineteenth century. For example, the Travancore state was dedicated to Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, and the Maharaja of Travancore was considered the agent of the deity (Theertha 2004, p. 131). This indicates how Travancore state officially patronized the orthodox Hindu rituals and practices to defend Hindu faith (Bayly [1999] 2001, p. 162). While a large number of temples were under the direct supervision and control of the Maharaja, who was the supreme feudal lord, the feudal aristocracy controlled his authority and power (Jeffrey 1976, pp. 1–3; K. P. P. Menon 1924, pp. 95–96; Yesudas 1977, pp. 14–16). The Travancore state validated the very essence of caste as a social and cultural institution, thereby strengthening the social stratification (Mateer 1883, pp. 332–34). Subsequently, the Travancore rulers created a distinct provision for the administration to deal with matters of civil and criminal nature. To this end, orthodox Hindus such as Brahmins and Nairs played a crucial role in the principal and subordinate courts (Yesudas 1977, pp. 28–30).

While challenging this complex social and cultural stratification, women missionaries in Travancore argued that only conversion to Christianity would guarantee equality and social esteem to marginalized women. Missionaries believed that the marginalized Indian women would be able to experience decency, equality and respectability only when some of the controversial orthodox Hindu customs are discarded. As agents of change, missionaries endeavoured to disseminate what they called egalitarian values, offer a modern perspective of womanhood, question the deeply embedded orthodox Hindu customs and confront the attire pattern among the converted Christian women (Fleming 1992).

Thus, the colonial missionary encounter with the people of Travancore became tangible since the beginnings of the nineteenth century when London missionaries started working in Travancore encouraged by British Residents who were officially assigned there (Howard 1993, p. 19). It is significant to note that the practices of assimilation and adaptation in Travancore before the Protestant missionary confrontations were a common phenomenon

where local Hindu rulers allowed Christians, Muslims and Jews to freely practice their respective religions. Surplus lands were donated by the state for construction of churches, mosques and synagogues. Trade charters were issued to various religious groups to have control over ports and marketplaces. The intercultural interactions between different communities demonstrate that the Travancore state neither discriminated any religious groups nor intruded into the cultural realms of the people (Ouwerkerk 1994, pp. 47–48).

However, the arrival of Protestant missionary agencies created a new beginning in the cultural history of Travancore. A series of attempts were made to destabilize the social and cultural fabrics of the Travancore society through a superior Protestant religious imaginary. Missionaries had a cordial relationship with most of the British Resident commissioners. For example, Colonel Colin Macaulay and Major John Munro extended their generous support to missionary activities. Colonel Macaulay patronized the missionary proselytizing activities initiated by Ringeltaube, a German missionary of the London Missionary Society. In fact, Major Munro who had the distinction of being the most loved and venerated of the British Residents in Travancore assisted missionaries to intensify evangelization and modernization. The British Residents patronised missionaries, showed them much personal kindness and rendered substantial services towards educational works. Missionaries indicated that these Residents were idealistic, resourceful and extremely critical towards the privileged feudal aristocracy (Yesudas 1977, pp. 8–10). They expressed their gratitude for the help rendered by these Residents for the extension of Christianity in Travancore. Missionaries asserted that it was impossible for anyone to be more anxious for the promotion of Christianity in Travancore than Major Munro himself (Church Missionary Society 1819, p. 322; 1832b, p. 526).

The marginalized communities in general and the palmyra-climbing Nadars in particular attracted a great deal of missionary inquisitiveness, primarily as a subject of critical enquiry. Missionaries argued that a large number of Nadars were keen on pushing themselves forward from social and economic captivities (Aloysius 1998, pp. 17–18). They believed that the marginalized sections of the people would embrace Christianity when they are modernized through evangelization and Western education. However, the landowning communities such as Nairs challenged the controversial process of modernization, as it was seen as opposed to the established norms of Travancore Hindu tradition. The discourse of missionary modernity prompted the orthodox Hindus to exert pressure on the Maharajas of Travancore to detest missionary modernization. Subsequently, the Travancore state and orthodox Hindus expressed their discontent against missionary ideologies (Yesudas 1980), though some women from the royal family, including Gowri Parvathi Bai, supported missionaries and their religious discussions. Even though women from the royal families that belonged to the Nair caste received missionary education, they were disinclined to convert to Christianity for cultural and political reasons (Church of England Zenana Missionary Society 1881).

As overseers of land, the Nairs in Travancore enjoyed certain power and privileges under the pre-British policy. They were also known widely for their strong military training that helped colonial government to a great extent. Major Munro created two battalions of Nair sepoys and one company of cavalry headed by European officers to work as bodyguards and escorts to the royalty (Yesudas 1977, pp. 22–24). The Nairs, who were mostly feudal chieftains, had separate estates with distinct rights. Business transactions between Nairs and marginalized sections were conducted through an agent system in order to avoid pollution by physical touch. As feudal lords and warriors, the Nairs were hardly imprisoned for their crimes (Panikkar 1918). Even though Nairs demonstrated themselves as soldiers and officials who defended the rights of orthodox Hindus, they were classified as Sudras. They were classified as inferior in ritual status to Namboodiri Brahmins, non-Malayali Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Ambalavasis (the temple servants). As Sudras, Nairs appeared to have carried a degree of 'pollution' to Brahmin priests, Kshatriya Maharajas and temple premises. In Travancore, the notion of pollution was capable of transmission not only through physical touch but from a distance as well. Hence, Nairs

could approach but had no right to touch Namboodiri Brahmins; Pulaya slaves had to remain ninety-six steps away from a Brahmin; Syrian Christians could touch Nairs but were prohibited from inter-dining; and Ezhavas and Pulayas were considered as contaminating social groups (Jeffrey 1976, pp. 2–9).

The complex Travancore social settings impelled missionaries to challenge the social stigma of the marginalized women. The upper cloth struggle was interpreted not only as a sociocultural movement for a new identity with self-esteem but also was understood as an intense struggle for power between landowning Nairs and landless Nadars.[10] Missionaries believed that Nairs and other orthodox Hindus persecuted Christian converts from the marginalized sections for violating the deep-rooted Hindu customs and traditions. They specified that Nadars made repeated complaints against atrocities of Nairs in a respectful manner but such complaints were hardly entertained.[11] Missionaries maintained that on several occasions, Nadars in Travancore waited on the Diwan (the highest court official next to the Maharaja) of Travancore to put forth their complaints before him, but they were unceremoniously dismissed, because they wore the prohibited upper cloth. They insisted that, despite Nadars expressing their vulnerability, not a single government official, ranging from the Diwan to a peon, felt inclined to help them and speak a word on their behalf (See Note 11 above).

Missionaries indicated that Christian women were willing to stand up and fight back against what they called the arbitrary authoritativeness of the Travancore state and orthodox Hindus.[12] The *Madras Times* reported that Nadar women yearned for a decent and modest lifestyle precisely because going around half-naked was a moral and psychological hit to their feelings. They could not endure it but had to do so since they lived in a kingdom that promulgated the practice. The missionaries instructed the caste Hindus to either abandon their ancient customs or be willing to be civilized by the authority. When the orthodox Hindus refused to concede, missionaries vented their discontent that the customs were a foul blot upon humanity and should be obliterated so that civilization and advancement get a fair field. Missionaries proclaimed that the Maharaja of Travancore would never have cause to regret that he has in his kingdom a hundred thousand people so far advanced as to be ashamed of their condition (See Note 12 above). Consequently, missionaries portrayed Christians as sheep in the midst of ravaging wolfs. They believed that as long as the colonial officials had power in Travancore, they would have the liberty to carry out their proselytization in order to set people free from the state of degradation and ignorance (*The Scottish Congregational Magazine* 1860).

Missionaries contended that the Travancore customs laid down dress restrictions partly with a view to distinguish various social groups for occupational reasons and partly due to their distinctive cultural and ritual practices (Jeffrey 1976, pp. 57–59). It is significant to note that the attire patterns of men and women in Travancore were marked by simplicity. Covering the body was considered to be a mark of disrespect to both deities and to the customary practices. In some cases, women who dared to cover their body in front of the ruling elites were punished and their breasts mutilated by royal order (Pillai 2016). These instances indicate that it was almost possible to identify the caste of a person by dress and appearance (A. S. Menon 1978, p. 298). The women's attire pattern in Travancore did not change frequently and remained unaltered for centuries (Mateer 1871, p. 58). The custom of baring body was considered to be an integral part of the Travancore tradition, and a symbol of respect, as well as reverence. The Brahmin men showed their body as a mark of respect before the deities. The Nair women could cover their body with a particular style of cloth, which they were expected to remove before temple idols and people of superior castes.[13] The Syrian Christian women, who claimed a superior status to Nairs, wore a long-sleeved blouse. They were not expected to remove their cloth before high-caste Hindus.[14] Ezhavas were not only identified as the single-largest polluting caste but also were completely prohibited from carrying an umbrella or from wearing a shoulder cloth. Their women were forbidden from covering their body.[15] The social and cultural inequalities that were practiced in Travancore were also applicable to Nadars, even though community conversion

to Christianity had enabled them to escape some of the indispositions. Nadar women were prohibited from covering their body.[16] Similarly, the so-called slave castes such as Pulayas and Pariahs were forced to carry out the most arduous agricultural labour merely in return for food. Hence, missionaries claimed that conversion to Christianity was the only way forward for the holistic development of the marginalized communities. The vast majority of Christian converts in Travancore were from Nadar and Pariah communities that had become victims of patriarchal surveillance—a tangible violence against women (Jeffrey 1976, pp. 20–38).

The framework of deep-rooted patriarchal society in Travancore did not leave any stone unturned to keep women out of educational institutions. The women not only encountered issues that were closely linked to gender, identity, power and masculinity but also endeavoured to create an alternative discourse against their own men counterpart. The stereotypical portrayals such as 'men should never listen to women', 'a fifty-year-old woman should bow to a boy of five', 'a woman's sense comes too late' and so on proscribed women from education.[17] Similarly, a section of Nadar men in the Madras Presidency made sarcastic remarks against women's education suggesting that the patriarchal society was able to live well enough without educating its women for centuries. These men argued that imparting education to women would be detrimental to the patriarchal society, as they believed that education would make only 'troublesome' wives.[18] While challenging this strongly rooted patriarchal principle, converted women such as Krupabai Satthianadhan in Madras presidency strongly defended women's education. As has been specified in the census report in the 1860s, missionary education improved the social condition of women profoundly in the second half of the nineteenth century.[19] Furthermore, patriarchal society constructed the notion of dignity for women that gave men the ownership right over women's bodies within the framework of family. Similarly, husbands believed that their wives were their marital property. In many cases, women were classed with cows, mares, female camels, slave girls, buffalo, cows, she-goats and ewes. For example, the manner in which the Nadar men took up the struggle for attire decency suggests that women's bodies were perceived as men's property in one way or the other. It is equally important to note that the patriarchal society was preoccupied in controlling its women's bodies more than educating them. It was in this context, missionaries played an imperative role in creating a new cultural ecosystem where education and evangelization became tools for modernizing the marginalized women (Sarasvati 1888, pp. 50–60).

3. Discourse of Missionary Modernity: Proclamations, Negotiations and Contestations

While missionaries in Travancore strived to challenge the controversial attire pattern of the converted Nadar women, British Residents such as Major Munro sought to bring about a sweeping change in the clothing pattern in accordance with the spirit of Christian decency (Church Missionary Society 1819, p. 322). Munro's popular 1812 proclamation allowed converted Nadar women to cover their upper portion of the body for the first time in a manner that was in sync with the Christian women elsewhere in the world (Aiya 1999, pp. 236 and 526). The discourse of missionary modernity was thus initiated in Travancore through this first-ever official proclamation.

This proclamation specified that the orthodox Hindus had 'unnecessarily' interfered with the fundamental rights of the women who had embraced Christianity. It contended that the dominant caste men had prevented women from wearing their preferred cloth. It noted that those who become Christians should have the right to wear the shoulder cloth in accordance with the standards of decency befitting Christianity and in accordance with the customs prevailing in Christian countries. It emphasized that no opposition should be shown to Christian women.[20]

In reaction to Munroe's proclamation, the Travancore government issued a counter proclamation in 1814 allowing the converted Nadar women to cover their body with a short jacket as was worn by the women of privileged minorities such as Syrian Christians and Mappila Muslims. However, the Travancore state and the orthodox Hindus

did not allow the converted women to imitate the Nair women for cultural reasons (Hardgrave 1969, p. 60). The process of cultural imitation and the quest for upward mobility often created identity crisis between the defenders of missionary-advocated modernity and the upholders of Travancore tradition. The culturally sensitive Travancore state and the land owning Nairs appropriated this proclamation as a powerful tool for cultural assertion and political mobilization. The traditional attire of Nair women is the *mundum neriyatum*, a loose garment that roughly resembles the sari. This attire indicated the distinct cultural identity of the community (S. Thomas 2018, p. 38). When the converted Nadar women attempted to imitate the attire model of Nair women, Travancore witnessed a series of cultural conflicts. Missionaries and the British Residents encouraged the converted Nadar women to disobey the proclamation issued by the Travancore state. The Nadar women's continued replication of Nair women's attire led to the promulgation of yet another proclamation by Maharaja Venkata Rao in February 1829, which vindicated the Travancore custom and asserted that the disturbance was largely due to Nadar women's violation of the earlier proclamation. The state cautioned the Nadar women not to emulate the attire of Nair women (*Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons: East India, Annexation of Territory; Afghanistan, King of Delhi, Oudh and Travancore* 1859, p. 3). The rulers of Travancore were extremely critical of the Christian converts who were guided by missionaries. The Travancore administration, which had an incredulous attitude towards missionaries, ordered them to register their complaints directly with the Travancore government and not with the British officials (Strachan 1838, pp. 145–46).

Enraged by the missionary discourse of modernity, and the continued imitation of Nadar women, the Travancore state contended that women who belonged to Nadar, Ezhava and other marginalized communities were deliberately disregarding the Travancore customs by violating the established rule of law. The Travancore officials alerted that if such violations continue, it would be impossible to distinguish Nair women from other communities. The danger of touching the orthodox women based on the concept of purity-pollution triggered a series of discussion as to how the state should handle the issue responsibly. The state asserted that Nadar and Ezhava women should never imitate the attire pattern of Nair women, though it permitted Christian women to make and wear blouses based on the custom of Mappila Muslim women.[21]

The missionaries, however, continued to rouse the Christian Nadar women to fight for their right by breaking the outdated customary cultural practices including their attire pattern (Hardgrave 1979, pp. 162–63). Modernizing the marginalized women through education and evangelization became one of their powerful ideological tools (Strachan 1838, pp. 145–46; Church Missionary Society 1859, pp. 196–97). The continued cultural conflicts for attire decency resulted in violent clashes in various parts of Travancore such as Kalkulam, Yerenial and Valevengod (Strachan 1838, pp. 145–46). In many cases, the Travancore tradition and the missionary discourse of modernity appeared to be in direct conflict with each other. The reactionary attitude of the Travancore state and the subsequent inter-religious rivalry indicate how the anti-Christian outlook challenged the growth of missionary-propagated Christianity. Subsequently, missionaries appealed to the then British Resident Morrison, who, in turn, agreed to extend unconditional support to the Christian converts (Peter 2009, pp. 48–49; Ryland 1909, p. 5).

4. Politics, Power, and Identity in Post-1857

The struggle for identity, power and public decency took a new shape in the second half of the nineteenth century. The political scenario in the aftermath of the 1857 revolt augmented the power of the British colonialists. The official approval of the governor of the Madras Presidency was now required for the Travancore Maharaja to select his Diwan. It provided the British government a considerable amount of power in determining the political panorama of Travancore (Subramanian 2009, pp. 86–87). Meanwhile, the British Queen issued a proclamation in November 1858 emphasizing the need for religious neutrality, which pronounced that the government would refrain from interfering with

religious beliefs or worship of any of its subjects.[22] While the missionaries interpreted the proclamation as a threat to their proselytization activities, Nairs applauded the proclamation as they anticipated that it would give adequate power to local rulers to preserve their tradition, customs, conventions and rituals. Commenting on the changing political dynamism, Diwan Madhava Rao remarked that the mutual resentments between Nadars and Nairs were dormant for some time, but the Queen's proclamation renovated these feelings. While Nadars believed that the proclamation permitted them to infringe the existing Travancore rules, Nairs considered that it strengthened the right to protect Hindu traditions and customs (University of Calcutta 1872, pp. 241–45; Aiya 1999, pp. 235–36). Most notably, after the proclamation, the Madras Governor George Harris visited Travancore and restored the Maharaja with all the powers that the East India Company had unjustly taken away (Church Missionary Society 1859). Subsequently, the Travancore state and orthodox Hindus hoped that the Queen's proclamation would discontinue all its ties with missionary agencies, and thereby, missionary activities would cease to exist (Agur [1903] 1990, pp. 931–32).

After the Queen's proclamation, the Diwan Madhava Rao warned the converted Nadar women not to disrespect the rule laid out by the Travancore state. Retorting to the Diwan's admonition, missionaries proclaimed that the Travancore tradition was unsuited and unworthy of Christian decency (*The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* 1859, p. 729). Nevertheless, the principles of religious neutrality did not allow the British Resident William Cullen to defend missionary prerogatives. When missionaries made an appeal to Cullen to use his power to challenge the out-dated Travancore tradition, he expressed his discontent that the Christian converts were deliberately violating the established customary practices and forewarned that the converts would face consequences for their own imprudence (Church Missionary Society 1859). These remarks generated anti-Cullen sentiments among the missionaries who had persuaded the converts to defy the unsuitable customary attire practice. The missionaries instructed them to wear tailored blouses to cover their upper body like the Nair women (Mateer 1871, p. 278; Hardgrave 1969, p. 60). The tensions between the Travancore state and missionaries led to a series of violent struggles in Neyyantinkara, Kalkulam, Valevengod and Agastheswaram of Travancore in December 1858 (Mullens 1864, p. 105).

When the missionary modernity tried to challenge the 'incongruous' Travancore tradition, the culturally conscious orthodox Hindus endeavoured to reinvent their self through cultural (re)assertions. The state extended its unconditional support through proclamations with a view to defend the claims of those orthodox Hindus. Diwan Madhava Rao, in his 1858 order, notified that it was wrong on the part of Nadar women to violate ancient customs and antiquity without permission from the authorities. He threatened that those who violate the established customary practices would be severely punished.[23] The two-fold effect of this order was that Nadars had to respect the rule of the state and Nairs should not take law in their own hands. The then British Resident Cullen neither revoked nor expressed any disapproval of this order.[24]

Commenting on the colonial government's religious neutrality and the 1857 Travancore state order, missionaries remarked that the British Queen ensured social immunity to Nairs by giving more power to them to reassert their culture, dominance and power. Missionaries were unequivocal in condemning Resident Cullen for his failure to stop the violence against Nadars. They charged that Cullen did not bother to take any effective measures to treat the injured and punish the offenders (Church Missionary Society 1859). When the struggle for decency reached its peak in the 1850s, the then Secretary of State for India Lord Stanley directed Cullen not to recognize any exclusive distinctions repugnant to public morals. Lord Stanley also asserted that the proclamations made by the Travancore state were not only inappropriate for the modern age but also were in violation of the principles of dignity and decency (*Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons: East India, Annexation of Territory; Afghanistan, King of Delhi, Oudh and Travancore* 1859, pp. 3–4).

Consequently, the Travancore state proposed to abolish all restrictions on the converted Nadar women with some reasonable restrictions that did not allow them to imitate the attire of Nair women. The then governor of Madras C.E. Trevelyan directed both the Travancore Maharaja and the Resident Cullen to put an end to the controversial customs and traditions that violate human dignity (*Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons: East India, Annexation of Territory; Afghanistan, King of Delhi, Oudh and Travancore* 1859, pp. 4–5). The Christian Nadar women, armed with sympathy and support of the missionaries, demanded total abolition of the restrictions on covering their body (*Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons: East India, Annexation of Territory; Afghanistan, King of Delhi, Oudh and Travancore* 1859, p. 8).

Assisted by the missionaries, Nadars submitted a petition to the governor in the council of Madras Presidency titled 'The State of Travancore—The humble petition of the Nadar inhabitants of South Travancore' on 28 January 1859. The petition appealed to the governor to immediately intervene and help Nadars on behalf of the natural rights of women. It demanded same rights and privileges for their wives and daughters to decently cover their persons, as was enjoyed by women of orthodox Hindus in Travancore. It clarified that their claim had nothing to do with the pride of the attire, nor was it an invasion on the rights of others but was simply a requirement of natural modesty and one of those things that distinguishes human beings from brutes. The petition charged that it had always been the practice of the orthodox Hindus to suppress the petitioners. It informed the Governor of Madras that the stand taken by the Travancore state with regard to the exercise of right had been different at different times, in accordance with the recommendations of different British Residents in Travancore. The petitioners contended that the orthodox Hindus and the Travancore state had grossly and maliciously misinterpreted that the Queen's proclamation had driven away the East India Company and that all the rights and privileges that have been gained for Christian converts and for the so-called lower castes by the charitable help of the white men, were now nearing an end. The petitioners contended that as soon as this (mis)interpretation of the proclamation became generally known, orthodox Hindus assembled in crowds started beating the converted women and tore down their clothes. The petitioners impugned Resident Cullen for his insensitivity and irresponsible attitude towards Nadars. They contended that the officers of the Travancore state were not only caste minded but also portrayed Nadars as their chief enemies. The petitioners charged that instead of allowing Nadars to choose their path of decency, the Travancore state was using military power for the purpose of ensuring their degradation as imitation was interpreted as a state crime.[25]

Missionaries wrote extensively on the social plight of Nadars and their quest for upward mobility. In a letter dated 25 February 1859 to *The Madras Times*, John Cox, a missionary of London Missionary Society, argued persuasively that no slaves in Travancore had yet attained their freedom, and none of the Nadar and Ezhava women converts have ever worn an upper cloth. He claimed that he had always condemned the Travancore attire tradition because, when the cloth was worn without a jacket, it was, from its looseness, by no means a decent covering. He asserted that he had always encouraged all the Christian women to wear the jacket. He maintained that he had a number of meetings with Christians in 1858, and a more decided advance was made in the matter pertaining to women's decent attire. As a result of this, the women started wearing the jacket. Consequently, they were assaulted in public marketplaces and their jackets torn. He underlined that this issue was brought to the notice of the police, but the offenders were let off with not even so slight a punishment as a fine. He expressed his discontent that, since the reading of the Queen's proclamation, the ill feelings of Nairs have been far more markedly shown. He claimed that the predominant objective of Nairs was to create a revolution against missionary-advocated modernity. John Cox also stated that Nairs threatened the missionaries to stop preaching the gospel and not to open churches. In some places, he maintained, Nairs locked the churches, took away the keys and burnt the houses of Nadars in the presence of Travancore government officials (See Note 15 above).

Despite challenges and limitations, missionaries persistently declared that the moralizing effect of Christianity awakened the miserable Indian people to a sense of decency in their lives. Missionaries believed that all those who came under the spiritual direction of the missionaries were led to assume a different kind of attire that reflected what they called feminine modesty.[26] They argued that Nairs began to look down upon Nadars with jealousy due to their socioeconomic change through education. Missionaries expressed their apprehension that the Diwan of Travancore, from whose liberal education and enlightened views they had hoped for better things, failed to remove morbid feelings from the marginalized. They argued that the Travancore proclamations were intended to revive the obsolete and disgusting attire practice that compelled Christian women to expose their nudity to the gaze of the public (See Note 26 above). They sought to characterize the conflicts between tradition and modernity as valiant battles between the unsuitable conventional attire model that kept the marginalized in seclusion and the enlightened Protestantism that strived to promote the values of decency and respectability. The manner in which the land-owning Nairs lost control over the labouring Nadars and Ezhavas became a crucial point of debate. The struggle between tradition and modernity that had strived for continuity and change appeared to be gratifying to missionaries as they were able to use their religious ideals to modernize the marginalized women.[27] Consequently, missionaries were able to harvest souls, create wholesome homemakers and make reliable missionary assistants.[28] Nevertheless, the women who infringed the entrenched cultural practices faced a series of difficulties.

Missionary records indicate that those women who violated the Travancore tradition were sent to Trivandrum in order to undergo a severe punishment at the hands of the enlightened Travancore Maharaja. This, according to missionaries, demonstrates how the very act of covering one's own body was seen as a serious crime, almost as bad as killing a cow or touching a sacred Brahmin. Missionaries expressed their discontent that, despite unreasonable and unjustifiable actions of the Travancore state, the Maharajas and Diwans were protected and honoured by the most gracious Queen. They remarked that, while Nadars were kept in jail and exposed to all kinds of insults and tortures, Nairs were treated as respectable gentlemen and let out on bail and could thus hold their heads as high as ever.[29] Most importantly, the crux of the issue was that the Travancore state had decisive power over the labouring populations. This facilitated the state to arbitrate new claims to status. It was *that* power of the Travancore state that was at the centre of this series of historically specific conflicts. It was a question of holding authority and power. In some senses, the Nadars' struggle was not restricted to the idea of decency. On the contrary, it was a struggle for the same status and same privilege as the manner in which Nairs enjoyed.

While challenging the privileged status of the Nairs, missionaries persistently resisted what they termed the 'obsolete' Travancore tradition. They refused to allow their converts to submit to an observance so repugnant to all decency. This resulted in a series of riots between the sticklers for exclusive privileges and the unfortunate victims of an odious tyranny. According to missionaries, the consequences of these violent conflicts were disastrous. The British Resident's bungalow in Travancore and some of the protestant churches were burnt down, and the houses of the missionaries were destroyed. All those who were connected with the Protestant mission were obliged to proceed to Travancore to seek protection. Missionaries held a meeting with Resident Cullen in February 1859 to address the issues faced by the Christian converts. Yet, the meeting turned out to be an inconclusive one, as the Resident was disinclined to support the missionary point of view. Subsequently, a party of the Nair Brigade, under the command of Captain Daly, was sent to quell the Nadar–Nair violent conflict, which the missionaries termed the crying shame. Despite challenges, missionaries assured Christian women of their natural rights and persuaded them to infringe customs abhorrent to humanity through Christian notions of decency, equality and status (See Note 26 above).

5. Travancore Affairs, Communitarian Consciousness and Religious Identity

When the missionaries made appeals to Resident Cullen, he retorted that Nadars had broken the law of the state and therefore must be punished. Cullen sent Nair soldiers to put an end to the violent conflict and to reprimand the Nadars.[30] While commenting on the 'rebelliousness' of Cullen, *The Madras Daily Times* in its editorial 'Travancore Affairs' dated 1 April 1859 made a scathing attack on him stating that the religious persecution in Travancore was burning as fiercely as ever. The editorial remarked that a better man should be found to act as Resident in Travancore than Cullen. It specified that the best and most practicable way of accelerating the march of civilization was to create an enlightened native public opinion, honest enough to control the base tendencies of caste rigidity. It appealed to the people of Travancore to speak out plainly and vindicate their right to be considered worthy citizens of the British Empire in India (See Note 30 above). The manner in which missionaries and some British Residents endeavoured to modernize the marginalized women reveals how the colonial agencies in Travancore were keen on creating a Christian femininity.

While criticising the missionary modernity, some colonial officials remarked that the Christian converts were determinedly diluting the deep-rooted cultural practices of the orthodox Hindus by claiming equal status. Sir Mark Cubbon, one of the colonial authorities in Madras Presidency, contended in 1859 that the Christian women had forcefully imitated the Nair's attire pattern that was legitimately prohibited to them, and therefore, they must face legal consequences. Missionaries interpreted this controversial remark as an indication of the colonial government's irresponsible and worst attitude towards the marginalized communities and their newly adopted religion—Christianity.[31]

When the Maharajas and Diwans of Travancore expressed their discontent over the missionary intervention, a considerable number of people belonging to marginalized sections, consistently supported by the missionaries, were willing to be moulded by missionary ideologies. A substantial number of marginalized women started questioning and disowning the inferior cultural status imposed on them. The quest for equality and public decency propelled the marginalized women to transform their self in the light of the missionary modernity (Subramanian 2009, pp. 87–89). Missionaries used the idea of modernity as a potent tool to make an ecosystem for a profound cultural transfiguration. They strongly believed that their religion-driven modernity would create worthy and civilized British subjects (Devika 2005). It is significant to note that the British colonists and missionaries embarked on a cultural transformation mission where their predominant motive was to demonstrate themselves as cultural germ carriers who triggered the quest for freedom from social and cultural supremacy of orthodox Hindus (Smith 1958, pp. 450–51).

The letters exchanged between the Secretary of State for India, the Madras Governor, the missionaries and the British Resident commissioners in Travancore between March and June of 1859 reveal how the discourse of missionary modernity was explicitly expressed showing a sympathetic attitude towards the converted Nadar women (*Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons: East India, Annexation of Territory; Afghanistan, King of Delhi, Oudh and Travancore* 1859, p. 13). In a memorandum to the Maharaja of Travancore in February 1859, the missionaries argued that despite the abolition of slavery in 1855, Nairs failed to treat Nadar slaves in an appropriate manner. The British Resident Cullen, on the other hand, informed the Madras government that he had received a large number of complaints from Nairs that they had completely lost the services of their Nadar slaves on Sundays due to their conversion to Christianity. The Resident also questioned the missionaries for giving complete exemption to Nadars on Sundays from performing social and religious services to people from the so-called high castes (*Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons: East India, Annexation of Territory; Afghanistan, King of Delhi, Oudh and Travancore* 1859, pp. 7–15).

Those Nadar women who followed the practice of keeping their body uncovered before their conversion to Christianity had changed their attitude after their conversion by openly challenging the controversial attire pattern with unconditional missionary support. Consequently, Nairs contended that Nadar women did not only violate the state proclama-

tions but also used their Christian identity to question the deep-rooted cultural practice (*Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons: East India, Annexation of Territory; Afghanistan, King of Delhi, Oudh and Travancore* 1859, pp. 5–6). The Resident Cullen defended Nairs stating that the violence could have been averted if the Nadar-dominated neighbouring people from the neighbouring regions had not supported their caste men in Travancore and made counter-attacks on Nair villages (*Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons: East India, Annexation of Territory; Afghanistan, King of Delhi, Oudh and Travancore* 1859, pp. 6–7). Diwan Madhava Rao remarked that when Nadars took it upon themselves to infringe the state proclamations, Nairs considered that it was their moral responsibility to punish those who infringed the customs. He justified that Nadar women were attacked only when they appeared in public imitating the attire pattern of the Nairs in violation of the state rule and social customs (*Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons: East India, Annexation of Territory; Afghanistan, King of Delhi, Oudh and Travancore* 1859, pp. 8–10).

The continued struggles for cultural assertions and quest for decency generated intense debates among the lawmakers in London in the 1850s. The members of the House of Commons sought clarifications from the Secretary of State for India Lord Stanley. Even though Lord Stanley declined to give any pledge of interference, he termed the struggle for cultural assertion and the quest for decency a hypothetical case that needed a critical scrutiny.[32] Despite persistent appeals made by the Madras governors George Harris and Charles Trevelyan and the missionaries, the Travancore state asserted that the cherished Travancore tradition would never be terminated completely, as it would be against the rule of law. Yet, the state extended the idea of attire equality to Hindu Nadar women for the first time, and they were allowed to emulate the Christian Nadar women by preference. The 1859 proclamation of the Travancore Diwan reiterated that there was no expostulation to the Hindu Nadar women the wearing a blouse in the same manner as the Christian Nadar women.[33] In fact, this proclamation created a new model where both Hindu Nadars and Christian Nadars were deemed equal. It eventually proposed to abolish all cultural commandments perceived to be barriers for Nadar women and to grant them perfect liberty to meet the requirements of decency, with the reasonable restriction that they would not imitate the attire of Nair women (See Note 32 above).

As defenders of decency, missionaries denounced the traditional Travancore practice as a barbaric law and once again petitioned the Madras Governor in July 1959 to repudiate the Diwan's proclamations. They questioned the continued presence of Resident Cullen, for being hostile to missionary demands (Hardgrave 1969, p. 69). Despite reactions from the Travancore state and the British Resident Cullen, missionaries continued to use the struggle for attire decency to disseminate Christian notions of respectability and equality among the converted women. The persistent missionary pressure finally made Cullen to resign from all his official responsibilities as the Resident in 1860. Later, the Travancore state initiated a scholarship in memory of Cullen in the Trivandrum High School (Brown 1874, p. 502).

The struggles for continuity and change demonstrate how aspects of tradition and modernity in India were actually thematized and produced as a symbol of rule, power, privilege, status, decency and equality. The orthodox Hindus had incentives to argue on the basis of their tradition that became a well-established idiom of legitimation. The principles of tradition were used as potent political tools to challenge missionary modernity. The orthodox Hindus used tradition-centric proclamations to distinguish castes in the public space and thus maintained a somewhat superior status embodied in dress codes.

On the contrary, the proponents of change, most specifically the converted Nadars, Pariahs, Ezhavas, and Pulayas, were inclined to adopt Christian notions of respectability, public decency and equality. It would be simplistic to argue that the missionary modernity was the only ideology that guided the marginalized women to challenge the social and cultural hierarchy throughout the period under study. In certain scenario, leaders of marginalized communities such as Jotirao Phule, Muthu Kutty Swamy, Rettaimalai Srinivasan and Iyothee Thass Pandita in Madras Presidency, and in contexts unconnected

to the missionaries directly, also challenged the layers of hierarchy and power with an anti-orthodox communitarian consciousness. As an effective instrument, missionary modernity successfully challenged the power dynamics of tradition. Even though the Travancore state used tradition as a potent tool to confront missionary modernity, it could not dissuade the missionaries from creating communitarian consciousness among the marginalized communities in general and Christian identity among the converted Nadar women in particular. One of the crucial outcomes of missionary modernity was that it strengthened caste consciousness among Nairs and Nadars who came out with their own community organizations such as Nair Service Society and Nadar Mahajana Sangam, respectively, in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Similarly, the missionary modernity was instrumental in creating a new religious identity among the marginalized communities who converted to Christianity (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967, pp. 29–49).

6. Concluding Observations

The colonial discourse of missionary modernity pierced through the cultural sphere of the people through negotiation, contestation and resistance. It solidified communitarian consciousness and sharpened religious identity among the privileged, as well as marginalized, communities. As no-changers, the Nairs were able to uphold the age-old Travancore attire pattern. On the other, as pro-changers, the converted Nadar women were keen on adopting missionary perceptions of respectability, decency and equality.

While the quest for decency among the converted women was the intended consequence of missionary modernity, marginalized sections that were unconnected to missionaries also endeavoured to change aspects of their body to demonstrate their transfigured social and cultural status. The quest for modernity among the marginalized Nadar women did not only expand the process of religious conversions among other caste groups but also impelled them to be critical of their ascribed social and cultural hierarchy. However, the missionary modernity that attempted to offer a re-evaluation of the marginalized women's identity was limited largely to those who were either converted to Christianity or to those who adopted the principles of secular modernity disseminated by missionaries.

The unrelenting missionary sympathy for converted women indicates that the missionaries perceived those pro-changers essentially as a formative influence on next-generation converts. The well-established idioms of missionary modernity such as decency, equality and respectability were instrumental in creating a Christian femininity. On the contrary, however, orthodox Hindus assertively defended their attire pattern as an integral component of their glorious tradition. They also struggled to retain their traditional attire as a potential instrument for cultural assertion and political mobilization.

The persistent missionary encounters with the cultural life of the people impelled the Travancore state and orthodox Hindus to defend orthodox femininity through cultural assertions. The missionary modernity particularly among the marginalized women had a direct clash with the orthodox femininity through conflicts and confrontations. As potent players, women missionaries were efficacious in constructing a Christian femininity among the converted women in general and Nadar women in particular, for the first time, in the nineteenth century. The critics of missionary modernity, on the contrary, persuasively defended their venerable customary attire practice of Travancore in order to uphold their orthodox Hindu femininity. The discourse missionary modernity did not only impel the converted women to challenge their ascribed sociocultural status but also bolstered communitarian consciousness and religious identity among Hindus and Christians on an almost equal footing.

7. Limitations of This Study

A lack of vernacular voices from marginalized women—those Nadar women who embraced Christianity and women from other castes—is one of the serious limitations of this study. Further research is needed that needs to include oral narratives of both lettered and unlettered women who may have had mixed responses to missionary discourse of modernity. While some women could perhaps have sided with the missionaries and their idea of modernity by supporting the issues of the marginalized women, others could possibly have showed a critical attitude towards missionary modernity due to social, cultural and political reasons.

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Notes

1 Council for World Mission Archives, Outgoing letters: India, 1822–1939, India General, Box no. 1–59, H-2133, Zug, 1978, 1913–1935, Microfiche, 5307–5349, no. 5324, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter NMML), New Delhi.

2 *The Friend of India*, No. 3, Vol. 1, 15 January 1835, Real 2863, Serampore, Calcutta, 1 January 1835 to 28 December 1837, NMML, *Friend of India* for the year 1835, Volume I, Serampore, MDCCCXXXV, *Friend of India*, Microfilm Real 2863, Serampore, Calcutta, 1 January 1835 to 28 December 1837, NMML, New Delhi.

3 *The Friend of India*, No. 12, Vol. I, 19 March 1835, Serampore, Calcutta, 1 January 1835 to 28 December 1837, NMML, *Friend of India* for the year 1835, Volume I, Serampore, MDCCCXXXV; *The Friend of India*, No 42, Vol. I, 15 October 1835, Microfilm Real No. 2863, NMML, New Delhi.

4 *The Friend of India*, No 18, Vol I, 20 April 1835, Serampore, Calcutta, 1 January 1835 to 28 December 1837, Friend of India for the year 1835, Volume I, Serampore, MDCCCXXXV, *Friend of India*, Microfilm Real 2863, Serampore, Calcutta, 1 January 1835 to 28 December 1837, NMML, New Delhi.

5 Northcote to Lawrence, 15 August 1867, Lawrence Papers, Letters from Secretary of State, Vol. iv, No. 36; Also see (Gopal 1965, pp. 38–40).

6 Indian Records of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Micro Film, Acc. No. 2137, S.P.G. 1, NMML, New Delhi.

7 Council for World Mission Archives, Reports, 1866–1940, North India, Box No. 1-11 (H-2134) Zug. 1978, Box No. 2-1898, Microfiche, 6860–6906, no. 6866, NMML, New Delhi.

8 *The Friend of India*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1158, 12 March 1857, 1 January-31 December 1857, Microfilm Roll No 2882, NMML, New Delhi.

9 *The Friend of India*, 20 January 1859, 6 January 22 December 1859, Vol. XXV, No. 1255, Serampore, Calcutta, Microfilm Roll No. 2884, NMML, New Delhi.

10 *The Madras Times*, 5 January 1859, *The Madras Times*, 5 January–28 February 1859; 1 March–30 June 1859, Microfilm Roll No. 903, NMML, New Delhi.

11 *The Madras Times*, 9 February 1859, *The Madras Times*, 5 January–28 February 1859; 1 March–30 June 1859, Microfilm Roll No. 903, NMML, New Delhi.

12 *The Madras Times*, 3 March 1859, *The Madras Times*, 5 January–28 February 1859; 1 March–30 June 1859, Microfilm Roll No. 903, NMML, New Delhi.

13 *The Madras Times*, 10 March 1859, *The Madras Times*, 5 January–28 February 1859; 1 March–30 June 1859, Microfilm Roll No. 903, NMML, New Delhi.

14 *Harijan*, Vol. I, No. 6, 18 March 1933, Harijan 11 February 1933–7 December 1935, Microfilm Roll No. 1312, NMML, New Delhi.

15 *The Madras Times*, 7 March 1859, *The Madras Times*, 5 January–28 February 1859; 1 March–30 June 1859, Microfilm Roll No. 903, NMML, New Delhi

16 *The Friend of India*, 10 February 1859, 6 January 22 December 1859, No. 1258, Vol. XXV, Serampore, Calcutta, Microfilm Roll No. 2884, NMML, New Delhi.

17 Hilda Lazarus, 'Woman's Work for India's Women: Work in the Zenana as a Missionary Agency,' *The Harvest Field*, Addison and Co., Madras, May 1893, pp. 425–27.

18 *The Madras Mail*, 12 March 1869.

19 Report on the Census of the Madras Presidency (1871), Report on the Census of the Madras Presidency, 1871, with Appendix containing the results of the Census arranged in standard forms prescribed by the Government of India, by W.R. Cornish, Sanitary Commissioner for Madras, Vol. I, Madras, Printed by E. Keys, at the Government Gazette Press, 1874, pp. 111–2.

20 Order of Her Highness Parvathi, whilst Colonel Munro was the Resident, given at Quilon in the year of the Quilon Era 988 = AD 1812 19 Margali to the Sarvadi Karyakartas of the districts of Trivandrum and Negauttangarey. See Note 11 above.

[21] Order of Narayana Meneven, Diwan Peishkar, whilst Colonel Newall was Resident, dated Quilon year 999 equal to AD 1824. See Note 11 above.

[22] East India (Proclamations), Copies of the Proclamation of the King, Emperor of India, to the Princes and the Peoples of India, of the 2nd day of November 1908, and the Proclamation of the Late Queen Victoria of the 1st day of November 1858, to the Princes, Chiefs and People of India, India Office, 13 November 1908, Arthur Godley, Under Secretary of State for India (London: Eyre Spottiswoode, 1908), pp. 2–3.

[23] No. 20, Memorandum from Major H. Drury, Assistant Resident in charge, Travancore and Cochin to the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort Saint George, dated Trivandrum, 28 September 1859, No. 85, Proceedings of the Madras Government, Political Department, for the month of November 1859, Govt. of Madras, Pol. Dept., G.O. No. 666, dated 12 November 1859, National Archives of India (NAI) New Delhi.

[24] Order of Madhava Row, the then Diwan, General Cullen, being Resident, nearly two months after the publication of the Proclamation of Her Majesty, Quilon Year 1034, AD 1858, December 27, proclamation to all people, *The Madras Times*, 9 February 1859, *The Madras Times*, 5 January–28 February 1859; 1 March–30 June 1859, Microfilm Roll No. 903, NMML, New Delhi.

[25] 'The State of Travancore'—The humble petition of the Shanar inhabitants of South Travancore to the Right Honourable the Governor in Council, 28 January 1859. See Note 11 above.

[26] *The Madras Times*, 28 January 1859, *The Madras Times*, 5 January–28 February 1859; 1 March–30 June 1859, Microfilm Roll No. 903, NMML, New Delhi.

[27] Report of the Committee, delivered in substance to the annual meeting held on 1 May 1832, (Church Missionary Society 1832a, pp. 60–61).

[28] Letter from G.E. Phillips to Rev. A.K. Legg, London Mission, Quilon, South Travancore, India, 14 March 1935, Council for world Mission Archives, Outgoing letters: India, 1822–1939, India General, Box no. 1-59, H-2133, Zug, 1978, 1822–1939, Microfiche, 5307–5349, no. 5342, NMML, New Delhi.

[29] *The Madras Times*, 14 March 1859, *The Madras Times*, 5 January–28 February 1859; 1 March–30 June 1859, Microfilm Roll No. 903, NMML, New Delhi.

[30] *The Madras Daily Times*, 1 April 1859, *The Madras Daily Times*, 5 January–28 February 1859; 1 March–30 June 1859, Microfilm Roll No. 903, NMML, New Delhi.

[31] *The Madras Daily Times*, 19 April 1859, *The Madras Daily Times*, 5 January-28 February 1859; 1 March-30 June 1859, Microfilm Roll No. 903, NMML, New Delhi.

[32] No. 21, Order Thereon, 12th November 1859, No. 666, *Proceedings of the Madras Government*, Political Department, for the month of November 1859, Govt. of Madras, Pol. Dept., G.O. No. 666, dated 12 November 1859, NAI, New Delhi.

[33] *Proceedings of the Madras Government*, Political Department, for the Month of November 1859, Govt. of Madras, Pol. Dept., G.O. No. 666, dated 12 November 1859, NAI, New Delhi.

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Article

Christianity and Its Impact on the Lives of Kallars in Tamil Nadu Who Embraced the Faith, in Comparison to Those Who Did Not: Special Reference to Kallar Tamil Lutheran Christians in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract: The German and Swedish Lutheran Mission was a major and pioneering Protestant mission society that started its mission work in Tamil Nadu. The Halle Danish, Leipzig mission, and Church of Sweden mission societies had a larger mission field in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Christians are intimately associated with the German Lutheran Mission and Swedish Mission. The first German Lutheran missionaries, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, came to India in 1706. From then on, many Lutheran missionaries came to Tamil Nadu. Afterwards Tamil Nadu became a thriving Christian center for decades, with a strong Christian congregation, church, and several institutions. The majority of these Christians are descendants of Dalits (former untouchable Paraiyars) and Kallars who embraced Christianity. From a life of near slavery, poverty, illiteracy, oppression, and indignity, conversion to Christianity transformed the lives of these people. Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Dalits and Kallars found liberation and have made significant progress because of the Christian missionaries of the Church of the German and Swedish Mission. Both the German and Swedish Mission offered the Gospel of a new religion to not only the subaltern people but also the possibility of secular salvation. The history of Lutherans needs to be understood as a part of Christian subaltern history (Analysing the Indian mission history from the native perspective). My paper will mainly focus on Tamil Lutheran Dalit and Kallar Christians. In this paper, I propose to elucidate the role of German and Swedish Lutheran missionaries in the social, economic, educational, and spiritual life of Tamil Lutheran Dalits and Kallars. Due to the page limit, I am going to mainly focus on Swedish Mission and Kallar Lutheran Christians.

Keywords: caste; Kallars; Swedish Mission; infanticide; Tamil Lutheran Kallar Christians; Tamil Evangelical Lutheran church; Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran mission; Church of Sweden mission

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1. Swedish Mission in India

The Swedish Mission entered India through the first Swedish missionary who stepped foot on Indian soil in 1740. The following section will explore a few important missionaries' short biographies, including the most important ones in this paper.

First Swedish Missionary in India. John. Zacharias. Kiernander

The first Swedish missionary in India, as far as is known, was John Zacharias Kiernander (Estborn 1952, p. 125; Latourette 1960, p. 186; Asirvadam 1962, p. 1; Anderson 1999, p. 214; Iyyer Samuel 1955, p. 184; Hardeland 1895). He was the first Protestant missionary who arrived in Bengal. He was born in Akstad, Sweden, and educated at both Uppsala University and Halle, Germany. In 1739, he responded to a request by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge for a worker at Cuddalore in Bengal. After ordination, he came to India via London, arriving there in 1740. He rapidly built up a congregation and worked for the empowerment of women. When the French captured the city in 1758,

he was expelled and relocated to Calcutta. There he opened a school, Mission; he built the Old Mission church (Fenger 1906, p. 184) and occasionally preached in nearby Serampore. When his wife died three years later, he married a wealthy English widow, gaining social status and money to expand the work. Because the protestant church in Calcutta had been destroyed in the 1756 uprising, he built a new structure, along with a school and mission house, all at his own expense. He completed it in 1770, and it was later known as the old church or mission church. However, his entrance into high society hurt the effectiveness of his ministry, and his second wife died in 1773, and some bad business dealings ruined him financially. After losing the property in a bankruptcy proceeding in 1787, he became a chaplain at the Dutch settlement of Chinsurah. When war broke out in 1795, he returned to Calcutta and died destitute and forgotten (Sandegren and Kirenander 1928; Carnes 1832, pp. 299–318; Estborn 1952, p. 124; Iyyer Samuel 1955, p. 184).

In 1831–1836, another Swedish missionary came to India, namely Peter Fjettstedt, a pioneer of the missionary movement in Sweden. He was born in the province of Värmland in western Sweden and studied for the ministry at the University of Lund. After his ordination, he went directly to the Basel Mission School for missionary training. He was sent to Palayamcottai in South India. He was working in Tinnevelli in the service of the C.M.S., but because of ill health he had to leave India, and after some years of service in Turkey, he went back to Sweden. In the second half of his life, he worked as a missionary motivator and organizer in his homeland, where he helped to found the Lund Missionary Society in 1845; this was the forerunner of the present-day Church of Sweden. Though lasting only a few years, his service in the mission-field was important enough. However, it became still more important at home, because his enthusiasm was able to arouse interest in mission work in the whole church. One result of his work at home was the formation of the Lund Missionary Society 1845. Only 10 years later, it merged with the Swedish Mission Society, but during the short time of its existence as an independent society, it had taken a step of the greatest importance for the future: it had established a connection with the Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission (Latourette 1960, p. 186; Estborn 1952, p. 124; Iyyer Samuel 1955, p. 184).

2. The Connection between the Church of Sweden Mission and the Leipzig Mission Society

This Mission, founded in 1836, had already established itself in Tranquebar Mission and to the leaders of the Swedish Mission; therefore, it seemed expedient to work with the German Mission, both being deeply rooted in the Lutheran Confessions. Lund Missionary Society was integrated into the Swedish Mission Society, and later, this Society was succeeded by the Church of Sweden Mission Board. In this way, a fellowship between these two Lutheran Missions lasted until the Second World War. In many ways, it proved to be a real blessing to the Lutheran mission work in the Tamil country. However, cooperation between the two Missions was not always easy and could not be preserved without mutual sacrifices. Swedish Lutheranism was different from the German, less exclusive and more open and sympathetic to Evangelical missions and churches of other confessions. Even then, the C.S.M. continued to carry out its administration of the former L.E.L.M properties under the control and supervision of the Mission Trust of Madras (Estborn 1952, pp. 124–25; Iyyer Samuel 1955, p. 184; Jeyakumar 2009, p. 39; Murthy 2020, p. 206). The L.E.L.M later cooperated with the C.S.M in Tamil Nadu, which in 1919 resulted in the establishment of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran church. Because of World War I, in 1916, the work and properties of the L.E.L.M. in Tamil Nadu were transferred to the C.S.M. Later, under the orders of the Government of India, through notification No. 3550 dated 22 May 1919, the properties of the L.E.L.M. hitherto administered by the C.S.M were transferred by the custodian of the enemy properties, Madras, through a transfer deed to the Mission Trust of Madras (Hardeland 1895, pp. 179–92; Estborn 1952, pp. 123; Iyyer Samuel 1955, p. 184).

3. Desire to Be Independent

During this time in Sweden, the interest in the mission in India had also exploded, and they collected and sent no small amount of money. However, this increase at home and in India raised a problem. It felt like a significant handicap at home in Sweden that the mission friends could not look up to Swedish missionaries, as they were missionaries or on stations, such as Madura and Coimbatore, which had Swedes posted there for long periods as Swedish stations. All the money had to go through Leipzig, and the management of the mission was entirely in the hands of the Collegium at Leipzig and the church council at Tranquebar. The Swedish Mission Society made many attempts to be independent. Still, the desire of the Swedish Mission was not fulfilled, even though Karl Alexander Outcherlony, a Swedish missionary, had worked out proposals for a more independent position for Swedish missionaries. In his time, however, these did not bring any real change. However, when the Leipzig Mission Society had handed over its work to the Church of Sweden Board and the whole Church had become interested in the Indian Mission, they worked proposals out for a more independent position in the Swedish Mission (Hardeland 1895, pp. 179–92; Estborn 1952, pp. 128–29; Iyyer Samuel 1955, pp. 184–89).

The proposals, however, met with challenging resistance at Leipzig. The Collegium was eager to preserve the unity of the mission. Instead of the independence, Leipzig offered the Archbishop of Sweden a seat in the Collegium. In this situation, it was fortunate that an important Swedish missionary, namely Johannes Sandegren[1], who later became a bishop of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church in an eminent degree, enjoyed the confidence of both missions and felt equally are important. He wrote to the Collegium and the Church of Sweden Mission Board. He pointed out, on the one hand, the advantages of cooperation between the two missions and the necessity of independence for the Church of Sweden in its work in India. After protracted negotiations, the Collegium consented, in 1901, to hand over three stations, Madura, Pudukkottai, and Anikadu, to the management of the Church of Sweden. Yet, for all external purposes, the name of the Swedish stations should be the Swedish Diocese of the Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission (Estborn 1952, p. 129).

In 1901, Leipzig's mission gave three stations to the Swedish mission, namely Madura Pudukkottai and Anikadu (ibid, p. 129). From Madura, Swedish missionaries extended their evangelical work into the Ramnad District. Missionary Pleyel was working among the *Maravars* and built the *Paramakudi* station. The response of the Maravars, however, was scanty, although subsequent missionaries in those parts had tremendous success among the Pallars and other so-called low caste communities. During this time, a movement started among the *Kallars* at Kodaikanal in the Madura District. According to Estborn, the government tried their best to pacify and civilize the Kallar community, but the British had little success. The British Government introduced sterner methods (ibid., p. 139), but it provoked the Kallar community due to this rebellion's tumult and attack on the police forces. The Kallars were defeated, leading the Kallar community to listen to the missionaries' message. Estborn expresses, "Religious and worldly motives joined to cause a mass movement towards Christianity". The British government found that the missionary work for the pacification of the Kallars was more successful than their own, and gave the mission their support. Paul Sandegren, who later became bishop, worked among Kallars for years. Later, work carried out by Himmelstrand founded the station at Usilampatti. Estborn called this place the heart of the Kallar country. Himmelstrand built a church in the Indian style, which served as a model church for other church buildings and chapels in South India (Estborn 1952, p. 138). He worked with Miss Osterlind among the Kallar community; both worked especially for the upliftment of the Kallar women (Gäbler 1936).

The inhabitants of Pattukkottai are mainly *Kallar*. According to missionary Else Gäbler wife of Gustav Hermann Gäbler who worked in Pattukkottai "the *Kallar* are a characteristic. Harsh people, thieves, and robbers are in the community." But I don't agree with this statement because later part of my article I explained origin and occupation of Kallars (Gäbler 1936). However, the Gospel brought them social change. The social change has been explained by the missionaries in the following way: "God's word has not come

back empty. Our best and most efficient pastors and teachers have emerged from the *Kallar* communities". For example, the well-known native Tamil preacher N. Devasagayam mentions his own origin as being the "*Kaller* caste" (Gäbler 1936).

4. The Tamil People and Caste System

The populations in Madura, Pudukkottai, and Anikadu are Tamil people. Traditionally, sociological identity was found by the population of Tamilnadu in a particular *jati* or strictly endogamous caste group to which one belonged by birth for one's life. Apart from certain tribes who were settled in the hills or other remote places, or moving about as migrants, the society was composed of various local units, in which various *jati* formed and reformed a hierarchal but mobile system of interdependency within and outside the *Vedic* framework of the avarnas: *Brahmans*,[2] *Kshatriyas*,[3] *Vaisyas*[4], and *Sudras*[5] of which only the first and the fourth were initially held to be represented in Tamilnadu (Grafe 1990, p. 14).

The Kallars caste's claim to be Kshatriyas, the second varna, was made by the Maravars and Kallars, small game hunters and soldiers serving under the Palayakars in peaceful times. Some of them raided on their own, but most of them invested with a piece of land for agriculture. The Maravars mostly live in the Ramanathapuram District, and in some places are called Servaikarars, while the Kallars live in the Pudukkottai and Madurai districts (ibid., p. 16). Kallars called themselves Vellalars, although Vellalars rejected their classification as Sudras claiming to be Vaisyas, and Vanniars asserted in the census of 1931 that they were the Kshatriyas of Tamil Nadu of old (ibid., p. 20).

5. The Origin of the Kallars

They were several legends regarding the origin of the Kallars. My main focus is not to go into detail about the origin of the Kallars, but I would like to shed light on one legend. According to F.S. Mullaly, "as also that of the Maravars and Ahambadayars, is mythologically traced to Indra and Aghalia, the wife of Rishi Gautama. This so incensed Indra that he determined to win Aghalia at all hazards and succeeded in utilizing a cleverly devised ruse. Aghalia bore him three sons, who took the names *Kalla*, *Marava* and Ahambadya. The three castes have the agnomen *Theva* or God and claim to be descendants of Thevan indra)=". Another legendary exists that "once upon a time, Rishi Gautama left his house to go overseas on business. Devendra, taking advantage of his absence, misbehaved with his wife, and three children were born. When the Rishi returned, one of the three hid behind a door, and as he thus acted like a thief, he was henceforward called Kallan. Another got up a tree and was called *Marvan* from *Maram*, the Tamil word for a tree, whilst the third brazened it out and stood his ground, thus earning for himself the name of *Ahamudeiyan* or the possessor of pride. This name was corrupted into Ahambadiyan" (Thurston and Rangachari 1975, pp. 62–63).

Apart from legends, some scientific research has been carried out on the origin of the Kallars. One of the recent studies was carried out by Prof. Dr Pitchaiyappan, a professor at Madurai Kamaraj University, who performed genetic research. The result of the genetic research disclosed that the genetic factor of the blood group of *Piramalai Kallar* and the genes of the ancient people of Africa, namely M 130 Y, are the same. This study dates *Piramalai Kallar's* (Tamil) origin back six thousand years. This research confirms that ancient people migrated to India six thousand years ago from Africa (Raja and Malar 2004, p. 71). Today the *Kallars* are a politically influential community, but their origins and identity have been kept a secret. They have often provided scholars with the missing links in early Tamil history and have been variously identified as the Cholas, the *Muthttaraiyars*, the Pallavas, and the Kalabhras (Taylor 1857–1862, p. 399).

There are specific names for the Kallars: the Kallars are warriors,[6] criminals,[7] freedom fighters[8], farmers, and soldiers (ibid., Muthuthevar 1976, pp. 75–76; see also Blackburn 2007, p. 39). According to H.A. Stuart, the Kallars are "a middle-sized dark-skinned tribe found chiefly in the districts of Tanjore, Trichinopoly, and Madura, and in the Pudukota territory". They commonly derived the name Kallan from Tamil Kallam, which means theft.

Nelson doubts the accuracy of this origin, but Dr Oppert agrees on it, and no other has been recommended. The original home of the Kallans seems to be *Tondamandalam* or the *Pallava* country, and the head of the class, the Raja of Pudukota (presently Pudukkottai), is to this day called the Tondaman. There are reasonable grounds for believing that the Kallans are a branch of the *Kurumb*. When they found their regular occupation as soldiers gone, they "took to marauding, and made themselves so obnoxious by their thefts and robberies", that the term Kallan, the thief, was applied, and stuck to them as a tribal application. Rev. W. Taylor, the complier of the catalogue *Raisonne* of oriental manuscripts, also identifies the *Kallans* with the *Kurumbas*, and Mr Nelson accepts this conclusion. In the census returns, *Kurmban* is returned as one subdivision of the Kallan caste (Thurston and Rangachari 1975, pp. 60–61).

According to W. Francis Wites, the Chola country or Tanjoreseem to have been the original abode of the Kallans before their migration to the Pandya kingdom after its conquest by the Cholas in about the eleventh century A.D. However, in Tanjore, they have been greatly influenced by the numerous Brahmans there and have taken to shaving their heads and employing Brahmans as priests. The name Kallan is a disrespectful term and, hence, was later changed into Kallar. In the manual of the Tanjore District, it is stated that "profitable agriculture, coupled with the security of property in land, has converted the great bulk of the Kallar and *Padeiyachi* classes into the contented and industrious population. They are now too fully occupied with agriculture, and the incidental litigation, to think of their old lawless pursuits, even if they were inclined to follow them. The bulk of the ryotwari proprietors in that richly cultivated part of the Cauvery Delta, which constituted the more significant part of the old taluk of Tiruvadi, are Kallars. As a rule, they are a wealthy and well-to-do class (ibid., pp. 61–62).

6. Kallar Community and the British Government

The British started their military campaign against the Kallars in 1755 when Colonel Heron burned their throttlehold of *Koilkuti* at *Tirumbur* (The kaval right granted to Kallars by Tirumala Nayak). Most of the barracks were put to the sword, and the place was robbed (Hill 1914, p. 97). Later, during the blockade of Madura, the British were again active. Angered that the Kallars were able to escape their defense and smuggle "the indispensable betel leaves inside the blockaded fort, they dispatched a Captain Preston to their area 'to burn and lay waste all the villages and to make some examples of those they found in arms'" (Ibid., p. 198). In subsequent periods, the British army attacked and "pacified" the Kallars of *Melur* four times, but history provides details only of the last of these occasions. In 1764, Captain Rumley marched on a Kallar fort near Melur (Vellalpati) with 5 battalions of sepoys and 1500 cavalry and ordered the *ambalakkars* to meet with him.[9] When they refused, he besieged the fort. Unable to enforce his terms, Rumley burned the fort and town and swiftly caused a massacre by slaughtering 2000 more. This annihilation is one of the few recorded wreckages of what must have been an extensive campaign of military defeat carried out by the British against the Kallars and others in their colonization of South India (Blackburn 2007, p. 42).

7. Criminal Tribes Act (C.T.A.) and Kallars

To know how the C.T.A. affected the Kallar community, firstly, we must understand the Criminal Tribe Act. Why did British officials introduce it? We first try to answer the first question. This act includes a series of laws passed by the British in the 1870s to propagate the idea of a few tribes and nomadic people of India as born criminals. According to the British, some of India's ethnic or social communities are "addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences „The act, introduced by the British in 1871, was initially executed in North India. Later, it was extended to West Bengal and to other regions in 1876. Finally, it was implemented in the Madras Presidency in 1911. They amended the act many times and, by 1924, it covered most of the parts of British India. Initially, the act started

branding a few communities but, for a period, it included nearly 150 tribal communities, defining up to 60 million people as allegedly having criminal tendencies (Puja 2021).

The key characteristics of the act were to have close supervision and control over the movement of the tribes and informed the provincial governments. It provided sweeping power to the local administration and village elders to decide on their own will who was subjected to the law and how to implement punishments. It also provided unlimited power to the police to arrest, control, and monitor the movements of certain tribes. These tribes were forced to undergo compulsory registration and to obtain passes for movement. These kinds of unlimited power were given to the police and local administrations to arrest the tribal communities without a warrant or valid reason. They were arrested based on suspicion. Judicial systems were prohibited for these communities. The district government had regular records of such communities. There are several reasons that the British government passed this act. First, they liked to control the forests to cater to their demand for resources (supply timber for shipbuilding, iron for smelting, and training) to needed to meet the demands of the World War. British officials felt they could not execute their plan. If a forest tribe still dwelled in a forest, then the forest itself was the biggest hurdle to achieving their plan. The British believed that this act could help natives to settle down in one place to facilitate taxation and control. The British believed this act would monitor those tribes who resisted them (ibid.). I like to say that this act is a tool used by the mighty British, who wanted to exploit the vulnerable communities.

Taking these facts into account, it is as a culmination of the "*collerie*" image of the annihilation of the Kaller confrontation, and the annihilation and perversion of the kaval system, that we must view the application of the Criminal Tribes Act (C.T.A.) to the Kallars in 1919. Indeed, the abovementioned police surveillance was not new to the Kallars, for in 1801 the British appointed one Nathan Kahn as a special officer to supervise them (Nelson 1868, part II 114: see also Blackburn 2007, op cit, p. 48). The prohibited *tuppukulli* row brought on a scheme in 1905 by which all suspected *tuppu* agents were watched in particular taluks in northern Madura and southern Coimbatore districts. In one year, 800 Kallars were under suspicion, and efforts were made to arrest them by placing them under the then criminal procedure code.[10] The campaign intensified, and police records show that Kallars were often arrested for charging the now unlawful fees and that many crimes were traceable to kaval disputes (ibid., 1900–1915). Arrests increased radically, and many Kallars were clustered into settlement camps, one of which had to be abandoned because of unsanitary conditions (ibid., 1919, pp. 27–51). A huge mob of Kallars greeted them, and the result was 14 Kallars dead—and, later, 1 constable. Fearful of further Kallar resistance, the government extended the act to all Kallars in the Madura District that year (ibid). Simultaneously, police raids on several Kallar villages, in the euphemism of the police reports, "facilitated registration considerably" (ibid.). It was so "considerable" that, in 1920, no less than 20,000 Kallars were registered, constituting 97% of all persons registered under the act that year (ibid). The true intent of the C.T.A. is clear from the report, which stated that the forced registration clause was to be held "in terrorem" against the Kallars (ibid.).

In the succeeding years, they extended the C.T.A. to Kallars in Tanjore. In fact, by 1933, the total number of Kallars registered—38,000—was equal to the total registered from all the other 250 castes plus "tribes" combined. Both in its relative and complete nature, this is an astounding figure. These figures mainly represent male Aneiyaur (or Piramalai) Kallars. Furthermore, since census returns totaled around 15,000–20,000 in 1933, we are forced to conclude that every single one was registered under the C.T.A.[11]

Even if we estimate from the number of Kallar males in the whole district that year, we find that it was applied to 40% of them. In the Madura area, the C.T.A. was, in essence, a Kallar control act. After 1918, the registration of Kallars under the C.T.A. proceeded at an abrupt step of several thousand each year, and resistance to this imposition reached a climax in 1920. Refusals to appear for registration prompted a constable and several armed police officers to go to the village of Perunkanallur near Madura (Blackburn 2007, p. 26).

8. Liberation from Female Infanticide Practice

On 18 December 2021, my wife and I were blessed with a third baby, a girl. My wife was pregnant while we were in Germany, so for seven months, my wife was in Germany, but, for her delivery, she came to India. It is usual in Germany or other Western countries for doctors to reveal the baby's gender when the mother conceives; however, in India, it is not allowed to tell the gender of the baby. As such, when my wife was admitted to the hospital for the delivery, I told the nurses we knew the baby was a girl, and we were delighted to have a girl baby. After the delivery, one nurse came to me and said, "we never see a father like you who is very happy even though he knows the baby is a girl". There are many parents who, when they knew the baby was a girl, were not happy, because they were expecting a boy baby. The reason I am sharing my experience is that parents' attitudes are even like this in the 21st century as well as in earlier days.

Female infanticide was largely practiced in the Kallar community. Faced with unbearable socio-economic pressures, An estimated 6000 babies were killed between 1976 and 1986 alone. The first daughter is rarely killed. However, successive female infants face murder because of the social and economic burdens that crush this community (Venkatramani 1986). An article by S.H. Venkatramani, in India Today, entitled "Women of Kallar community in Tamil Nadu", kill their female babies by feeding them poison", gives a very detailed account of female infanticide in the Kallar community.

This female infanticide directly resulted from the dowry system that prevailed in the society, especially among specific caste-based communities in the Usilampatti area in the Madurai District. It was prevalent in Salem and Dharmapuri districts as well. Specifically, in what was called the C.S.M. Pioneer Board Area, the Usilampatti Taluk, this practice was frequent among the Piramalai Kallar Community. There were so many young widows in society due to child marriage. It was usual for the Kallar community in the Madurai Usilampatti Area to remarry the young child widows. As such, the Swedish missionaries did not find it necessary to start any home for the widows in this area. However, in other parts of Tamil Nadu, the Swedish missionaries started homes for the child widows and industrial schools to train them in various occupations.[12]

During the 18th century, female infanticide was predominant all over Tamil Nadu, and it was more so in the Madurai Usilampatti zone. Esther Peterson, who came to India during the latter part of the 18th century, worked to eradicate this practice. Her visits to the villages produced fruits. Her forward-thinking approach and personal one-to-one dialogue was the best approach for seeding slow but steady social thinking for social change.[13]

She used to bring women from the nearby villages in vehicles to Usilampatti, give them food, and train them in handicrafts, embroidery, sewing, basket making, and gardening, etc., as she firmly believed that self-employment empowered the women, and that they could stand on their own without depending on anyone else, earning money for their daily living. Furthermore, she took the responsibility of dropping them back in their villages in identical vehicles. As it was difficult for the women and Ester Peterson to travel back and forth daily, they stayed in Usilampatti for a period. Hence, a place of residence was arranged and made available for them. In Usilampatti taluk, the literacy rate among males was higher when compared with that of females. They did not send most of the girl children to school. The land-holding population was tiny in this region, though most people were engaged in cultivation. The standard of living was average; during that time, Piramalai Kallar made up nearly 43.26% of the total population of this area (Government Press 1885, p. 95, in Punniyavathi 2015, p. 71).

Infanticide was a common practice in the community. Any members of the family rarely welcomed the girl child in family. The dowry system played a vital role in this unwelcoming behaviour in response to a girl baby. What the missionaries developed as a strategy to prevent female infanticide became significant in later days. Esther Peterson should be given credit for all these good things because, after her period of work, the C.S.M. missionaries continued her programs to eradicate the social evils that cankered the

Tamil society. Swedish missionaries worked very hard to promote awareness about the evil nature of female infanticide.[14]

During the early 18th century, some people stopped the practice of female infanticide, at least within their own families and immediate family circles. Even though they had many girls in their homes, these parents reared them, showing no kind of inhibition about educating them. Because of their education, these girls later grew up into good, responsible women in society, and married and settled in life with great respect. These missionaries adopted the children of poor parents and helped them in all ways to bring them up and get them settled down in their lives within the social life of the Piramalai Kallar community. [15]

Another important Swedish missionary who worked to empower the Kaller women was Ellen Nordmark. She came to India as a missionary in 1938. She was trained as a teacher and a pastor. Her training closely connected her with women's education, particularly the formation of the Girl's High School and the Women's Teachers Training Institute at Usilampatti. In 1949, Usilampatti primary school could not run properly because of the government order. With the help of another important person in Usilampatti, Miss Nordmark made an effort to run the school successfully. She was the headmistress and correspondent for the girl's school. She boldly worked among the village women in and around the Usilampatti for the empowerment of Kallar women. She always followed the method of Ester Peterson, such as bringing a group of girls by van, and they learnt tailoring, sowing, craftwork, etc. She stitched a bundle of blouses individually and introduced the garment to the women of Tamil Nadu (Punniyavathi 2011, p. 57).

She protected small children from child marriage, saved female children from infanticide, brought and gave them shelter and food education, and made them serve society in various fields. From time to time, she took specific steps to boldly empower the women in Tamil Nadu, especially Kaller women. She was a member of the Kallar Reclamation Committee. Mr Mookiah Thevar M.L.A. appreciated and called her Veerammal, which means "Brave mother". She was a member of the Church Council from 1965 to 1968 and was chairperson of the Education Board. In 1969, she returned to Sweden after sacrificing herself to Madurai and Usilampatti. She reached eternal rest on 21 December 1995 (Ibid.).

9. Conclusions

As we see above, caste and religion cannot be separated in the Indian context. The caste system is the most powerful tool used by the so-called high caste people to exploit the vulnerable so-called low caste community. Christian Mission Societies were also drawn into the caste controversy, particularly the Leipzig Mission. The Swedish Mission had a soft approach towards casteism, which created bitter experiences among the mission societies. Still, at the same time, the mission work of Leipzig and the Church of Sweden Mission were not interrupted. Even though the primary goal of the Swedish Mission Society in Tamil Nadu was to spread Christian Gospel among the most backward peoples, they gave education to the so-called low-caste communities and women. That education made them powerful. The power of the Gospel made them self-conscious that they, too, were valuable and dignified, both in the sight of God and human beings, and provided social healing. There is a clear relationship between the conversion to Lutheran Christianity and the desire for upward social mobility. The Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Kallar caste found liberation and have made significant progress because of Christian missionaries of the Church of Sweden Mission. The mission offered the Gospel of a new religion to the subaltern people and the possibility of secular salvation. Swedish missionaries' role in eradicating female infanticide is commendable.

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Notes

1 Johannes Sandegren was born on 20 November 1883 in Madura (now Madurai) in India, the third son of missionary Carl Jacob Sandegren. His siblings, Karl, Hermann, Paul, and Ebba were also later active in the mission. He studied theology and philosophy in Germany and in Sweden and was initially active in parish ministry. On 29 September 1907, he was assigned to South India and devoted himself to learning the Tamil language from 1907 to 1909. He then served in Virudupati (now Virudhunagar) in 1907, Tiruchuli in 1908, Virudupati in 1912, and Madura and other stations in 1913. He married Ingrid Ahlstrand on 20 June 1913 and subsequently headed several mission stations. In 1920, he became director of the seminary in Madura. He served in Madura from 1924 to 1926, as principal of the preaching course in Madras (now Chennai) at Gurukul College in 1926, principal of the theological college in 1927, principal of Madura station in 1929 and finally took over Arasaradi-Madura in 1930. In Germany, he became an honorary Doctor of Theology at Rostock in 1932. After returning to India in 1933, he became Bishop of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC) on 4 April the same year. He held this office until 1956. In retirement, he continued to work as a lecturer for a short time. Johannes Sandegren died in Uppsala on 15 November 1962. (Leipziger Missionswerk—Detail Missionare n.d.).

2 The Brahmins, the priestly class, came from the head of God. They are eligible for learning and teaching and perform sacrifices. The others cannot teach and perform sacrifice. (Murthy 2017, p. 8).

3 The Kshatriyas, the warrior class, came from the shoulder of God. They are eligible for learning. Their work is to protect the people by waging war against enemies. (Murthy 2017, p. 8).

4 The Vaysias, the trading class, came from the thigh of God. Their work is to trade and feed the above two classes. (Murthy 2017, p. 8).

5 The Sudras, the servants, came from the feet of God, and their work is to do all menial works for the above three classes. They are not entitled to learn anything. (Murthy 2017, p. 8).

6 (Ramanathan 2004, pp. 8–9). See also (Kallar The Caste Who Makes the History of Tamilnadu 2007; Venkatasamy Nattar 1923, pp. 20, 23, 37–41); "The great warrior tribes of Mudiraja-Muthuraja" http://mudiraja.com/mudiraju_warriortribes.html, cited in (India Church Growth Mission 2014, pp. 23–24).

7 "The great warrior tribes of Mudiraja-Muthuraja" http://mudiraja.com/mudiraju_warriortribes.html; (Baliga 1960, pp. 116–19; Stein 1966, p. 143). It is true that the name Kallan literally means thief as per the Tamil lexicon. It explains thief/robber depredator as the meaning of the word Kallan, which derived from the root word Kal, meaning theft or robbery. (The Tamil Lexicon II Part 1 1932, pp. 806, 809; Oppert 1972, p. 257; Thurston and Rangachari 1975, p. 68; Orme 2010, p. 381). Cited in (India Church Growth Mission 2014, pp. 23–24).

8 Thiru N.S. Ponniah, Advocate, High court of Tamil Nadu, http://www.academia.edu/5439431/Tamilnadu_De-Notified_Nomadic_Tribes_Consultation_proceedings. Anand Pandiyan, "Crooked Stalks: Cultivating Virtue in South India" (cited in India Church Growth Mission 2014, pp. 23–24).

9 History of the Madras police (Madras 1959, p. 531). Cited in (Blackburn 2007, p. 42).

10 Madras report on the Administration of the police of the Madras Presidency (Madras 1905, p. 9) cited in (Blackburn 2007).

11 The piramalai or Aneiyur Kallars were counted at 20,000 in 1881 (census, IV, 135), or approximately one-sixth of the total Kallar population of Madura District (subtracting the number of Kallars in present Ramnad District, which was then part of the Madura District). The 1931, the Kallar population in the Madura District was 200,000 (census, XIV, pt. II, p. 306), one-sixth of which is 33,000, of which one-half would have been males. Obviously, the figures are wrong somewhere, but the salient point is that an enormously large percentage of the Kallars of Madura District were subjected to the restrictions of the CTA.

12 Contribution of Swedish Missionaries for Women's Development in the Field of Social Recognition in Tamilnadu (India).

13 Himmelstrand. J, letter with Alm to the CSM Board 1929 cited in (Punniyavathi 2015, p. 71).

14 Rev. Himmelstrand, Mrs. Himmelstrand, Sr Rev. Nordmark, Sr. Larsen Vasti, Sr. Holmason Peterson, Rev. Gill, Sr. Wicklander, Sr. Peterson Snja, Sr. Will Helmson Ingrid, Sr. Segarstad Erick, Sr. Segarstad Sigrid, Sr. Thumblad, Sr. Edstrom, Sr. Ulla Sandegren, Ouchterlong (1855–1856) Blomstrand (1860–1863) Osterlind (1915–1918) Holm Anny (1920) Lagerquist Army (1921–1922) Evavan Gernet (1922–1923) Halm Anny (1923–1928) Kronsell Ester (1928) Jonsson Maria (1928–1930) Logren Naemi (1928–1931) Wimmereranz Elna (1930–1931) Halm Anny (1930–1931) Paul Gabler (1935) Kronsell Ester (1931–1946) Enggvist Carlsson (1935–1937) John Greta (1937) Halm Anny (1937–1945) Kronsell Ester (1946) Larson Vusti (1946) John Greta (1947–1948) and Halmberg Tage (1949).

15 Anna Irbe, Annual report 1929, p. 7; Annual Report TELC 1931 p. 6, cited in (Punniyavathi 2015, pp. 71–72).

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Inter-Weaving of Local and Global Discourses: History of Early Pentecostals in Kerala

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Abstract: Even though the Pentecostal movement in Kerala, South India, is a unique expression of Global Christianity, it has not been given due recognition either in the history of Kerala Christianity or Global Pentecostalism. It was rooted in both local and global discourses of the early 20th century. So, in order to understand the origin and early history of the Pentecostal movement, we need to delve deep into the history of socio-religious reform movements, which were enthusiastically embraced by Dalits, women, and other marginalized sections of Kerala. Unique features of Kerala Pentecostalism were shaped by various revival and reform movements among Christians in Kerala. With the arrival of American missionaries associated with the Azusa Street revival, the homegrown brand of Kerala Pentecostalism engaged in the global discourse on Pentecostalism. It equipped Pentecostals with the language and interpretations to make a break with the past and carve out a new identity for themselves. The usual method of approaching it as an extension of global Pentecostalism will not help us to understand how Pentecostals in Kerala creatively engaged in local and global discourses at the turn of the 20th century.

Keywords: modernity; Kerala reform; discourse analysis; Kerala Christianity; Pentecostalism; Brethren movement; Dalit Christians

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1. Introduction

This is a project in progress about the origin and development of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala.[1] Many scholars have approached the Pentecostal movement as one of the denominations that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century within the thick and rich Christian landscape of Kerala.[2] The major focus of their study, thus, was to analyze the role and contributions of certain American missionaries and elite indigenous leaders. However, we would like to place the Pentecostal movement within the 19th and early 20th centuries' discourses on modernity, which was characterized by the emergence of unprecedented socio-religious reform movements among various communities in Kerala. American Pentecostal missionaries initiated the early Kerala Pentecostals into a discourse on global pentecostalism, which endowed them with Biblical and theological resources to engage in existing local and global discourses. In the process, they created a discourse on gender, caste, and religious authority, which helped them to carve out a new identity for its members within the caste-stratified patriarchal society of Kerala. So, everyone who is concerned about the modern history of Christianity in Kerala and global Pentecostalism cannot brush off the early history of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala. Even though its significance was nothing less than other major socio-religious reform movements at the dawn of the 20th century, secular historians haven't made any serious attempt to locate its role and place within the history of discourse on modernity in Kerala. This article attempts to accentuate various discourses and movements that shaped the origin and development of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala and flesh out its engagement with Global Pentecostalism.

2. Significance of Discourse Analysis

Church historian Douglas Jacobsen introduces Pentecostalism as one of the four Christian mega-traditions (Jacobsen 2021, pp. 49–61). According to him, 20% of the world's Christians are now Pentecostals. The growth of Pentecostalism is considered "one of the most dramatic developments in all of Christian history." (Jacobsen 2021, p. 60). Even though the Azuza Street Revival that began in Los Angeles in 1906 is generally considered the birthplace of the global Pentecostal movement of the 20th century, scholars argue that prior to or independent of it, in various places, people had Pentecostal experience. It is recorded that in 1906 and 1907, people experienced a Pentecostal-like religious revival at the Mukti Mission of Pandita Ramabai in Pune, India (Joshua 2022, pp. 52–59). Even though one can identify common vocabulary and grammar among various Pentecostal traditions around the world, each tradition has been locally rooted and, therefore, unique in its origin and development. Taking into consideration the distinct features and characteristics of various Pentecostal traditions, therefore, we can argue that Pentecostalism is not a monolithic tradition. Even though a large number of Pentecostals (in Asia, Africa, and Latin America) were poor, the rich in Global North also embraced it. Though women outnumbered men in Pentecostal churches everywhere, men contributed tremendously to the spread of the Pentecostal movement. Both urban and rural populations, as well as people of Global North and Global South, embraced Pentecostalism. So, the question is, what is the relevant methodological approach to studying varied traditions within global Pentecostalism? While studying the origin and development of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala and its indebtedness to global Pentecostal traditions, it is important to acknowledge the religious and societal forces of the 19th and 20th centuries that shaped its distinct features. So, while it is possible to compare and contrast the Pentecostal movement in Kerala with that of similar movements in other parts of the world, we feel that such an approach will not help us to understand the rootedness of Pentecostals within the Kerala society and its engagement with the global traditions at the beginning of 20th century.

Different approaches can be employed to study the origin and development of socio-religious movements, such as the Pentecostal movement in Kerala. Talal Asad, an anthropologist of religion, challenged the Euro-centric preoccupation that reduced religious traditions to mere doctrinal and propositional statements. Such an approach understood religions as monolithic and trans-historical traditions. Thus, the study of religions was reduced to studying scriptures and other written sources. Even though they can help us to understand the common vocabulary and grammar of religious traditions they are not adequate enough to explain the historically specific beliefs, practices, rituals, symbols, and language that formed a religious tradition. Asad, therefore, has argued that no religious tradition is monolithic and, therefore, it needs to be approached as discursive tradition (Asad 1983, pp. 237–59). Religious traditions are not formed in isolation but rather through intense power negotiations with local and global forces. Discourse analysis, therefore, is an effective method to study the emergence and development of religious movements. Using discourse analysis to study Pentecostalism in Kerala will help us to realize both its connections with global Pentecostalism and its locatedness within the societal and religious landscape of Kerala.

Discourse, the mechanism of social discipline and conformity, is a vital part of the formation of a community. It is essential to the operation of power and essential to resistance. "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart." (Foucault 1998, pp. 100–1). Discourse analysis, therefore, captures the ideas and large patterns of thoughts embedded in the negotiations of power. It pays attention to dominant discourses a community engages with, its mechanism of separating truth from false, its reinforcement of certain interpretations of the Bible, and its propagation through official channels of communication networks. In this paper, we are not examining the linguistic or semantic dimensions of discourse; rather, our attempt is to understand the various dimensions of discourse on modernity in Kerala in the 19th and early 20th centuries. What were the salient features of discourse

on modernity in Kerala? Who engaged in discourse? Why did they engage in it? How did discourses impact various communities? How did it trigger internal reforms within a community and create a new sense of identity for itself? How has identity formation helped the community to demand greater access to education and employment? (Waitt 2010, pp. 217–40). Discourse analysis, therefore, helps us analyze the past, understand the present, and perceive how a community looks to the future.

Unlike several other regions of Asia and India, Kerala has one of the oldest Christian traditions in the world. However, Christianity in Kerala can be traced back clearly to the ancient Orthodox tradition that emerged from Syria. The arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century introduced Catholic traditions in Kerala. European missionaries ushered in various Protestant denominations to Kerala in the 18th and 19th centuries. So, at the dawn of the 20th century, Pentecostalism emerged within the thick and diverse Christian landscape of Kerala, where Christians were a socially and culturally privileged community (Frykenberg 2008, pp. 225–30; Brown 1956). Pentecostal movement in Kerala, which is one of the unique expressions of global Christianity, began as a movement of people—women, the economically deprived sections of society, and the Dalits or "untouchables"—who did not find a place of belonging among traditional Christianity in Kerala. After a century, even today, Pentecostals are a tiny minority among the Christian population of Kerala (Zachariah 2016). This article argues that the modern history of Christianity in Kerala, especially how missionary activities and socio-religious reform movements revived and revitalized the Christian community, cannot be understood without paying sufficient attention to the origin and development of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala.

Generally, the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala was marked by the arrival of US missionaries George Berg and Robert F. Cook at the beginning of the 20th century.[3] So highlighting the contributions of Berg, Cook, and indigenous leaders such as K. E. Abraham has been the major preoccupation of those who studied the history of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala.[4] Such a preoccupation is inadequate to explain the continuity and break between the socio-religious reform movements among Christians and other communities in Kerala of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the Pentecostal movement. In this paper, therefore, our focus is on the early history of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala, especially its antecedents and deeply rooted engagement with precursor Christian movements. Moreover, we would like to explore how their engagement with global Pentecostalism equipped them with sophisticated language and theological acumen to create a new discourse on caste, gender, and religious authority. It implies that we cannot understand the history of the Pentecostal movement without placing it within the discourses on Kerala modernity and global Pentecostalism. Moreover, we may not sufficiently understand the features and characteristics of Kerala's modernity without paying sufficient attention to Pentecostal discourse on caste, gender, and religious authority.

The voices of foreign missionaries and elite indigenous leaders have been recorded in missionary reports and official records of various Pentecostal churches. Several scholars have studied these writings and brought out the contributions of elite missionaries and leaders to the emergence of the Pentecostal movement. However, the voices of women, Dalits, and other marginalized communities who constituted the majority of early Pentecostals were not recorded in the institutional and communication network. It may be the reason why their voices have not been commonly heard in the studies of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala.[5] Material needs and aspirations for human dignity and recognition of marginalized sections among Pentecostals were not different from that of other marginalized sections of Kerala society. Regardless of their religious affiliations, Dalits were dispossessed and marginalized by non-Dalits, including Christians. Women, irrespective of their religious affiliations, were a suppressed group within society's patriarchal structures. The material conditions and needs of the poor sections of society were more or less the same. The early Pentecostal discourse in Kerala will have to read in continuity to their collective aspirations and desires to create a new future for themselves. So, we argue that listening to their discourses of the 19th and 20th centuries will help us to hear the hitherto

unheard or silenced voices of Dalits, women, and the poor among the Kerala Pentecostals and write it back into history and give them their due place. In short, in order to study the origin and early history of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala, we need to study the materials available in missionary and church archives along with discourses of various non-Pentecostal and non-Christian communities in Kerala, especially on caste, gender, and religious authority.

3. Discourse on Modernity in Kerala

In order to explain how we come to approach religions as monolithic and transhistorical traditions in the modern period, Talal Asad argued that secularism and religion are similar to Siamese twins in the West (Asad 2001). Consequently, we cannot understand the genealogy of one without the other. In this section, our objective is not to delve into the genealogy of either religion or secularism but rather to analyze the features and characteristics of European modernity in order to learn how Kerala modernity is different from it. The intellectual and ideational origins of European modernity can be traced back to the Renaissance, Protestant Reformation, and Enlightenment traditions. In Europe, discourse on secularism eventually resulted in nation-states controlling religion and relegating it to personal and private spheres of life. Reason and science became the criteria to decide the truth of the religious claim. It eventually resulted in removing religion from secular space (politics, culture, and society) in Europe and religious expressions from the public sphere. With colonialism, European discourse on modernity spread all over the world and became the dominant paradigm to measure all other traditions of modernity. The notions of science, technology, and rationality independent of traditions gave European modernity an edge over other modernities, which eventually elevated Europeans over non-Europeans (Abraham 2014, pp. 6–10). Universal humanism of European modernity provided the framework to critique unjust social hierarchies based on caste, gender, and religious identities (Chakrabrty 2000, pp. 4–5).

Pre-colonial Kerala society was a feudalistic agrarian society organized on a rigid hierarchical caste system with Brahmins at the top and 'low caste' people at the bottom. Millions of people who came to be known as Dalits, meaning 'crushed ones,' did not have access to public squares, temples, baths, roads, hospitals, and schools and were placed outside of the caste structure.[6] The arrival of Protestant missionaries at the beginning of the 19th century and their egalitarian message of 'equality of all before God' and ethos gradually transformed the power equations based on land ownership and rigid caste hierarchy. The radical English evangelical missionaries, harbingers of the discourse on modernity in Kerala, were at the forefront of the permeation of the key ideas of human rights, dignity, and equality among the masses. Further, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), London Missionary Society (LMS), and Basel missionaries were strongly established in Kerala for over a century before the emergence of the Pentecostal movement.[7]

English missionary work in Kerala received the express consent and active support of the British colonial establishment. Moreover, the progressive outlook of the rulers of Travancore and Cochin princely states and their desire to create modern states cannot be ignored. In order to become a 'modern' state, during the second half of the 19th Century, it was essential for state governments to promote modern education and literacy at the popular level. As the princely states of Travancore and Cochin lacked adequate resources and expertise to achieve it, they invited missionaries to take over the task. So, at the turn of the 19th Century, missionaries started several elementary schools and technical institutions in Kerala and promoted education along with their proselytizing efforts (Kawashima 1998, pp. 82–113).

What is significant for us to note here is how these educational advancements towards modernity triggered socio-religious reform movements among various communities in Kerala (See George 2007, pp. 101–28; Tharakan 1984). Until then, access to education was considered as the exclusive prerogative of the high-caste people of Kerala. So, one of the primary demands of the Christian converts from the lower rungs of society was

that missionaries open elementary and primary schools and exert their influence on the government to bring legislation that permits them to join government schools. Dalits, women, and the socially marginalized sectors of society enthusiastically embraced modern education when the government made it open to the public. Thus, popular demand for educational opportunities and access to employment in government sectors became the hallmark of Kerala society's transition into modernity.

Another facet of the discourse on modernity in Kerala was the popular uprising of women and Dalits challenging systemic oppression and demanding their civil liberties and rights. Here also, we should not overlook the contributions of radical evangelical missionaries and their campaign to abolish slave labor and remove social and civil disabilities for the Dalits and women. With the support of colonial establishments, missionaries succeeded in passing legislation to guarantee the rights of the marginalized. However, the passing of legislation was not enough for women and Dalits to secure their rights and dignity. They had to organize themselves and defy oppressive caste rules publicly in order to secure their rights, which had been denied for centuries by high-caste people. Popular uprisings resulted in the removal of severe forms of untouchability, which allowed Dalits to secure their right to walk freely on public roads and to obtain admission to government schools.

Discourses on religious conversion, modern education, and civil rights initiated by missionaries inspired leaders of various communities to promote socio-religious reforms internally.[8] The force of these reform movements came together in such an unprecedented power over all sections of Kerala's population. So, even though it was European missionaries who planted the seeds of modernity in Kerala, all sections of society played a role in its spread by embracing it and initiating reforms among their own communities. It was the Dalits, the depressed classes, and women who picked it up in the most sea-changing ways than other communities (Bygnes 2008). Epoch-making people movements of Narayana Guru (1856–1928) and Ayyankali (1863–1941), during the last decades of the 19th century and the early 20th century, challenged the oppressive caste system, which paved the way for upward social mobility of their respective communities (Chentharassery 1996).

The consolidation of caste and communal identities and the formation of various associations were other hallmarks of Kerala's transition into modernity. Sri Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, and Chattampi Swamikal (1854–1924) emerged as popular leaders and reformers among Ezhavas, Pulayas, and Nairs, respectively (Oommen 1985, pp. 97–100; Mohan 2015; Paul 2022). Under their leadership, members of their respective communities united under one umbrella and formed community-based associations. These associations played a crucial role in securing their communities' educational and employment opportunities and political representation in the state legislative assembly. These associations became the venue for the leaders to conscientize their community members on the need to pursue modern education and to motivate them to send their children, especially girls, to schools. They initiated internal reforms among their own castes by condemning superstitious beliefs and practices that prevented them from embracing science, medicine, and the positive contributions of unfolding modernity.

In short, unlike in the West, discourse on modernity in Kerala was not simply about ushering in scientific or technological advancement. Even though discourse on modernity promoted science, modern medicine, and rational thinking to an extent, it did not result in creating a European model of secular society, the public sphere, and the marginalization of religions to private realms. In Kerala, as in many other places, the transition to modernity manifested itself through many phenomena: the emergence of modern education, increased and more equitable access to the institutions of the state and the public sphere, and the reconfiguration of traditional social relationships, driven in part by increasingly liberal attitudes about the relationship between individuals and communities (Osella and Osella 2000). One major hallmark of Kerala modernity was the emergence of socio-religious reform movements and caste-based associations, which spearheaded anti-caste struggles, championed women's liberation, and the demand for greater opportunities to obtain education and employment. Our contention is that it is within this crucible that we need to

place the reform movements among Christians in the 19th and early 20th centuries and the eventual emergence of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala.

4. Christian Reform at the Dawn of the 20th Century

As noted, Christianity was well-established and a powerful presence in Kerala's social and religious landscape when the Pentecostal movement emerged. Discourse on modernity in Kerala impacted Orthodox Christianity in an unprecedented way and challenged its notions of gender, caste, and ecclesiastical authority. As a result, churches began to reform themselves. We argue that we cannot understand the emergence and growth of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala without analyzing the revival and reform movements among Christians during the last decades of the 19th century and the early 20th century. The Pentecostal movement in Kerala emerged in continuity and response to these revival and reform movements (John 2018). So, it is impossible for us to divide them neatly, and we can trace back the 19th and early 20th centuries' Christian reform in Kerala as the harbinger of the Pentecostal movement.

With the arrival of Vasco da Gama in 1498, Roman Catholic Christianity was introduced in Kerala. Since then, the Roman Catholic Church in Kerala has actively proselytized and converted others to Christianity. However, the Syrian Orthodox Church was reluctant to open its door to others, especially Dalits, and hadn't engaged in evangelistic mission activities until the 1870s (Mundadan 1984, vol. I; Thekkedath 1982, vol. II). As Baiju Markose has argued, the ecclesiology of Eastern Orthodox Christianity in Kerala was modeled on the Brahmanic hierarchical structure of Hinduism. Consequently, the priest occupied the pinnacle of this hierarchical ecclesial structure, and the ritual celebration of the eucharist became the highlight of the liturgical worship (Markose 2021, pp. 67–72). The liturgy was still recited in the Syriac language, which was a language foreign to Kerala Christians. Preachings centered on the Bible did not find any place within the liturgy of the Orthodox Church. The Church's mission was also understood as maintaining the social hierarchy inside and outside the Church. There was no space and freedom of expression within this hierarchical order for the laity, let alone for women. Even when socio-religious reform movements in Kerala championed the rights of women, the Church continued to marginalize women and their aspirations. The arrival of European evangelical missionaries and the dissemination of their radical message via print media shook the Orthodox Church to the core (Brown 1956). When missionaries preached the Gospel to Dalits, who were considered outcastes hitherto by Orthodox Christians, they converted to Christianity en masse. When newly established Protestant Christian denominations accepted Dalit Christians into their fold, it redefined the Christian landscape of Kerala. It challenged the traditional power equations of Kerala society and uprooted privileges enjoyed by Syrian Christians. The Orthodox churches' mission approach underwent radical change following the pan-Kerala Christian conversion movements. Shaking off these hitherto firmly held social norms seems to have created a conducive atmosphere for the emergence of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala. However, these forces were not enough to undercut the Orthodox Church's power structure and its hold on the Christian population.

Revival meetings spearheaded by lay preachers such as Sadhu Kochukunju Upadeshi, K. V. Simon, Poykayil Yohannan Appachan, and preachers of the renowned Maramon annual Christian convention at the end of the 19th century continued the reform and offered an alternative Christian spirituality based on the Bible. In the 1880s, Sadhu Kochukunju Upadesi emerged with a message of Christian revival and reform (Mathai and Bangert 2019). His field of activity was centered among the Marthoma Syrian Christians of the central Kerala region. He preached that Christians are the chosen people of God and called out to live a life of separation and holiness. He invited Christians to live morally, promoting social justice with austerity. His campaign against the practice of the dowry system and to serve poor children fitted well with the message of contemporary social reform movements. Christians from all denominations enthusiastically embraced his revival songs, which were deeply immersed in personal devotion to God and individual consolation. His revival

movement ushered in an alternative expression of Christianity, thereby challenging a spirituality based on Syriac liturgy and priestly authority (Daniel 2014). Young and lay people were attracted to his reform movement.

Another prominent lay preacher and poet, K. V. Simon, who was a contemporary of Kochukunju Upadesi, was a great supporter and co-traveler of his revival meetings. Simon was known for his poetic expressions and devotional side of the faith in Christ. While Kochukunju Upadesi remained with the Marthoma Church, K.V. Simon emerged as the spokesperson and architect of a movement that advocated separation from all existing Christian denominations. His advocacy for separation from mainline churches was based on his interpretation of the doctrine of immersion and adult baptism (Simon 1918). K.V. Simon joined the Brethren missionaries in Kerala and was instrumental in establishing Brethren congregations in several places in the central Travancore region. In 1895, the Evangelistic Association of the Mar Thoma Church conceived and launched an annual Christian convention at Maramon, in Travancore, on the bank of the Pampa river, which later grew up as one of Asia's largest Christian conventions (Alex 2021). The Maramon Convention became another launching pad for Christian reform in Kerala. Maramon convention preachers transformed the very language of Christianity, additionally paving the way for alternative expressions of Christianity which were unthinkable a few decades before.

Whereas the above attempts had focused on reformation among the Syrian Christians of Travancore, Poikayil Appachan's prophetic Church defied caste norms and formed a revivalist movement among the Dalits of Kerala, questioning the discrimination that they experienced at the hands of Syrian Christians. Appachan's movement created a dissenting voice, which paved the way for an alternative Christianity named PRDS (*Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha*, which can be translated as the Visible Salvation Church of God). PRDS insisted that salvation has to be experienced here and now. Appachan popularized esoteric forms of worship and singing. All these movements appeared on the horizon as if they were the harbingers of the Pentecostal movement (Mohan 2013).

It was primarily Syrian Christians from middle and lower-class families and rebelling Dalit prophets such as Poikayil Appachan who spearheaded these movements (Daniel 2014, p. 126). These revival and reform movements permeated within Christianity and rebelled against Syrian Christian churches in Kerala.[9] While discussing these harbinger movements that arose within and without the mainline Christianities of Kerala, we also need to note the systemic stone-walling mechanism that the institutional Church erected to withstand these movements. In response, from the very beginnings of these reform and revivalist movements, there emerged a discourse of 'separated brethren.'[10] It was not an accident that one of the first Pentecostal denominations was named *'verpadukar,'* literally "separated people."[11] They launched a bimonthly periodical named "Malankara Viyojithor" in Malayalam and "The Malankara Separatist" in English.[12] K. V. Simon, one of the main proponents of the movement of separation from the Mar Thoma Church, was its editor. The Brethren movement, which emphasized separation from mainline churches, built church buildings resembling local school buildings. They never erected the symbol of the cross anywhere in their church buildings. Worship was free of the formal liturgy. Members of Brethren assemblies were known for wearing only white clothes, carrying Bibles in public, and preventing women from adorning themselves with jewelry. Adult immersion baptism and the priesthood of all believers were the main teachings of the Brethren movement in Kerala.

The key themes of the 19th-century Christian reform and revival movements included the literal interpretations of the Bible, exposition of its teachings on Baptism, especially the mode of the Baptism, assurance of salvation, and new ecclesiology. The development of these doctrines made them distinct from the Orthodox Christians of Kerala. At the forefront of these assertive and extremely argumentative, hairsplitting biblical literalist interpretations were people such as K. V. Simon, K. E. Abraham, P. E. Mamen, and A. J. John.[13] A cursory look at their writings and preaching would reveal that they vehemently

defended their separatist position with regard to these theological issues. However, it is significant to note here that creating a wedge or dividing wall to demarcate between Sadhu Kochukunju Upadesi, who remained with the Mar Thoma Church, and separatist K. V. Simon is almost impossible in several areas of their discourses. It implied that the relationship between the 19th-century Christian revival precursor movements and the newly emerging Pentecostal movement was more of continuation and divergence than separation (Mammen 1919, p. 178ff).

5. Continuity and Change: The Paradigm of Early Pentecostal Discourse in Kerala

On the front pages of *Kahalam,* "Pentecostal Trumpet," an organ of the Travancore Assemblies of God, which was considered the first periodical of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala launched in 1925, editors asked the following question about the identity of the emerging Pentecostal community within the Christian landscape of Kerala: Are Pentecostals a separated [*verpadukar*] community? Or are they another Christian denomination? (John 1925, p. 2). Here the term "separated" refers to the Brethren community of K.V. Simon. Editors of the journal argued that Pentecostals neither belong to the Brethren community nor are similar to other Christian denominations in Kerala. Early Pentecostals claimed a distinct identity for themselves. Accordingly, Pentecostals described themselves as a fellowship of 'men and women believers who were baptized in the Holy Spirit.'[14] They claimed themselves as the authentic Church patterned on the early churches of the New Testament times. In this section, we will elaborate on how early Pentecostals continued to engage in the 19th and early 20th centuries' Christian discourse on caste, religion, and gender in Kerala. Here, we will also discuss how they were ushered into the global discourse on Pentecostalism and analyze how it helped them to carve out a new and distinct identity for themselves.

The precursor movements' discourse, which we discussed in the previous section, on the Bible, personal devotion, assurance of salvation, daily walk with God, and rejection of the clergy-laity divide were continued into the new dispensation that the Pentecostal movement opened up. In spite of it, Pentecostals were mostly influenced by Brethren separatists than Kochukunju Upadesi's movement, which remained within the Marthoma Church. Similar to Brethren, Pentecostals wanted to make break from mainline denominations in Kerala and create a distinct identity for themselves. So, they built churches resembling school buildings, in the pattern of Brethren church buildings, rather than the huge cathedrals of Orthodox Christians. Such as early Christians in the book of Acts, met at homes for fellowship and worship. Early Pentecostals did not make a strict bifurcation between the public and religious realms of their lives. They were known for wearing only white clothes and dressing in public the same way they did for church activities. They carried a Bible wherever they went. Unlike other men in Kerala, Pentecostal men either shaved their mustaches or kept a full beard. All these measures helped to create a visible presence of Pentecostals and Brethren in the public square. Similar to Brethren, they were proud to call themselves 'separated ones.'

In order to develop a distinct identity for themselves, both Brethren and Pentecostals in Kerala followed countercultural thinking. Their actions ran counter to mainstream norms of traditional Christians in Kerala, which further consolidated their 'separated' identity. Kerala Pentecostals interpreted the Bible in a way that created a new counterpublic for these sections of society. Their worship services were scheduled to start at 10:00 am on Sundays when mainline churches' services ended. This scheduling made it possible for them to encounter public places non-Pentecostal/Brethren Christians returning home after attending their Sunday services. Similar to Brethren in Kerala, Pentecostals refused to follow the liturgical calendar and celebrate Christmas, Easter, or any saints' days, and cultural festivals such as Onam. The Bible was their only authority and guide in negotiating religious and cultural issues. Traditional customs and practices followed by Syrian Christians in relation to marriage and wedding ceremonies were rejected. It was common among Syrian Christians to schedule wedding ceremonies on auspicious times

and dates prescribed by Hindu astrological calendars. Brethren and Pentecostals even refused to wear and exchange wedding rings, bridal dress (*mantrakoti*), and the traditional custom of the groom ties a *thali mala* (a wedding string) around the bride's neck. Thus the movement's countercultural dimensions were evident in its theological development and identity formation.

It is significant to note that it was mainly with the arrival of American Pentecostal missionaries that Pentecostals began to make break with the Brethren community in Kerala. Even though their values and norms of conduct did not differ substantially from the Brethren, Pentecostal theology and certain interpretations of the Bible created a wedge between them. US missionaries introduced Pentecostalism in Kerala while Christians engaged in discourses on revival and reform. George Berg and his wife, Mary Berg, came to India in 1906 as Brethren missionaries. Later, they returned to the US and participated in the Azusa Street revival meetings and became Pentecostals. So, in 1908, they returned to India as Pentecostal missionaries, settled in Bangalore, and managed missionary work at various places in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. George Berg inspired and invited Robert F. Cook and his wife, Anna Cook, who were also part of the Azuza Street revivals, to come to India as missionaries. In 1913, as a result, after their arrival in Bangalore, they accompanied Berg on his preaching tours to Kerala. Kerala Pentecostals' opportunity to engage in global Pentecostalism endowed them with a new language, which eventually created a new identity for them. It gave them the power and authority to pray over sickness and evil spirits. So, healing and exorcisms were frequently reported in early Pentecostals' meetings in Kerala. The Pentecostal doctrine of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) made the break with the Brethren.

K. E. Abraham (1899–1974) was one of the prominent indigenous leaders of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala. A peek into his life will help us to glimpse how the Pentecostal movement was a continuation of precursor Christian reforms of the 19th and early 20th centuries and also how Pentecostals made a break with it and carved out an identity for themselves. K.E. Abraham was born into a Syrian Jacobite family and attended Sunday school at the Mar Thoma Church, closer to his home. Even though in 1908, at the age of nine, he was exposed to Pentecostal revival meetings, it was in 1914 that he dedicated his life to God's service while attending a meeting conducted by Kuchukunju Upadeshi (Abraham 1965, p. 60). After his schooling, while working as a school teacher, he attended Bible studies led by K.V. Simon, who rebaptized him by immersion on 27 February 1916. Under the mentorship of Simon, who launched the *Viyojitha Prasthanam* (the separatist movement) in 1917, he separated from the Syrian Jacobite Church. It is significant to note that he had the Pentecostal experience under the influence of C. Manasseh (1876–1938), an indigenous Pentecostal leader, in 1923 prior to meeting Robert F. Cook. (Joshua 2022, pp. 83–84). In 1925, after distancing from the Brethren movement, he started the South Indian Pentecostal Church of God and began publishing the journal *Kahalam* (Pentecostal trumpet). In 1926, even though he decided to join forces with Robert F. Cook, he had to separate after three years, and he eventually founded an indigenous church known as Indian Pentecostal Church. Inspired by the emerging national movement, later, he defended the decision to break away from Robert F. Cook as an effort to keep the "autonomy of native churches" and emancipation from "being under the yoke of slavery." (Pulikottil 2002).

While the early leaders of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala were mainly from the Syrian Christian community, such as K. E. Abraham, a substantial section of the community members were Dalits and women. We argue that the space that women and Dalits found within the Pentecostal movement were what distinguished it from the Brethren and other precursor Christian movements. Early Pentecostals addressed each other as 'brother' and 'sister'—such a way of saluting each other erased notions of superiority or inferiority. Early Pentecostals were known for meeting regularly for fellowship and sharing in a common meal after worship gatherings. If the prohibition from sharing meals was one of the means by which caste hierarchy has been maintained for centuries, Pentecostals broke that tradition; Dalits and non-Dalits Pentecostals' eating together was more or less

a common practice after their gatherings. In-filling of the Holy Spirit empowered Dalits, women, and laity to speak with boldness and power. Many of them were respected for their leadership skills and the ability to exercise the "gifts of the Spirit," such as speaking in tongues, discernment, and prophecy. Pentecostalism offered them a new possibility of being a Christian, which was not available for Dalits or women in Kerala until the arrival of the Pentecostal movement.

Here it is significant to note the observation of Partha Chatterjee (Chatterjee 1990, pp. 233–53) that women had the burden of preserving and maintaining the traditions. Pentecostal women always covered their hair and were not allowed to wear any jewelry. Even after a century, women continue these traditions. However, the lifestyle changes adopted by the first generation of men at the beginning of the movement were not continued in the subsequent generations. Even though there is no Biblical basis for these practices, women had to continue them as they became the marks of Pentecostal community identity. Right from the beginning of the movement, such as Dalit Christians, women were also recognized for "the gift" of interpreting and speaking the Word of God with authority and power. Consequently, several women rose to prominence and leadership in the movement. There was a strong '*ashram*' (or monastic) movement under the leadership of Annamma Mammen (1911–2002), who was a leader, songwriter, and itinerant preacher, among women at the beginning of the 20th century. This is an indication that women's voices and contributions shaped the grassroots Kerala Pentecostal imagination, and several women had dedicated themselves to leaving their homes in order to lead a celibate life and engage in teaching and preaching. Allan Varghese argued that Annamma Mammen's songs continued to shape the contemporary imagination of Kerala Pentecostals (Meloottu 2020).

Religious conversion to Christianity as a means of emancipation from caste discrimination for Dalits had already emerged as a powerful discourse by the mid-19th Century (Gladstone 1984, p. 76). Consequently, mass conversion of Dalits to Protestant Churches began along with, and especially after, the anti-slavery legislation of the 1850s. Dalits publicly rejected Hindu religious customs and traditions that perpetuated caste discrimination and marked their protest through their conversion to Christianity. However, they were not embraced as equals and continued to face caste discrimination within mainline Protestant churches. So, we argue that Dalits' decision to join the newly developing Pentecostal movement in Kerala was a continuation of this discourse on 'conversion as emancipation' that was already present in the social landscape of Kerala modernity. Dalits' abandonment of protestant Churches such as the CMS and the LMS and their affiliation with the new Pentecostal movement of the early 20th century was not only a radical rebuke against the Syrian Christians' casteist behavior and domination within the established Kerala Churches but also a hopeful leap into a movement which provided more space for their aspirations, dignity, and individual initiative. In some places, they joined Pentecostal congregations en masse. Pentecostal spirituality embraced Dalits' culture and traditions in several ways. Drums, which are traditionally associated with Dalits, became the major musical instrument of accompaniment in Pentecostal worship. As Dalits and poor were generally illiterate, orality became extremely important for early Pentecostals. Pentecostals' emphasis on extempore preaching and free worship helped Dalits to realize the theological significance of orality (Paul 2019).

While considering the mass conversion of Dalits and women to Pentecostalism, we should not assume that it was the result of their collective decision. It is significant to note that Dalits were not a monolithic group. Moreover, women from different socio-economic and caste backgrounds embraced the Pentecostal movement. Their decision to join the movement involved a new awakening of self-awareness and self-reflexivity.[15] It included accepting Jesus as their personal savior and receiving adult baptism publicly. Remembering the dates of making these decisions have been highly valued among Pentecostals. For some, remembering their born-again experience is much more important than celebrating their own birthday. Sharing personal testimonies of how they experienced the leadership of the Spirit in daily life situations was a significant part of early Pentecostal worship services.

These testimonies became extremely significant for the whole community as many early Pentecostals had to break their familial ties and relinquish their right to ancestral property in order to join a Pentecostal congregation. Syrian Christian families and communities condemned Pentecostalism and ostracized their kith and kin who embraced the Pentecostal movement. Listening to testimonies of early Pentecostals will reveal that joining the movement was a major decision that they took consciously in their life, which made them socially and economically vulnerable. Pentecostal worship, as it was not restricted by a liturgical tradition, provided enough space for the personal expressions of women and Dalits. Several of them wrote songs and preached sermons during church services.

Right from the beginning, Pentecostals were engaged in missionary outreach. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers launched a laity missionary movement among Pentecostals. They preached to Christians and non-Christians as they did not distinguish between them. Everyone who was not a Pentecostal was considered the target of the mission. So when we consider the expansion of the Pentecostal movement by drawing a large number of people from the Orthodox tradition (whether reformed or otherwise), it is significant to note the place of 'conversion' discourse that permeated Pentecostal missiology. In that sense, we should see the 'conversion' discourse introduced by evangelical missionaries as the most defining precursor to the Pentecostal movement in Kerala.

In short, the Pentecostal movement in Kerala was a unique expression of Christianity within the global Christian movement of the 20th Century. So, its study is significant for all those who want to understand the Christian history of Kerala, global Pentecostalism, global Christianity, and Kerala reform. The Pentecostal movement was part and parcel of Kerala's history of socio-religious reform movements and the struggle for self-determination of Dalits, women, and economically marginalized classes. Even though global Pentecostalism shaped the theological and Biblical interpretations of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala, this article argued that the 19th and early 20th centuries. Christian reform movements played a very crucial role in shaping its discourse on caste, gender, and religious authority. In unfolding the history of the Pentecostal movement, the usual method of approaching it as an extension of Azusa Street revival and American missionary enterprise and their elite counterparts in Kerala will not help us to understand how preexisting discourse on modernity shaped the movement and its countercultural dimensions. Equally, to understand various dimensions of the socio-religious reform movements and discourse on modernity in Kerala, one cannot ignore a careful study of the Pentecostal movement. In this regard, this study demonstrates how we could approach the early history of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala in order to recover its history, which has not largely found a place in the grand narrative of Kerala Christian history and Global Pentecostalism.

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Notes

1 Kerala, a province on the Malabar coast, in South India represents one of the oldest Christian traditions in the world, which is believed to have begun with the arrival of Saint Thomas in 52 CE. We are in the process of writing a book-length history of Pentecostal discourse in Kerala, which will survey major discourses of the first few decades until it became an organized movement with its own distinct teachings and institutions.

2 The following are some of the notable studies on Kerala Pentecostalism. Saju Mathew, *Kerala Penthecosthu Charithram* (Malayalam) [History of Kerala Pentecost] Kottayam: Good News Publications, 1994; Michael Bergunder, *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century.* Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008; Kunjappan C. Varghese, "Reformation Brings Revival: A Historical Study of K. E. Abraham and his Contributions in the Founding of the Indian Pentecostal Church of God" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Trinity International University, 1999); Aleyamma Abraham, "Pentecostal Women in Kerala: Their Contributions to the Mission of the Church (D. Miss Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2004); V. V. Thomas, *Dalit Pentecostalism: Spirituality of the Empowered Poor*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Cooperation, 2004; Reeju Tharakan, "Pentecostal-

Charismatic Christianity in Kerala: A Socio-Historical Analysis of its Transition and Transformation" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Science, 2019).

3 George Berg, along with his wife Mary Berg, came to India in 1906 as Brethren missionaries. In 1906, they went back to the US and actively participated in the Azusa Street revival meetings. In 1908, as Pentecostal missionaries, they came back to India and settled in Bangalore. They engaged in missionary work at various places in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. See, Anderson (2007, p. 95), George Berg inspired another couple, Robert F. Cook and his wife Anna Cook, who were also part of Azuza Street revivals, to come to India. In 1913, they came to Bangalore and accompanied Berg on his preaching tours to Kerala. See, Cook (1939, pp. 8–9). For a historiographical commentary on Indian Pentecostalism, (Kuiper 2013, pp. 91–117).

4 For a discussion on the 'discursive' nature of the Pentecostal origins, see (Kuiper 2013, p. 106f.)

5 (Spivak 2010, pp. 21–78). The place of Dalits and the polarization between dalits and Syrians within the Pentecostal Movement are well documented in (Thomas 2004; Samuelkutty 2000).

6 They were denied admission to schools and hospitals until the end of the nineteenth century. See (Abraham 2014, pp. 10–12).

7 During the first phase, CMS missionaries worked among the Syrian Christians or St. Thomas Christians. Some of them were landlords who practiced slave labor and employed 'slave castes' such as Pulayas. In 1836, after two decades of CMS attempts to introduce Evangelical Christianity among the Syrian Christians, the CMS discontinued their connection with them. See for details (Cherian 1935; Hunt 1920, vol. I).

8 Gladstone (1984). See for a discussion of the issue of the link between missionary social affiliations and their social involvements. (Oddie 1979, pp. 9–17; Kooiman 1989, pp. 32–44). See also (Copley 1997; Bebbington 1989).

9 See for an early debate on Church practices and theological issues on Baptism (Simon 1916). For a very recent work on the archaic nature of the Syriac liturgy and the need for revision (Kuruvilla 2021).

10 It is significant to note here that in 1917, at a time of rising nationalism in India, K.V. Simon launched the Viyojitha Prasthanam (the Separatist movement) also to challenge the high-handed ways of some overseas missionaries. (Joshua 2022, p. 82.)

11 Even though Pentecostals advocated separation from mainline churches of Kerala, later, the term 'verpadukar' was used to refer to the members of the Brethren churches in Kerala.

12 Early issues of the publication are available at the library archives of India Bible College and Seminary, Kumbanadu, Kerala, India.

13 Simon (1918). See also the monthly (*Suviseshakodi* 1902) and *Suvisesha Deepika* 1916–1919.

14 See also the monthly, (*Suviseshakodi* 1902).

15 To learn more about 'inwardness and reflexivity', read (Taylor 1989, pp. 25–52).

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Article

Christianity and *Liberation*: A Study of the Canadian Baptist Mission among the Savaras in Ganjam (Orissa), c.1885–1970

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Abstract: Liberation is a psychological attribute that primarily aims towards peace of mind followed by emancipation from fetters. Every individual covets liberation through their actions and expects a conducive milieu to experience the same. However, for oppressed people, the journey to liberation is convoluted as it involves escape from many elements. In a hierarchical society like India, liberation means liberation from the whole structure in which religious affiliation plays an important role. The marginalized section of the population seldom has the liberty to choose for their lives and they continue to remain subordinated under age-old power relations, which are garbed in the names of destiny and ordinance. For them, liberation is a quest to make an identity and reinstate the value of self-worth. Christianity, with the Church as its mission partner, seeks to liberate these caged souls from their precarious standings. This study will try to show how the Canadian Baptist Mission, with a primary objective to evangelize, left a trail of aspiration among the tribal Savaras of Ganjam to undertake the pursuit of liberation and fight oppression on their own.

Keywords: Christianity; tribal; Orissa; culture; religion; liberation

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1. Introduction

Any comprehensive study on religion entails a detailed discussion of culture, traditions, and historical discourses. As each of these aspects are intertwined, a subtle understanding of these three terms is a prerequisite. Culture was defined by Sir Edward Taylor in 1871 as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society" (Krishnamurti 1993). Culture is an integral and inalienable part of our existence and identity. It may be understood as a consortium of communication that a section of the population have in common: their shared experiences, perceptions and values, consciousness, myths, rituals, customs, and manners (MacDonald 1991; Michael 2015). Because culture is concerned partly with symbols and meanings, the problem of how or whether to theorize culture is particularly a complex issue for historical analysis (Hall 2000). B. Malinowski (1945) clearly explained the impact of contact on culture. M.N. Srinivas ([1966] 1972) discussed the process of cultural change in India and introduced the concept of 'Sankritization' referring to the process of adapting cultural traits of higher castes by the lower ones. In this regard, Redfield (1955) used the concept of 'Great and Little Traditions' in the study of great traditional elements and the upward movement of little traditions due to the interaction of cultures. Robin Horton (1975), through his case study in Africa, conceptualized traditional and cultural interactions in a two-tiered structure whereby the 'lesser spirits' involved the microcosm of the local community (especially the isolated ones which lived by subsistence farming), with the 'supreme being' appropriating the macrocosm of the world. If tradition is people's creation out of their own past, then its character is not moribund, and therfore, one tradition is replaced by another the moment a superior force superimposes itself over the inferior. Simultaneously, individuals and institutions constantly create and re-create culture. In this regard, tradition and culture share their properties, as both play determinig roles in human affairs. Though they appear synonymous, they are distinct in that tradition is a temporal

concept, while culture comprises a synchronic state of affairs. Tradition seems to be ad hoc and fragmentary; culture is an index of identity and existense, and the interaction among traditions (Glassie 1995).

These concepts resurface individually and collectively when a community undergoes a social transformation that reconfigures the societal relationships and dismantles the prevailing equation hitherto being followed. A stark example of this change can be traced in the circumstances of religious conversion. Because conversion is a multifaceted process, it involves transformation of an individual's spiritual life, faith, philosophy, ideology, psychology, and a physical makeover (Jenifa 2013). It seeks liberation from the current state of existence and does not seem to be a temporary phase born out of provocation or frustration (Khan 1991). According to Lewis Rambo (1993):

> Conversion is paradoxical. It is elusive. It is inclusive. It destroys and it saves. Conversion is sudden and it is gradual. It is created totally by the action of God, and it is created totally by the actions of humans. Conversion is personal and communal, private, and public. It is both passive and active. It is a retreat from the world. It is a resolution of conflict and an empowerment to go into the world and confront, if not create, conflict. Conversion is an event and a process. It is an ending and a beginning. It is final and open-ended. Conversion leaves us devastated and transformed.

The concept of liberative theology, which is inherent in Christian conversion, is a subjective experience which changes its definition with the alteration of space and time. It is, therefore, not a monolithic one, but encompasses myriad definitions within the framework of different contexts. Pinning down when the theology of liberation had its inception is difficult, as movements of thought and reflections are always difficult to date in terms of the exact moment of their birth. Enrique Dussel opined that its roots can be traced back to the early sixteenth century in the prophetic theology of the Latin American Church associated with names like Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolome de Las Casas. The non-academic prophetic–pastoral theology of these men that took up the sufferings of the exploited races and peoples of the colonies perhaps commenced the Theology of Liberation that found its expression in the subsequent period (Taylor and Taylor 1991). Something similar theologically, but different formally, was the widespread ministry carried out in the Central American countryside by unordained itinerant catechists called the "delegates of the Word". The liberation theology movement arose as a response to an authentic disciplinary concern of academic theologians educated in the North. Many of them were priests in poor parishes who wrote books based on their heuristic experience for the intellectuals to build upon (Yoder 1990).

Juan Luis Segundo (1976) asserts his:

> ".... feeling that the most progressive theology in Latin American is more interested in being liberative than talking about liberation. In other worlds, Liberation theology deals not so much with content as with the method used to theologize in the face of our real-life situation".

Also, Alistair Kee (1987) stated,

> "Liberation theology is not the application of traditional theology to a different theological agenda including exotic phenomena such as revolution. It is a Theology done through a completely different method".

However, in India, the liberative theology is viewed from a very complex pedestal whereby quantitative and qualitative aspects are enmeshed. On one hand, the number of churches, converts, and their employment opportunities are indexes of liberation; while on the other, the struggle against injustice is not merely to eradicate poverty, misery, and exploitation, but also to give birth to an altogether different person (Chethimattam 1972). As far as the Marxist analysis of liberation is concerned, the economic aspect is predominant in which the role of church and missionaries in bringing about economic reforms and assistance is an overarching one (Abeyasingha 1979). Research in this line of argument

in India is still a grey area. Not much has been written juxtaposing the religious and cultural entitlement with the historical narratives through the prism of liberation as a mode of theological understanding. Existing research projects conversion from different vantage points of social change. Studying the Bhil tribe, for David Hardiman (1987) conversion meant accepting an 'alternative system of ethics.' Gauri Viswanathan (1998) viewed conversion as a 'subversion of secular power' that involved interweaving and disentangling of two religions and cultures. It also encompassed three interlocking and interdependent dominant symbols: God, world, and human beings, and their reconstitution in order to protest oppression (Robinson and Clarke 2003). Therefore, certainly, it attempted to gain social mobility, self-respect, and dignity (Pickett 1933; Oddie 1977; Forrester 1980; Kooiman 1989). Although Felix Padel (2009) and Barbara M. Boal (1996), through their anthropological studies on the Khonds of Orissa, put forward the idea that Christianity liberated the tribe from traditional beliefs of superstition and elaborate rituals, the authors did not focus on the liberative aspect of spirituality. Historians like Robert L. Hardgrave (1969), Henriette Bugge (1994), Gunnel Cederlof (1997), and P. Sanal Mohan (2015) pointed out the reconfiguration of traditional social relations that underwent conversion, and by which the oppressed could protest tyranny and slavery. However, another group of scholars put forward a theory of 'aggressive cultural imperialism' that lay under the motive of converting people and argued that missionary activities disrupted the social equilibrium and fostered a communal divide and separatist movement between Hindus and Christians (Panikkar 1953; Goel 1986; Susan Bayly 1989; Devalle 1992; Kim 2003). Christian conversion led to a convert becoming a non-being who, at a psychological and cultural level, failed to associate himself in a new religious ethos, which made him feel alienated from the society (Copley 1997). It created a rupture in prior faith, heralded displacement within the family and society, both individually and collectively, and ended up in an intensification of experiencing 'otherness' with an added epithet of 'Rice Christians' (Dube 2004; Harding 2008). It was Sathianathan Clarke (1998), John C.B. Webster (2007), and James Massey (2014) who delved into the liberative aspect of the conversion movements and opined that Christianity offered the disenfranchised and marginalized people an escape from social discrimination and despicable bearings.

Therefore, the question remains of how did the oppressed conceive of liberation in the process of embracing Christianity? Because conversion did not lead to complete emancipation from social ostracization, how far did liberative theology still have its pertinence for the converts? This research on the Christian conversion movement among the tribal Savaras of Ganjam will rely on three theories of culture, namely functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism, to understand how conversion shared its ontological derivations with culture. Historical discourse will be our prism to articulate the various aspects of changing cultural patterns. Moreover, the hypothesis that it was an urge towards proper existentialism that propelled the need for a counter theology will also be under our purview.[1] Through the configurational approach, this article will study the shift in religious practices, cultural patterns, and the problems that overshadowed the lives of Savaras, strengthening a cultural divide among themselves on the one hand, and bringing them into the mainstream civilization on the other. Utilising the theory of phenomenology, I shall take up a comprehensive history of Christianity in Ganjam and try to show that the decision to convert was a countenance of contextual and liberative theologies, and that liberation was more of a psychological comprehension based on individual piety. Since socio-historical phenomena are more than theoretical interpretation, archival sources and mission reports will be critically analyzed, blended with theoretical overtones, and corroborated by the secondary literature to present the arguments in a logical and unbiased manner.

2. The Rural World of Ganjam

The Ganjam district lies in the southern part of Orissa (see Figure 1), bordered by the districts of Nayagarh in the north, Gajapati and Srikakulam in the south, on the west by Kandhamal, and on the east by Khurdha and Puri and running along the coastline of the

Bay of Bengal (see map). During the early period of British administration, Ganjam was the northernmost district of the division of the erstwhile Madras Presidency called the Northern *Circars*. Prior to the creation of Orissa as a separate province, the whole of Ganjam Agency was divided into three taluks, namely, Ramagiri-Udayagiri, Ghumusar-Udayagiri, and Baligurha, and it was known as Baligurha division. Consequently, upon the creation of Orissa on 1 April 1936, Ganjam district was separated from the Madras Presidency and merged with Orissa. The district then comprised the divisions of Ghumusar, Chhatrapur, Baligurha, part of Brahmapur and Ichhapur Taluks in Brahmapur division, part of the Paralakhemundi plains, and the whole of Paralakhemundi Agency in Chicacole (Behuria 1992).

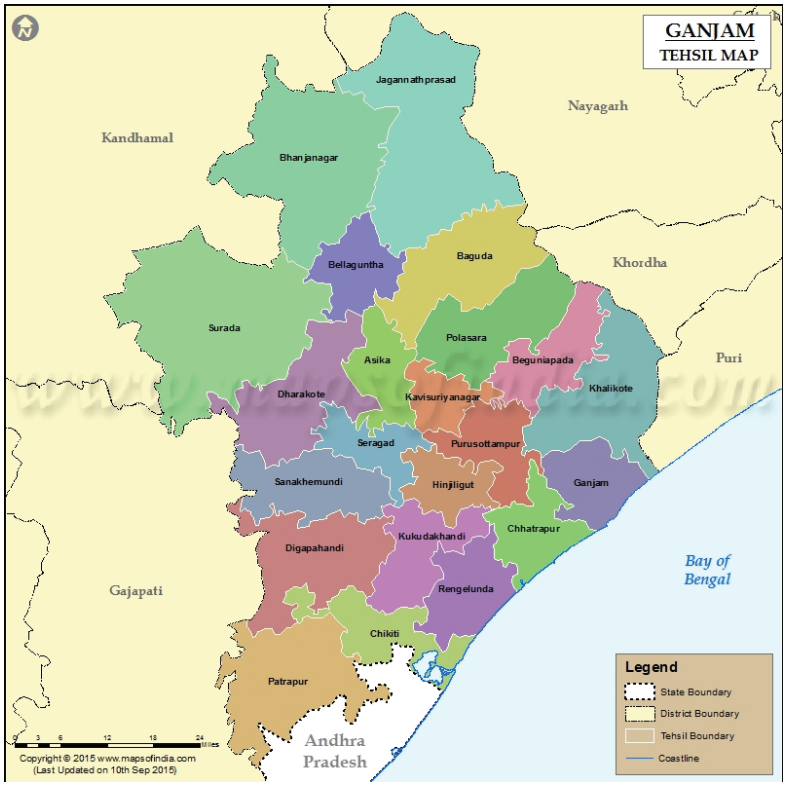

Figure 1. Ganjam *Tehsil* Map highlighting the names and locations of all the *tehsils* (administrative areas) in the district (https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/orissa/tehsil/ganjam.html, accessed on 12 October 2022).

The agency areas, or the hilly tracts with extensive thick forest growth, were mostly inhabited by the *adivasi* (first inhabitants) or 'tribal' Savaras and Kondhs, and the 'untouchable' Panos (*Small Farmers Development Agency: District Ganjam* 1972). The Savaras were one of the oldest tribal groups living in this district, especially in and around Parlakimedi. Along with them resided the Paiks and the Panos, who were a group of Oriya migrants from the plains. The Paiks were caste Hindus and formed a section of the ruling class, while the Panos were outcastes[2] and traders by profession. They lived apart in their own hamlets in parallel mud huts and had little in common with each other (McLaurin 195?). The Savaras themselves could be divided into two groups: *Kapu* and Hill Savaras. The *Kapu* Savaras inhabited the plains regions of the agency areas which provided them a scope to adapt the cultural traditions of the Oriyas and the Telugus. However, the Hill Savaras,

as the name suggested, lived in the more inaccessible regions and were staunch in their traditional faith and practices (Carder 1950; Thurston 1909; Singh 1984).

The mythologies of *Aitareya Brahmana* described the Savaras as descendants of the elder sons of *Viswamitra,* Valmiki's *Ramayana* traced them as inhabitants of the Dandaka forests, and legendary accounts like *Skanda Purana, Brahma Purana* documented that Lord Jagannath (the primary Hindu deity worshipped in Orissa) was venerated as *Neela Madhab* by the Savara chief Viswavasu (Elwin 1955; Mazumdar 1927; Joshi 2007; Konduru 2016). These accounts predominantly pointed towards a genuine possibility of the Savaras as followers of Hinduism. Unfortunately, the caste Hindus never considered them as their counterparts and treated them as '*antebasis*' or indigenous people residing at the '*pratyanta desh*' or frontier zones (Patnaik 1989). The Savaras believed in animism (spirit worship), and performed animal scarifices to propitiate and appease their gods and goddesses through a *shaman* (male priest) or *shamanin* (female priest). Their religion was known as *Darangmaa* and elaborate observance of rituals was an integral part of it (Elwin 1954; Acharya n.d.). They believed that the incidence of natural calamities was triggered by the demons[3] and diseases spread due to the enragement of their village goddess, and they reared their children with certain misconceptions about life and death (Paik 1910; Elwin 1954; Pfeffer 2014).[4] However, the Savaras had greater admiration for the Hindu cultural traditions and even tried to imitate their ritualistic behaviors and lifestyle. They tried to interpret the Hindu concepts of '*paap-punya*' (sin and religious merit) and '*kulamela*' (a concept similar to that of caste groups) in their own ways and appreciated the Hindu way of life (Mahapatra n.d.). This quest for social acceptance and affiliation to mingle with the mainstream civilization continued until Christianity entered the region.

The Panos, on the other hand, were Oriya speakers who had mobility in both the Ganjam locality and the hilly areas. They were involved in fishing, trading, and even menial jobs. They formed the outcaste group but worshipped deities of the Hindu pantheon along with village ones. The upper caste people exploited the Panos without rendering any substantial return to them. A Brahman, who could serve as a priest in the house of the four varnas (Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra), did not extend his priestly functions to the *avarnas* or low castes. The Brahmans occupying the highest position in the caste hierarchy treated the lower caste people as beyond the Varna order, and this spiralled into a feeling of inferiority among the latter. The Panos were traditionally considered the lowest in the caste hierarchy and they served not only the *savarna* castes but also other castes as well. The classes like Washermen, Bauris, etc., who accepted services from the Panos, maintained a social distance from them on the ground of "purity and pollution".[5] They were debarred from entering the Hindu temples and participating in the Hindu festivals as well. Thus, the Panos were alienated socially from all sides (Behera 1991).

However, the economic framework of Ganjam after the arrival of colonial rule was such that, depsite the outcastes being socially ostracized in a Hindu caste society, the Panos were in a better social position due to their dexterity and credibility compared to that of the tribal Savaras, which made the latter suffer from marginalization and subservience to both the Panos and others in the hierarchical society.

The British infiltration into Orissa that started in 1766 was completed after capturing the two districts in the South—Ganjam and Koraput; three districts in the North—Balasore, Cuttack, and Puri; and one district in the West—Sambalpur (Sengupta 2015). Apart from the changes in land settlements, the emergence of colonial rule in Ganjam led to the introduction of money economy, which undermined the self-suffcient livelihood practiced by the Savaras. With the opening of territory to the outside world, a large number of traders, liquor vendors, and communities like the Panos gained access to the agency areas (Henderson 1930). Perishable food stuffs, which were once used in gift exchanges, became a commodity in the wider market in lieu of cash. This led to an increasing exploitation and drain of natural resources which undermined the lives of the Savaras. As the local administrative officials were Oriya speakers, the Savaras developed a sense of inferiority, and this language barrier brought in opportunities for the Panos to exploit the tribals. The

tribals also resented the colonial rulers when they encroached upon their traditional socio-economic system, implementing policies of survey and taxation (Das 1983). The reformed land policies displaced the position of the Savaras from being original landowners to tenants-at-will. They were also denied occupancy rights over their ancestral lands. Because of their tribal status, the Savaras were humilated and were subjected to *bethi* and *begari* (forms of unpaid labor) (Bag 2007). The isolated nature of the Savaras kept them non-literate and they were unfamiliar with commercial undertakings. This was another reason for deception by the Panos, most of whom were literate and well adapted to the changing economic circumstances. The Panos acted as middlemen in trade between the hill and the plains people on one hand, and moneylenders on the other, to whom the tribals always remained indebted (*Proceedings of the Judicial Department, Acc. No. 2275G: FL-1* 1878; Thurston 1909). In an interview with Sridhar Gomango, the tribal chief of Sogeda, when asked about his opinion regarding the Panos, he replied:

> Panos are bad men. But they have a finger in every pie. I had to pay Rs.600 to save my land from ceiling laws through Barik Jogi Goenta (the biggest Pano fortune-maker). We always live on the brink of death and we have to tolerate them . . . in everything that we do, they outwit us. If we resort to violence, the police will not leave us. I suppose we chase away the Panos. (Singh 1984)

This led to the marginalization and stigmatization of the tribal Savaras from all walks of life. It was in this agonizing context that the Savaras were attracted towards the Christian missionaries, and embraced Christianity to witness a better standard of life, elevate their social positions, and be liberated from all sorts of oppression.

3. Arrival of the Canadian Baptist Mission and Their Contributions in Ganjam

The early years of British rule, imposed restrictions on the Christian missionary work in India as the East India Company was reluctant to allow any sort of interference in the religious and cultural practices of the people. It was only after the Charter Act of 1813 that the ban on missionaries was lifted (Frykenberg 2003). After the successful establishment of Serampore Mission in 1800 by William Carey, missionary activities began under the Company's jurisdiction. In 1822, a group of missionaries of the General Baptist Missionary Society arrived in Calcutta and then moved to Cuttack on 11 February 1822. Rev. J. Peggs and W. Bampton were the first to come in this journey. They were soon joined by Amos Sutton and his wife on 13 February 1824. In 1836, Rev. Samuel S. Day and Rev. E.L. Abbott of the American Baptist Mission came to Chicacole in Southern Orissa and, after a couple of years, they handed over the Chicacole station to the Canadian Baptist Mission (hereafter CBM), which, from 1885, made ventures in the frontier zones of Orissa and undertook evangelistic activities among the *adivasis* of the region. However, the great famine (1866–1868) of Orissa opened new avenues for the Christian missionaries to reach and preach to people and undertake social activities for them (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission, July 1914–July 1915* 1916). Rev. J.R. Hutchinson, along with a plains evangelist, Sora Venkiah, made a tour in the Parlakimedi hills among the Savaras in December 1886. In 1898, the CBM proposed the idea of a 'mission' for the Savaras, to be directed and supported through the seven Telugu churches of the Northern Association. The proposal was approved and, before the new year of 1900, a Savara evangelist, brother Goomana, was appointed under the new mission. In May 1901, Mr. B. Subraidu began his work as the first Telugu missionary for the Savaras. In December 1902, Rev. and Mrs. J.A. Glendinning arrived in Vizianagram (in present Andhra Pradesh) as new missionaries of the CBM, and the family moved to Parlakimedi in July 1904 to begin their work among the Savaras (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1905* 1906). Thus, the CBM activities commenced in Orissa in 1902 and they actively worked in the Northern Circars of the Madras Presidency. In 1910, the first Oriya *Mandali* (organisation) comprising local people was established in Burudingi. Subsequent *mandalis* were established in Ashrayagada (1910), Badapada (1913), Serango (1918), Rayagada (1922), Narayanpur (1923), Jhalarasrunga (1930), Chelligoda (1931), R. Udayagiri (1932), Nuagada (1933), Gumma (1938), and Brahmarapur (1968) for preaching

Christianity (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Telugu Mission 1890–1949* 1950; *Centennial 'Great Things' 1968–1970* (CBOMB) 1971).

W.V. Higgins in 1876 started with street-preaching and visited houses in Parlakimedi to get in touch with the tribal Savaras. Unfortunately, due to severe malaria, the undertaking had to be abandoned in 1893 (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1893* 1894). Rev. Glendinning stayed with his missionary friends in Parlakimedi and learned the Savara language from Goomana, who assisted him in the missionary work (Nanda 2002). Glendinning, Freeman, and some Bible women also preached in the open air, which attracted a larger audience who out of curiosity stopped by and listened to the missionaries.[6] Preaching the Gospel in the vernacular language created an effective impact on people and Messrs. Lacey and Stubbins had been successful in this endeavor (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1908* 1909). Rev. Glendinning undertook the tedious work of converting the Savara language into writing for easy reading, prepared the Savara–English and vice-versa dictionaries, translated Jonah and Mark into the Savara language, and published a couple of hymns in the vernacular also (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1907* 1908). Mathew Lima, a Christian convert, reported that, apart from the pictures of Jesus, the missionaries narrated different stories related to the Gospel through a device called 'magic lantern' (modern day projector). Instruments like the gramophone were used to play traditional songs, which attracted a number of people (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1910* 1911; Daniel 1966). Finally, in March 1965, the New Testament for the Savaras was prepared, printed, bound, and delivered by the Bible Society of India (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1966* 1967).

The CBM also established a number of boarding schools in different places in Ganjam like Parlakimedi, Chicacole, Rayagada, and Jeypore with the purpose being to give a new life to the poor and to destitute children. In 1899, the first school was established in the hills for the Savaras at Lankapardu by Papiah, a converted evangelist. Owing to its good academic performance, the school was later recognized by the government for the grants-in-aid (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Telugu Mission 1902–1903* 1904). Another important undertaking was the growth of female education. The annual CBM report of 1911 showed that within four months, the attendance of the Caste Girls' School at Rayagada increased from eleven to thirty-seven (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1911* 1912).

Creating medical facilities was a pathbreaking undertaking in the hills.[7] Rev. Glendinning was the pioneer in serving the Savaras. Though untrained in medicine, he sought advice from the CBM medical workers, and gave pills and a few bandages during an emergency. The patients responded to the medical treatments and this created a scope for improved longevity of life. In July 1920, a full-fledged doctor named J. Hinson West and his wife arrived in India and began daily medical treatment. The first hospital building of three rooms was opened in 1929 at Serango, and three additional wards were completed in 1933. In 1937, Miss Munro took charge of some Savara infants whose mothers had died, and started the Savara Baby Fold (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Overseas Mission Board, India, Bethel Hospital, Vuyyuru, 1939–1940* 1941; McLaurin 195?). Dr. West observed that unlike the Savaras, the Oriyas and Telugus visited the Parlakimedi clinic. Therefore, to reach the hill people, he opened a hospital and a bungalow in the Savara hills of Serango, and in July 1939 an out-clinic in Gumma (five miles from Serango) was started for the Savaras. Regarding treatment, the tribal Savaras used to apply leaves, take recourse to some esoteric practices followed by the elders of the family, and sacrifice animals to propitiate their village deities. Undergoing treatment in the hospital was a matter of fear and scepticism for them. To mention one instance, a Savara suffering from a bad ulcer on his foot, when it was suggested that he see Dr. West, replied, "If I give up the worship of spirits, how can I get better?" After four days of treatment, he healed up and this created confidence among the Savaras about the effectiveness of proper medication and medical missionaries (Christian Medical Service in Serango, Carder 1940). In 1940, a clinic was opened for the treatment of yaws, a peculiar tropical disease found mainly among the tribes (McLaurin 195?). In April 1946, Dr. John Coapullai, an eye specialist, arrived in Serango, and during the next

year the number of surgical operations and eye cases increased to three hundred and fifty in-patients, one hundred seventy-seven surgical operations, and nearly nine thousand total patients. Dr. Gill, in cooperation with the "Operation Eyesight" of Sompeta Hospital, pioneered a massive eye treatment program for Serango. In 1946, Dr. and Mrs. A.R. MacDonald arrived there, and they were in full charge of the hospital from 1950 (Medical Service in Serango, Carder 1951). By 1960, Mrs. MacDonald had put together an effective hospital nursing team. Three capable women also served with her. One Savara girl had completed her training in nursing and was appointed as the first registered nurse of the hospital. Moreover, there was installation of an electric plant and X-ray machine along with electric lights for the hospital and the Serango Mission Homes (Carder 1961). Therefore, hospital facilities and modern treatment infused a sense of hygiene, cleanliness, and the belief that proper medication was the sole way to get cured and lead a healthy life. As a result, most of the Savaras abandoned performing animal sacrifices and keeping spirit-pots in their homes.

Apart from these, the establishment of churches was perhaps the most vital task for the CBM. Interestingly, the first church was organized among the outcaste Panos on 10 January 1910 at Burudingi near Gumma. On February 1922, another church was organized in Ganjam-Rayagada, where one Savara man was baptized. The years 1924 and 1925 witnessed an unusual growth of churches (*Report of the Utkal Baptist Association 1930 (CBOMB-India)* 1931). Regarding worship, the Savaras carried on their Christian worship services in their own way and language at the mission house of Miss Munro and in their village homes. Later, they built a Savara prayer chapel in Serango. However, the baptized ones on the roll of the Serango church were all Oriyas. Therefore, the Savaras needed an independent church for themselves. With the strong cooperation of Mr. P. Allaby, the first Savara church was established in Serango on 16 February 1947 and came to be known as the Savara Baptist Churches Association.[8]

In the beginning, the Christian missionaries confined their work to purely evangelical and social upliftment activities. Later, they realized that undertaking defensive measures to secure tribal interests would make them trustworthy among the *adivasis*. Therefore, the missionaries were ready to offer assistance in temporal affairs also. They helped the helpless Savaras to redress their grievances, which made the latter come in large numbers for consultation and share their tales of misery. This helped them to fight social oppression and discrimination. During the British rule, the task of elevating the lives of these disenfranchised people in south Orissa was taken up only by the Christian missions. Missionary efforts in introducing mission protocols created a new skilled class which widened their economic, social, and political parameters. Education, healthcare, vocational training, and other welfare measures transformed their lifestyle, bringing new avenues of employment which enabled them to overcome the oppressive behavior of the influential communities. The missionaries assisted the marginalized ones to engage themselves in setting up self-supportive work, established Cooperative Credit Societies for providing loans, and rescued the non-literate Savaras from the clutches and exploitation of the fradulent *Sahukars* (moneylenders) (Nayak 2016).

4. Christian Conversion Movement among the Savaras and Its Consequences in Ganjam

H.V. Higgins visited many villages in and around Parlakimedi, and preached to people irrespective of caste, color, and religion. In 1894, two Bible women named Kanakamma and Lizzie were sent by the CBM to Parlakimedi and worked among women and children (Nanda 2002). By 1898, there were thirty Savara Christians on the plains. Instances of recovery after medical assistance made people believe in Jesus as a healer. In 1922, sixty-two Savaras converted to Christianity.[9] However, evangelism began among the Savaras with the baptism of Rudugu, the first Savara convert in the uplands, in 1928. Rudugu's family then gave up performing sacrifices, spirit worship, and intaking liquor. After this, others also moved forward to embrace Christianity (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1930–1931*

1932). Moreover, the ceaseless work of Rev. Glendinning, his associate women missionaries, and two local preachers named Papaya and Goomana, spread the word of Jesus among the Savaras. In March 1940, eighty-six Savaras were baptized in and around Serango. In 1943, a medical woman,[10] from a village named Tumlo, converted after recovering from a serious disease, and in the same year five Savara families came within the Christian fold (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1943* 1944). Therefore, with the growing acceptance of Christianity among the Savaras, the new mission field was named the 'Savara and Oriya Mission' and later renamed as the 'Savara Mission' (Daniel, Moving with the Times: The Story of Baptist Outreach from Canada into Asia, South America and Africa, During One Hundred Years, 1874–1974, Since the Canadian Baptist Mission was founded in India, Daniel 1973). On 16 February 1947, when the new church building in Serango was set up, a number of Savaras walked many miles, far away from their hamlets, to attend the inauguration of the new congregation. The three deacons Rudugu, Malinga, and Kulped worked their best to evangelize the community at large (Serango-The Saoras: General Work, Carder 1950). In 1956, there were over twenty-four congregations; over two hundred Savaras could read the Scriptures, and the New Testament had been translated into a few copies. In August 1963, a group of Savaras joined hands with Punya and Mongolo, the two leaders of the Savara church, and conducted the baptismal services for them. By March 1965, the Savaras had the New Testament in their own language, and in 1966, a new area church was formed and two new Savara pastors were ordained. There were seven churches comprising about a hundred congregations, with each area having its own pastor (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Missionary (CBOMB 86–70 India) 1965* 1966; *Report of the Saora-Oriya Work Committee: Evangelistic Cooperation in Western Ganjam, Orissa 1969–1970* 1970).

The Christian conversion movement among the Savaras cannot be indexed only in terms of the number of converts, but also by the impact it created in their lifestyle. The converted Savaras abandoned some of their old religious practices and beliefs. Traditionally they had rigid rules of inter-dining, which were forsaken after conversion. The Savaras accepted food from people of other tribes and castes. The Savara women were respected more than before and they were considered as an integral part of the family. Instances of divorces and polygamy were put in check as the Savaras understood the importance of family ties. Pre-Christian habits like drinking, superstitious beliefs, and shamanism were given up, as they were considered non-biblical. Their food habits changed as well. The Savaras adapted the practice of drinking tea instead of liquor, and using salt in food. Moreover, they followed the Christian traditions of birth, marriage, and funeral rites. Due to the spread of literacy, the Savaras were instructed by the missionaries to read before signing any document, not to sign on any blank paper while taking loans, and they were taught the use of money which made them confident as individuals. The converts celebrated Christmas, Easter, New Year, and some even 'Christianized' their traditional festivals. They celebrated the first fruits day (harvest festival) and brought the first yields to the church so that the pastor could offer a word of prayer for them. In Sunday worship service, the Savara Christian men wore white *dhotis* and *kurtas*, while the women draped themselves in good clothes and adorned themselves with light ornaments. Christianity also taught them monotheism and clarified the concept of eternal life and heaven, which enabled the tribes to be released from the fear of malevolent spirits and relieved from the financial burden of offering sacrifices (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1930–1931* 1932; Allaby 1932; Research Notes: Dr. West's Report (Serango Hospital) 1942, Allaby 1943a).[11]

Following the positive aspects of the Christian conversion movement among the Savaras in Ganjam, there was a flipside consequence from it. Because of rapid conversion among the Savaras, it was inevitable that the repercussions from the upper caste Oriyas and other non-converts would be quite unfavorable for both the Christian missionaries and the Savara converts. This was evident after establishment of the first church when there arose some tensions within the old village structure. Glendinning observed that the sudden elevation of the hitherto disenfranchised people to a better social position fomented the upper class to vent their displeasure. The caste people befriended the missionaries but

abused the new Christian converts. The Christians sought help from the white '*padre*' (a Christian priest), and his intervention brought redress to the sufferers. This filled with much confidence and courage to face their oppressors.[12] In 1926, tensions broke out again between the Savaras and the villagers of Burudingi. The church this time was weakened by an internal land suit filed by one party against another. The non-converts charged the Christians for neglecting their land rent. Some even encroached the village at night for vandalism and stealing (*Proceedings (Home Department*) Judicial 1926 1927). In December 1928, a mob of drunken Savaras raided the village and drove out many inhabitants who fled to Gumma and crossed the river to a place name Ashrayagada (*Proceedings (Home-Judicial) of 1928* 1929). The upper caste Oriyas and outcaste Panos also instigated the non-convert Savaras against the Christian converts and took advantage of the fiasco (Research Notes: Turnbull's Report 1942, Allaby 1943b).

Rapid Christianization 'from below' perturbed the upper caste Hindu Oriyas, fearing that Christianity might spread its roots among these tribal people and gradually gain a 'popular'[13] support, which was sure to pose a threat primarily to their supremacy and to the Hindu state as well.[14] Therefore, various allegations were hurled against the missionaries, who were blamed for converting these innocent people through force and coaxing.[15] As a result, anti-conversion laws were promulgated in Orissa which came to be known as the 'Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967′ on the pretext of forced conversion and calling proselytization illegal (Venkatesan 2008). Moreover, converison gave rise to jealousy among the non-converts and this led to intra-tribal conflict. In reality, religious conversion did not intend to destabilize the Hindu or other communities, as the content and program of the church-based education did not foster any communal hatred or discrimination. It was the disenfranchised group that sought Christianity as an alternative, to resist the oppression of the upper caste Hindus. It was alleged that the missionaries had caused destruction of the tribal culture due to their encroachment and illegal acquisitions of tribal lands. Although the delegitimization of the *adivasi* (tribal) rights was undeniable, the missionaries could not be blamed solely for this condition. The atrocious and coercive behavior of the upper caste Hindus also should not be overlooked in this regard (A. P. Chatterji 2009). Severe persecution against the Christians in rejection of Jesus Christ and His Gospel involved the indignant attitude of the offended majority who were determined to "preserve" their traditions and belief system. The Hindutva movement proclaimed that the tribals were Hindus and, therefore, legitimized the process of 'Hinduisation' or '*Suddhi*'. The practical purpose of this was to provide what Ian Douglas Richards argued was the "demographic advantage" over non-Hindus and treating conversion as "repugnant" (Suna 2017). It was these continuing oppressive attitudes and the extremely tense social outlook that made some Indian Christians reluctant to join Christianity and witness their faith in public (Daughrity and Athyal 2016).

5. Christianity as a Countenance of Liberative Theology

Bishop John Henry Okumu once stated, "The missionaries who brought Christianity, rid Africa of all its traditional values and religious concepts in order to have a clean plate on which to put the new faith". It was the consequence of a threefold objective of the missionaries, namely to Christianize, to commercialize, and to civilize. It was further believed by some like Daniel Defoe that in order to enable the 'primitive races' of Africa to live like Christians, it was important that they were civilized according to the western parameters of culture and language, leaving aside whether they were spiritually converted at all (Katoke 1984). The Christian missionaries commonly subscribed to Rudyard Kipling's view of the 'white man's burden'[16] which assumed that 'Western civilization' and Christianity were two aspects of the same gift which they were commissioned to offer to the rest of the world (Taylor 1965). This was not an event unique to Africa. It might apply to any part of the world that had been under the influence of the Western missionary enterprise of the colonial period. Conversion from one religion to another has always been a complex issue, especially in a pluralistic situation where change in religion affected one's

religious affiliation, social status, and culture. As S. Michael remarked, "Conversion may bring the individual into conflict with his family, neighbour, society, and culture" (Thavare 2000). The new converts also suffered from 'post-conversion depression' (Rambo 1993).

Having said this, we cannot deny that the Christian missionaries all over the world tried to follow the command of Jesus Christ who said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Moreover, the saying, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19) is a clear message of pronouncing Christianity and the words of God among the people, which the missionaries tried to execute through their evangelical activities. However, what was unacceptable was the exceeding emphasis on the part of the missionaries towards the converts to 'imitate' the extraneous cultural and ritualistic patterns of Christianity. There is a fine line between religious propagation and reproducing western cultural superstructure, which at times made the Christian missionaries the victims of destroyers of the tribal societies who had the intention of spreading 'rapacious capitalism' in the name of development (Exley and Exley 1973). They were even labelled as 'soldiers of imperialism' and 'soldiers of Christ' who intervened and disrupted the traditional culture of the region (Osuri 2012).

In any religious conversion, the spirit of liberation reverberates after the ongoing confliction of whether to surrender to the new reality. W.H. Clark defined conversion as:

> That type of spiritual growth or development which involves an appreciable change of direction concerning religious ideas and behaviour. Most clearly and typically, it denotes an emotional episode of illuminating suddenness, which may be deep or superficial, though it may also come about by the more gradual process. (Clark 1958)

So, this process undergoes three stages of experience: firstly, a period of conflict and push–pull forces of religious exit and entry that encompasses 'a conviction of sin'; secondly, the pinnacle involving surrender; finally, peace of mind when the convert feels in tune with God, redeemed of all sins and pains (Clark 1958). However, the theological understanding of the term 'liberation' is quite difficult to define in the Indian context, as the Protestant churches have undergone numerous divisions, and it is difficult to pin down any one one theological direction of liberation because each denomination has their own theological positions. However, what was common in Protestantism in India was the dissemination of work among the marginalized and the dispossessed peoples. A significant area of work was translating the Bible portions into vernacular languages in the regions of operation to make the oppressed liberated from their *status quo*. These translation undertakings led to revival of the vernaculars which had a profound impact in bringing about a 'cultural and social renaissance' among the indigenous peoples, who were awakened to realizing their identity and self-dignity. Moreover, launching a counter-theology was to serve the yearnings of the oppressed people and their conceiving of Christianity in their own way, wedded with some traditional ideologies. This became the basis for total liberation as a theological *praxis* (Massey 2014). Christianity for the marginalized was not about evangelism and spreading the Gospel, but a commitment to discern the liberative wisdom of God through "imaginative dialogue with diverse cultural expressions of Christian and other religious traditions" (Daughrity and Athyal 2016).

Despite the absence of methodological consensus and practices of divergent theologies, it is only in the liberation theologies from the black, feminist, and the Third World that these perspectives stand out as the most discernible development in the Christian thought. Because implicit in these theologies is a distinctiveness concerning its nature and scope, they include a social critique regarding the destinies of the "oppressed". The inter-relationship between the "oppressed" and the "oppressor" is explicated in the theologies of Freire, Cone, Gutierrez, and Ruether. All of them addressed the dialectical themes of particularity and universality in the Christian tradition. In liberation theologies, socio-economic and political contexts are analyzed as the hermeneutics under which the human condition is understood and the Christian faith interpreted. In this regard, the essential interpretative category is

that of "oppression". For the black theologians it is racism, for the feminists it is sexism, and for the Latin Americans, classism, that provide the context within which liberation takes place in the lives of the 'oppressed' (Bucher 1976).

The Brazilian humanist Paulo Freire, discussing the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor, stated:

> As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanised. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors' power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression. It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors. The latter, as an oppressive class, can free neither others nor themselves. (Freire 1973)

Gustavo Gutierrez insisted that liberation has to be undertaken by the oppressed themselves, which is the only context to bring about a true cultural revolution consistent with the Gospel. As he juxtaposed the oppressed's human condition with the need for liberation, and the oppressor with the class struggle, he says, "One loves the oppressors by liberating them from their inhuman condition as oppressors, liberating them from themselves. But this cannot be achieved except by resolute opting for the oppressed, that is, by combatting the oppressive class" (Gutierrez 1973). Because the oppressed have internally accepted the dominant social images, they must experience a liberation of self, mobilizing themsleves from self-hatred to self-esteem, via salvation as self-affirmation, which bolsters the renewal of humanity (Ruether 1972). Therefore, in this regard, the Theology of Liberation is self-consciously and deliberately contextual and follows the trails left by the historical discourses of life situation and realities. Liberation is pertinent in both the general and specific factors that result in dehumanization and marginalization of people within a given context. It is a *praxis* that commits to engage and identify God's redemptive power, and leverage the struggles of the oppressed, which is why this is often referred to as "Bias to the Poor" or "preferential option for the poor". One of the ways in which the political interest of the theology is displayed is in the process of education. This forms an integral part of the liberative ethos. Self-realization, coming to terms with their own potential, and the possibility of change through their own action, become part of the liberative process. Great emphasis is placed on similarities between the experience of the people of God in the Biblical stories and that of the poor and oppressed in their daily lives, which helps them find relevance in Christianity. This approach emphasizes the spirituality within the theology of liberation (Taylor and Taylor 1991). Jesus "believed that God would come to free man from every kind of bondage and usher in a new age of justice, freedom, love and universal brotherhood" (Kappen 1971). As Chethimattam stated, liberation in India referred primarily to the liberation of the whole man, and this tendency in the Indian tradition referred to moving away from all the rigid structures and systems of hierarchy (Chethimattam 1972). It seeks for those components that are meaningful for life. Perhaps the most appropriate expression of "Indianness" in the liberative theology is to make the notion of self-realization central and foundational, and the urge to overturn the traditional setup of oppressive relationships based on social grading (Abeyasingha 1979).

Liberative theology is not always about spiritual salvation, but is a sense of independence in practicing a religion.[17] This is why indigenization of Christian practices is pertinent to revitalize the religious and community life (Rao 2008). It brews a feeling of solidarity and contentment of being the children of God, a truth which for years had been denied to them. The age old marginalization and stigmatization of being tribal, the seething pain of being 'other', made them rejoice at becoming Christians. The vast majority of *adivasis*, who are non-Aryan by race and non-Brahmanical by religion, were never Hindus and survived with what Sathianathan Clark referred to as a "pseudo-Hindu identity" (Suna 2017; Raj 2004). This is not to overlook the fact that discrimination still prevailed between 'born' Christians and the converted ones, but the theological edifice of an all-embracing nature of Christianity made the hitherto undesired ones part of the mainstream civilization. It is convincing to believe that Jesus Christ had a 'liberating-mission-agenda' for his people who

have been identified in the Bible as the 'marginalized community', and this is revealed in Jesus' Nazareth Manifesto. The church therefore became the 'Mission-Partner-with-Christ' as and when it addressed the sufferings of the tribal community. By doing so, the Church joined hands with Christ in redeeming the pain of suffering humanity. It was for this role of the Church as a 'liberator' that Christ 'incarnated' himself in the form of Church (Hemrom 2011; Cheria 2014).

In our study, we found that the temporal aim of the Canadian Baptists was to redress the economic and social sufferings of the Savaras, but their ultimate aim was to spread the Gospel and bring them within the Christian fold. Through the ministry of healing, education, and other evangelical works, the lives of the tribal group witnessed a change.[18] In the process, the Savaras acquired knowledge of the three R's, i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic, they gained the strength to establish an exclusive institution named the Savara Baptist Churches Association, and they became aware of their rights to relinquish all sort of bondage and servitude. Their access to education and medical facilities paved the way for them to lead a healthy life. It was the functionality of the hierarchical society and the conflicts pertaining to it that made the Savaras attracted towards Christianity. The Canadian Baptists broached the liberative *praxis* according to the regional context through their evangelical and upliftment contributions towards the marginalized Savaras. If we take the definition of liberation theology as the critical reflection of the great efforts and struggle undertaken by the poor and oppressed who share solidarity with them (Taylor and Taylor 1991), it can be argued that the missionaries could not bring total liberation in the region, as there developed a social breach among the Christian converts and the non-converts. However, as previously stated, liberation is a psychological experience, and leaving aside the strained relationship that followed after conversion, the hitherto caged souls were released from captivity through education and salvation with the help of the Canadian Baptists. For the tribal Savaras, their existence was intertwined with religious affiliation and practices. Judging by the Indian fervor for liberation, the fact that the Savaras had access to a materialistic and institutionalized form of religion in the form of practicing Christianity, performing church services, and its rituals, allowed them to experience a feeling of breaking the shackles of the prohibition to follow another world religion. Moreover, education and welfare activities undertaken among the disparaged community, and voicing their grievances and sufferings, which are perhaps the fulcrum of the liberation *praxis*, were carried out throughout by the missionaries in Ganjam. Through these symbolic and concrete interactions and constant supervision, the urge to exist as a community with a respectable identity was inspired, along with an assurance of salvation and liberation of the soul. The fact that the Savaras could claim themselves to be followers of Christianity was psychologically a liberative one, which is perhaps the most desirable outcome of the conversion movement in Ganjam. In this regard, the Canadian Baptists were absolutely instrumental in bringing about confidence and liberation among the Savaras to eke out a distinctive social standing for themselves, devoid of any pseudo self of Hindu identity.

6. Conclusions

Use of a theoretical metanarrative marks a passage from specific to configurational history, where the convergence of independent historical developments is theorized in a way which transcends meaningful connections among events. Here, socio-historical models are constructed in relation to epochal shifts, transitions, or transformation. In our study, we traced the gradual changes in the tribal society over time, especially after the arrival of colonial rule and the Canadian Baptist Mission, the effects of which are still a debatable issue. Until there were transportation facilities and roads, the traditional cultural and religious beliefs could remain unadulterated. It was only after the introduction of railways by the British in 1853, and the development of road transport, that the most inaccessible zones came under the purview of colonial rule and the 'outsiders'. Later, due to various forest laws and the implementation of tribal development schemes, some plains people migrated to the

agency tracts for business, employment, and other purposes. This led to enculturation that invited some socio-cultural change among the Savaras. Initially, the economic culture of the tribes underwent a crisis, which took a turn towards socio-religious cultural change after the Canadian Baptists involved themselves with the inhabitants of Ganjam. Here, the term social refers to the network of social relations, roles, and interactions of people in a society, while culture applies to the artifacts, institutions, values, ideas, technology, and other symbolic systems that direct human behavior in a patterned society. The lives of the Savaras after Christian conversion, in a similar manner, could be seen from this changing cultural perspective. Embracing a new identity and comprehending themselves as liberated souls, the Savaras could mobilize themselves towards the 'mainstream civilization' and challenge the paralyzing nature of the hierarchical society. Moreover, the biggest liberative identity for them was the realization of being a part of the Indian subcontinent, a consciousness that developed after tedious efforts by the Canadian Baptist missionaries. By considering the Christian converts as nationals, India followed the *praxis* of syncretism as well as 'living together separately' (Konduru 2016; Robinson 2001).

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Notes

1 The tribal and Dalit (untouchable) Christians felt that the Indian Christian theology served the interests of the elite sections of the population. This initiated counter theology in the name of Indian Dalit theology that affirmed and confirmed the aspirations and needs of the marginalized people (Daughrity and Athyal 2016; Massey 2014).

2 The prevailing caste system in India is the system of four *varnas,* each comprising several endogamous castes and sub-castes (*jatis*) in the Hindu society. Each of these have their specified hereditary occupation. The four *varnas* are Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (soldiers), Vaishyas (traders), and Sudras (servants). People outside these *varnas* are called *avarnas*, *Ati*-Sudras, are arranged in their own hierarchies as the untouchables, the unseeable, and the unapproachable (Roy 2016).

3 The traditional beliefs about natural calamities like heavy rains, thunder and lighting, and earthquakes were that they were caused by demons. Therefore, during storms the locales would seek mercy from the Great God; when epidemics broke out, the Savaras believed that the evil spirits were pouring poisons from the top of trees or mountains, while the wind played carrier of those, thus ailing children (Paik 1910).

4 The Savara pantheon consisted of *Lobosonum* (female deity for good harvest), *Karnasonum* (male deity for good harvest of mango), *Jenaangloo* (village god or *Kittung*; a new harvest crop is first offered to the god before personal consumption), *Ratusonum* (male deity responsible for road safety), *Edaisonum* (ancestor god responsible for fever and *Khudan* sacrifices of a hen, goat, or beef before the house for propitiation), *Lodasonum* (forest deity), *Rogasonum* (both male and female in character worshipped to avoid breaking small pox), *Karnisonnum* (malevolent devil both male and female in character, and the *Khudan* offered pigs as sacrifice), *Gangasonum* (malevolent deity, female in character, worshipped to prevent drought and endemic diseases), *Surendasonum* (male in character, worshipped to keep away pests from the crops), *Illasonum* (devil responsible for consecutive miscarriages of a woman), *Gagir-a-Bulu* (devil responsible for creating ailments at the time of delivery; the shamanin offered hen, goats, or clothes for propitiation), and *Sadru* or *Maandua* (benevolent male god). In some areas, illness and diseases were linked to the symbols of colonialism. The Savaras created a new god *Sahibosum,* the *Sahib* (white man) god. Most probably, *Sahibosum* was a torturing official, a forest guard, or policeman, who was looked upon as a cholera carrier. The Savara carved wooden images in his honor and placed them at the outskirts of their villages to keep him out or at least divert his attention. Sacrifices were even performed for *Sahibosum* as it was essential to keep him happy (Tribal Myths of Orissa, Elwin 1954; Pati 2001).

5 'Purity and pollution,' a concept presented by Louis Dumont, weaved his theory around the four-fold Indian caste system. He tried to establish the fact that a person's ritual purity depended on the caste he was born to. Thus, for him, it was the caste rank that decided the degree of purity and pollution. Therefore, the untouchables belonging outside the caste hierarchy are the most polluting group in the society (Dumont 1980).

6 On every Saturday and Sunday, the Savaras used to visit the weekly markets in Parlakimedi where the missionaries used to preach the Gospel to them. Freeman expressed that they used to sell books and distribute pamphlets during the Hindu festival of *Rathyatra* (the 'Car Festival' of Lord Jagannatha). The missionaries used to stand amidst people, sing in Oriya and Savara, and share the word of God, which attracted the local people towards them. Dr. West, who arrived in 1919, carried out special evangelistic campaigns in the church, streets, homes of the sick, and in weekly markets (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1910* 1911; *Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1923–1924*).

[7] The Protestant missionaries believed that medical mission was the most important agency to reach the rural inhabitants. It functioned like a 'kindergarten system for preaching the message of the Gospel' (Basu 2013).

[8] The Ganjam Mala Odiya Baptist Church Association was founded with the support of four main churches and some of the sub-churches in Serango. In the beginning, the Savaras worshipped with the Panos without any hesitation or conflict. However, during the 1940s, with the spread of Christianity among the Savaras, they felt a need for a separate church. Out of the seventy-six respondents among both the Savaras and the Panos, all of them preferred a separate church because of linguistic and socio-cultural dissimilarities (*Report of the Saora Church 1947, Field News-India; Set-1, Box 1* 1948).

[9] A person near Rayagada took baptism in 1922 after recovering from a chronic fever (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1921–1922* 1923).

[10] Medical women were pious females extensively associated with, and having more actively participated in, promoting evangelical activities (Brouwer 1990).

[11] While Turnbull was discoursing about eternal life and heaven to a group of Savaras in the open air, he reported:Suddenly someone shouted 'airplane' or 'flying house' as they called it. All the audience was at once in the middle of the street gazing upward, "see, see there it is- up very high," and they watched it until it disappeared. Then as they settled down on the veranda again to hear the finish of the wonderful story, I was telling them, one man in all seriousness asked, "do your country people go to the eternal life heaven in airplanes?" (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1942* 1943).

[12] One day, the Gumma *zamindar* (landlord), out of resentment, beat some Christians severely. These frightened the latter and they decided to complain to the missionary. Glendinning met them on his way, bound their wounds, and recorded their complaints. Then he called on the landlord. The Raja admitted his fault and sought for forgiveness, lest the missionary would have lodged a complaint with the police (*Proceedings Nos. 81–82, July 1925* 1926).

[13] I borrow the concept of 'popular' from Sumit Sarkar who used 'popular' for the tribal people (along with the peasant and agrarian class) (Sarkar 1983).

[14] Hindu cultural supremacy is the ascendance of dominant Brahminic forms of culture and, after India's independence in 1947, Hindutva has made the unification of Hindus as a central agenda of its political aspirations. V.D. Savarkar reaffirmed this belief by stating that the Hindus "constitute the foundation, the bedrock, the reserved forces of the Indian state". This synonymized India as Hindu *Rashtra* or State, and vice versa. So, to Hindutva, every conversion to Christianity indicated a loss in the battle for creating a Hindu majoritarian state (Chatterji 2009; Froerer 2012 (second impression); Chatterji et al. 2019).

[15] The Christian missionaries were alleged to proselytize people with money power, allure the ignorant sections of the Hindu population, and displace Indian traditions by replicating western cultural patterns through the conduits of conversion. The attacks were generally hurled by the dominant sections of the society, and not the dominated ones. It was also pointed out that the missionaries took advantage of natural calamities like drought and famine when they posed themselves as saviors, which led people to convert (Lobo 1991).

[16] This famous poem was written by Rudyard Kipling as a response to the American takeover of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War and projected the responsibility of white men in civilizing people of the culturally 'backward' country (Kipling n.d.).

[17] A religious option can offer a wide range of emotional gratifications starting from developing a sense of solidarity, and relief from guilt, to building new relationships (Rambo 1993).

[18] As a method of approach, the National Christian Council proposed that the only feasible practice was to select certain areas as demonstration centers and carry out evangelical works there. The main objectives were—firstly, development of Christian character, fellowship and service; secondly, enabling healthy living in a healthy environment; thirdly, improvement of family life through sanitation and child-care facilities; fourthly, enhance economic condition of people in villages; fifthly, maintain a cordial social attitude towards the neighbors and create an environment of social cooperation; sixthly, the constant re-creation of personality involving physical, mental, and spiritual attributes. Kenyon L. Butterfield proposed ten types of services in rural India—firstly, proclaiming Christianity through preaching and friendship; secondly, promoting religious education both to the Christians and non-Christians; thirdly, establishing village schools; fourthly, ministry of healing; fifthly, providing economic and social relief; sixthly, play and recreation; seventhly, helping the home-makers; eighthly, providing mass education; ninthly, establishing rural organisations; tenthly, training indigenous leaders (Manshardt 1933).

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Article

Holistic Wisdom from Abrahamic Faiths' Earliest Encounters with Ancient China: Towards a Constructive Chinese Natural Theology

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Abstract: Philosophies in the East and West have favored wisdom in their search for truths. The Chinese civilization has sought holistic wisdom in its long history of absorbing the Abrahamic faiths since the seventh century. This paper aims to investigate how the Abrahamic faiths have interacted with ancient Chinese culture. In particular, this paper will examine the earliest written records in Chinese of the Luminous Religion (or *Jingjiao*), the earliest Jews in Kaifeng, and the earliest Muslims in China. By analyzing their theology of creation with reference to the Holy Spirit and *qi* (wind/breath/*pneuma*), this paper attempts a constructive Chinese natural theology based on a sympathetic and critical assessment of Alister McGrath's natural theology but makes up for his spirit deficit. This paper argues that the holistic wisdom achieved in the early integration process of the Abrahamic faiths with the Chinese culture is closely intertwined with the Spirit and *qi*, which provides a fruitful ground to construct a Chinese natural theology. The contribution of this paper lies in its original research into the earliest written records of the three Abrahamic faiths in China from the perspective of the doctrine of creation and its relationship with the Spirit and *qi*.

Keywords: holistic wisdom; Abrahamic faiths; Jingjiao; Chinese Jews; Chinese Muslims; creation; spirit; *qi*; natural theology

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1. Introduction

If philosophy means "love of wisdom" in the West, then ancient Chinese philosophers love to "hear the truth" (*wendao* 闻道).[1] Here, Dao refers to truth, the highest wisdom (Zhang 1989, p. 1). Chinese civilization has a high regard for wisdom. Wu Kuang-Ming, a leading philosopher in comparative philosophy and phenomenology, by vigorously engaging in East–West intercultural conversations (Goulding 2013, p. 355), argues that it is necessary to probe "Chinese wisdom alive" today, which "is millennium young, alive today, as a historic alternative to Western culture, ready to engage in inter-enrichment" (Wu 2010, p. xiii). Western culture features alphabetical thinking, digital and abstract, whereas Chinese culture features audio-pictographic thinking. The West has logic–rationality, while China has music–reason, shown by their respective ways of writing out their modes of thinking (Wu 2010, p. xiii). Against Francis Bacon's famous motto, "Knowledge is power", Cao Xing argues that wisdom is the real source of power instead of knowledge. Different peoples have their own unique wisdom and therefore can contribute to the wisdom of humanity from different perspectives (Cao 2005, p. 2). For Cao, "Compared to the wisdom of the West, the wisdom of the Chinese people possesses an inherent peculiarity. The western philosophers are good at analysis, while the Chinese philosophers do well in intuition. Pure analysis is restricted by attention to detail, while intuition concentrates on holism" (Cao 2005, p. 2). Hence, Cao proposes that Chinese philosophy is characterized by its intuitive holism. In making statements as such, Wu and Cao may run the risk of oversimplification; however, their insights are worth noting toward a holistic wisdom that incorporates the wisdom from both the East and the West.

Commenting on the relationship between science and theology, Jürgen Moltmann proposes "a new attempt to see science and theology in the context of the life common to them both [which] is made on the level of *wisdom*" (Moltmann 2003, p. 26, emphasis in original). For Moltmann, "Faith and reason can find each other in the house of wisdom they share, and each of them can contribute its own insights to the building of this house in a culture based on wisdom about life" (Moltmann 2003, pp. 27–28). This paper seeks to explore the "house of wisdom" constructed in the process of the integration of Chinese civilization with the Abrahamic faiths in their earliest encounters in ancient China. I argue that the holistic wisdom achieved in the early integration process of the Abrahamic faiths in China is centered on the Spirit/spirit and *qi* 气 (wind/breath/*pneuma*), which provides a fruitful ground to construct a contemporary Chinese natural theology.

In this paper, I shall first examine the earliest documents found in Chinese that record the life and theology of Islamic, Jewish, and Christian believers. Then, this paper will analyze how these sister faiths interact with the Chinese philosophical concept of Spirit and *qi*. Finally, I will attempt a constructive Chinese natural theology, which is based on Alister McGrath's natural theology but makes up for his spirit deficit. The contribution of this paper lies in its original research into the earliest manuscripts of the three Abrahamic faiths in China from the perspective of the doctrine of creation and its relationship with the Spirit/spirit and *qi*. This paper also attempts to offer some fresh, preliminary proposals toward a Chinese constructive natural theology, hoping to open the door to more meaningful interfaith dialogue and science–theology conversation.

2. Earliest Encounters of Abrahamic Faiths in China and Their Textual Records in Chinese

Among the Abrahamic faiths, Christianity entered China the earliest through the East Syriac missionary Aluoben 阿罗本 (or Alopen) along the Silk Road, who arrived in Chang'an, the capital of China, in 635 during the Tang dynasty (618–907).[2] After its initial success in the next two hundred years, *Jingjiao* 景教suffered a death blow by the Tang Emperor Wuzong 武宗 in 845 in his campaign of anti-Buddhist persecution (Nie 2010, p. 2). The Xi'an Stele, sometimes translated as the "Nestorian" Stele, was unearthed in 1623 or 1625 in the Ming Dynasty. The Stele was erected in 781 and inscribed with texts composed by the Church of the East monk Adam (*Jingjing* 景净) in both Chinese and Syriac, the discovery of which "caused almost as great a stir in the world of learning at that time as did the discovery of the first Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947" (Nicolini-Zani 2022, p. ix). Other documents in the Tang era related to *Jingjiao* written in Chinese are the "Dunhuang" manuscripts discovered from 1908[3] to 1943 by the Japanese Kojima Yasushi[4] and the 815 Luoyang Pillar unearthed in 2006 (Nicolini-Zani 2022, pp. 136–46). In sum, we have in our hands seven (or eight) genuine *Jingjiao* documents in the Chinese language.[5] Also pertinent to this paper is the *Jingjiao* missionaries' scientific learning in astrology, technological skills, and medical science (Feng 2022, pp. 84–88).

Concerning the time and the route of the Jews' arrival at Kaifeng, there has been no scholarly consensus.[6] According to Jordan Paper, the Jewish community in Kaifeng,[7] referred to as the "Chinese Judaism",[8] arrived at Kaifeng around 1000 (give or take a few decades) (Paper 2012, pp. 71–72) and lasted approximately 850 years, while the synagogue lasted for 678 years, from 1163 to 1841 (Paper 2012, p. 3). No explicit writings on theology by the Jews in Kaifeng have come down to us. Compared to the well-documented histories of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, there is a paucity of documentation on Judaism. Extremely little exists in Chinese records on the Chinese Jews, and Jewish documentation is limited to the stelae that were on the grounds of the Kaifeng synagogue (Paper 2012, p. 69). Four important stelae have been studied that are labeled with the year of inscription: 1489, 1512, 1663, and 1679.[9] Besides these large stelae with a significant number of texts in the synagogue courtyard, other texts produced by the members of the Kaifeng synagogue community include numerous placards in the worship hall. Fortunately, the Jesuits in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were fascinated by the Jews in Kaifeng

and meticulously recorded these inscriptions, almost all of which were lost in the last major flood. Most of the inscriptions were written by the literati of the Kaifeng community, but a few seem to have been written by non-Jewish friends of theirs (Paper 2012, p. 95).

Regarding their content, Andrew Plaks, referring particularly to the 1663 Stela, observes that "even if some or all of these texts were actually composed on commission by non-Jewish literati, according to the established Chinese custom of the time, I still maintain that they reflect primarily Jewish input, whether in the form of preliminary drafts or of discussion with the writers, so that they can be taken as evidence of Jewish thinking on various subjects" (Plaks [1999] 2015, p. 37). This paper shall examine the two earliest Kaifeng stelae: the 1489 Stela[10] and the 1512 Stela,[11] both inscribed in the Ming Dynasty. The text of the 1489 Stela was written by Jin Zhong 金钟, a Chinese Jew who passed the first level of qualification examination into the Official School.[12] The text of the 1512 Stela was penned by Zuo Tang 左唐, a Chinese Jew who was a government official.[13]

The 1489 Stela's original name is *Chongjian Qingzhensi* 重建清真寺, literally "reconstructing the Qingzhen temple". It is well known that *Qingzhensi* is the name of the worshipping house of Chinese Muslims. Against the misunderstanding that the Kaifeng Jews borrowed the name from the Muslims, Wei Qianzhi 魏千志 argues that the Kaifeng Jews named their synagogue *Qingzhensi* and assigned new significance to the phrase *Qingzhen*. *Qingzhen* originally meant "pure and genuine", which was initially unrelated to any religion. The Chinese Jews were the earliest to use *Qingzhen* to describe their own religion. Comparatively speaking, Chinese Muslims began to adopt the name at a later time. Wei quickly adds that this does not mean that the Chinese Muslims borrowed the name of the Chinese Jews. Instead, such naming is the logical result of their own internal development in China, as an adaptation of the earlier names of *Qingjingsi* 清净寺 and *Zhenjiaosi* 真教寺. Therefore, Wei suggests that the Chinese Muslims have also significantly contributed to endowing religious meaning to the phrase *Qingzhen* (Wei 1995).

Several theories have been proposed concerning the exact time when Islam was introduced into China. Wang Lingui 王灵桂 reviews a few scholarly proposals and suggests that no final consensus can be reached due to the paucity of historical records in Chinese and other languages. One trustworthy conclusion is that missionary activities were accurately recorded as late as the beginning of the eighth century.[14] According to the Chinese historical record, in the second year of Yonghui 永徽, Tang Dynasty (651), the Arabian empire sent an envoy to establish contact with China (Gui 2016, p. 10). It took hundreds of years for Islam concepts to be expressed systematically in Chinese as religious classics, which appeared at the end of the Ming Dynasty. The unique characteristics of the Islamic classics in Chinese marked the real birth of Chinese Islam. The borrowing of Chinese terminologies influences the expression of Islamic doctrines, and, more importantly, brings in the interaction between Islam and the Chinese culture represented by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. This, in turn, has enriched Chinese Islamic doctrines (Yang 2011, p. 1, translation mine). Islam has contributed significantly to Chinese culture. What is noteworthy is the advanced Arabic science and technology in astronomy, medicine, navigation, architecture, and other craftsmanship (Wang 2010, pp. 273–87). The three earliest remaining Islam stelae were inscribed in the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) and were found in Quanzhou 泉州 (1350), Guangzhou 广州, and Dingzhou 定州 (Ma 2021, pp. 224–25).

In sum, I have summarized the earliest missionary activities of the three Abrahamic faiths in China and identified their earliest inscription records. This paper now proceeds to analyze some of these records to determine their theology of creation with particular attention to their relationship to the Spirit and *qi*.

3. Theologies of Creation of the Earliest Abrahamic Faiths in China and Their Relationship to Spirit and *Qi*

3.1. Jingjiao's Theology of Creation

Christoph Baumer compares the different situations of the Western church and the Church of the East missionaries: the former expanded by supplanting theologically weak

religions (such as the Greco-Roman religion) by spreading among illiterate peoples (as in Germania and the British Isles) or by receiving help from civil authorities. At the same time, the latter encountered a highly developed culture and three very vibrant religions or worldviews, which were firmly anchored in the state and among the people. While Confucianism provided the state ideology and marked the machinery of society, Daoism (or Taoism) permeated the self-conception of the people and enjoyed the support of the first Tang emperors. For its part, Buddhism had reached Chang'an about half a millennium before Aluoben and, adopting elements of Taoism, spread rapidly throughout the Middle Kingdom (Baumer 2016, p. 187). Baumer identifies two chief difficulties faced by Aluoben and his successors, namely, explaining the uniqueness of the Savior Jesus Christ and selecting the target audience, since Buddhists, Daoists, and Confucians could not be addressed with the same concepts (Baumer 2016, pp. 187–88). After surveying the seven documents, Baumer characterizes the theology of *Jingjiao* as "a dialogue with Buddhism and Taoism: between orthodoxy and syncretism", which is different from Manichaeism that adapts itself in a chameleon-like manner to its new environment (Baumer 2016, p. 187). Baumer's evaluation does not share the mainstream evaluation that originates from John Foster (Nicolini-Zani 2022, p. 177), who, as early as 1939, argues that

> Terms belonging to the other religions are used throughout [the Tang Christian texts], the Buddhist being the most important. But it is not syncretism. Rather it is a borrowing of terminology, and a relation of doctrine to a familiar background of thought, as the only way of expressing Christian truth in its far-eastern environment.[15]

The theological method of *Jingjiao* is described as "an entirely modern Christian approach to other religions, a method of evangelization based on interreligious dialogue that was virtually unknown in the subsequent history of Christian missionary activity in China" (Nicolini-Zani 2022, p. 178). Their overall theology has been studied and summarized as "orthodox" (Chen 1997, pp. 41–42). To Matteo Nicolini-Zani, their methodology is inreligionization (as opposed to inculturation) due to their "positive view toward another religious vision and practice and occasional adoption of it" (Nicolini-Zani 2022, p. 179). Their assimilation of Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian terminology is "a selective integration, as it was for Christian literature in the languages of Central Asia" (Nicolini-Zani 2022, p. 185). Concerning their Christology, Roman Malek argues that their "Christian soteriology was formulated within the terminological framework of the Buddhist or Daoist *Weltanschauung* by using the *Dao*- or Buddha/Avalokiteśvara/Guanyin-model to develop a 'Buddho-Daoist' Christology" (Malek 2002, p. 36). Later documents, however, tended to "virtually ignore the crucifixion in favor of a Christology and soteriology that could be more aptly described as Daoist or Manichaean" (Eskildsen 1991, p. 79) or Buddhist (Nicolini-Zani 2022, p. 179).

In evaluating *Jingjiao*'s theology, Nicolini-Zani advises that, first, we "always consider the paucity and one-sidedness of the material available to us. Specific and precise studies on individual documents are therefore to be preferred to general reconstructions" (Nicolini-Zani 2022, p. 181). Second, such an evaluation must be carried out with the dialectic between transmission and transformation. Namely, in every work of cultural *transmission*, which results in the *translation* of original works and the *creation* of new texts, there is always a process of *transformation*, and transformation requires flexibility (Nicolini-Zani 2022, pp. 181–82). Philip Wickeri advises against "assum[ing] Western and European norms of heresy, orthodoxy and syncretism". He insists that we "begin with the East Syrian Christians' understanding of themselves and their mission, and relate this to the context from which they came, as well as the one in which they worked" (Wickeri 2004, p. 52). Nicolini-Zani also notices Chinese culture's "taste for harmony", whose hermeneutical approach makes it possible to overcome the fear of diversity, the suspicion that the other's otherness is a threat to one's own identity. Such an approach resists the Western and Christian hermeneutical categories of syncretism, distortion, and heresy and has been demonstrated in the process of Buddhism's reception to Daoist philosophical experience

and Manichaeism's adoption of the same Buddhist principle of adaptation to the linguistic, cultural, and philosophical context it encountered (Nicolini-Zani 2022, pp. 182–83).

What is of particular interest to this paper and has skipped the attention of most *Jingjiao* scholars is their theology of creation and its relationship with the Holy Spirit, with the exception of Jacob Chengwei Feng's recent publication of *Christianity's Earliest Encounter with the Ancient Techno-Scientific China*. Feng studies the primary texts focusing on the stone inscription of Xi'an due to the text's nature as *Jingjiao*'s statement of faith and argues that their *qi*-tological doctrine of creation contains the following key points. First, this theology is distinctively Christian and Trinitarian in its use of the language "Three-One", "cross", and the Spirit. Second, such a theology integrates the role of the Holy Spirit in creation with the Chinese metaphysical concept of *qi* 气 (or *chi*, breath, pneuma, spirit) by invoking the physical, spiritual, and medical senses of *qi* (Feng 2023, pp. 92–93). Third, the Spirit and wind as a derivative of *qi* are often treated synonymously (Feng 2023, pp. 94–97). Feng proposes that *jing* (as in their name *Jingjiao*) refers to the Holy Spirit in addition to the widely recognized meanings of "light", "grand", and "veneration". Overall, *Jingjiao*'s theology of creation is called *qi*-tological "due to their creative, conceptual imagination by 'dancing' around the Chinese metaphysical concept of *qi*" (Feng 2023, p. 99). Building on top of Feng's proposal, I now examine another reference to creation in *Xuting mishi suojing* 序听迷诗所经 (*Book of the Righteous Meditator*), whose author states that *renren judai Tianzun qi shide cunhuo* 人人居带天尊气始得存活. Namely, "everyone holds within herself the breath of the Honored One of Heaven". One can trace this theological statement to Gen. 2:7. Reflecting on Genesis, Ephrem (d. 373), considered the greatest representative of the Syriac tradition (Brock 2020, p. 3), understands the soul of Adam as having been engendered by God's own breath (Beggiani [1983] 2014, p. 17). Here, one observes that for the *Jingjiao* author, God's *qi*, his own breath, plays a vital role in the creation of humanity.

For Nicolini-Zani, "Physical and *spiritual* balance is given by the proper flow of *qi*. Here it seems to indicate a sort of vital breath … with which God shares life with the first man".[16] This is significant in that first, God's *qi* enlivening humanity reveals the *Jingjiao* author's employment of *qi* at physical, physiological, and spiritual levels while formulating their theology of creation. Second, his *qi*-tological imagination[17] enriches the traditional Chinese concept of *qi* by introducing an additional and vital *spiritual* dimension, significantly contributing to his *qi*-tological theology of creation. At the same time, it is worth noting that the common charge of syncretism in *Jingjiao*'s theology has been generally discredited.[18]

3.2. The Theology of Creation of the Chinese Jews

In studying the theology of the Chinese Jews, Paper points out two factors that moved the Chinese Jews moderately away from the theology they brought from Persia: (1) Their mode of thinking came to be far from the Greek-influenced developments emerging at that time in Islamic, Jewish (e.g., Saadia Gaon, Maimonides), and subsequently Christian theology, as Chinese thought is negatively oriented to abstract universals. Therefore, Paper speculates that the Chinese Jews were probably closer to Biblical thought than medieval Christian or Islamic philosophy and theology. (2) Their life experience was very different from that of the Jews in the West, who experienced government-condoned murder, torture, and expulsion, along with limits imposed on their right to occupy and own land. The implicit theology of the Chinese Jews would slowly have come to differ from developments in Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Mesopotamia, while their ritual life and dedication to the Torah and the Talmud remained unchanged (Paper 2012, pp. 17–18). In Paper's estimation, the Jewish theology that developed in China over many centuries emphasized complementary gender equality in relation to a non-anthropomorphic (non-sexed) monotheistic deity, who did not exhibit human traits and was therefore neither punitive nor jealous. Chinese–Jewish theology did not emphasize separation from a hateful world and was similar to the cosmogonic and cosmological understanding of the larger Chinese culture. Thus, Chinese–Jewish theology did not reject this world but fully em-

braced it, understanding humans to be part of nature rather than masters of it. Moreover, its use of Daoist-originated terminology and cosmogony, while not essentially different from medieval Jewish theology, with its non-anthropomorphic understanding of deity, may resonate with those contemporary Western Jews who are oriented toward Daoism and Buddhism (Paper 2012, pp. 23–24).

Of the 1489 Stela, the texts that are related to their theology of creation can be translated as follows:

> The founding Ancestor and Teacher Abraham of Israel was the nineteenth-generation descendant of Pan Gu A-Dan. Since the opening of the heaven and diving of the earth, the Ancestor and Teacher has taught that no images should be molded, no gods and ghosts be worshipped, and no witchcraft be performed. In fact, gods and ghosts are not useful, images bring no blessings, and witchcraft is of no help. Now contemplate this: the heaven is the *qi* that is light and pure, the most Supreme has no match, the *Dao* of heaven lies in *buyan* (wordlessness), practice according to the four seasons and all things will grow. Now observe that things germinate in the spring and grow in the summer, people collect the harvest in the autumn and store them in the winter; those flying and diving, the animals, and the plants flourish and decay, blossom, and fall; those that can be born will be born themselves, those that can transform will transform themselves, those that can take shape will shape themselves, and those that are colorful will take on color themselves.[19]

Based on the text, a few observations can be made regarding its theology of creation. First, the author of the text, Jin Zhong, links Adam in Genesis 1 to the well-known legendary figure Pangu 盘古 in the ancient Chinese creation myth.[20] Second, the frequent references to *zu* 祖 (ancestor), such as *zushi* 祖师 (ancestor and teacher) and *zutong* (the tradition of the ancestor), manifest the Kaifeng Jew's assimilation of the ancient Chinese concept of respecting the ancestors (Ma 2021, p. 229).

Third, the Chinese Jewish understanding of creation is associated with the Daoist concept of *dao* 道, *qi* 气, and *buyan* 不言. Both the 1489 and 1512 Stelae translate the Torah as *Daojing* 道经 and therefore confirm that the Jewish religion conforms to Dao, which can be seen from its respect for *Dao*. Such translation is consistent with the Chinese classic *Daodejing* 道德经, which displays the connotation of the Chinese culture in the Kaifeng Jewish religion. Moreover, Ma Baoquan speculates that the translation of the Torah to *Daojing* is based on the close pronunciation of "To" in Torah and "*Dao*" (Ma 2021, p. 228).

Fourth, the word *zi* 自 appears four times, which indicates the theology's adaptation of the Daoist principle of *ziran* 自然. Lao Zi (or Lao Tzu, 571 BC–471 BC) frames the phrase *ziran* to affirm the autonomy of all things and to safeguard their "self" while insisting on Dao as the Supreme Being in the chain of existence.[21] Paper observes that "[i]n Chinese cosmology, creation is continuous. The movement from nothingness to somethingness to division into two and then the two conjoinings and creating everything else is continually occurring, and in essence, everything continually creates itself. The Chinese term for this is *ziran*, which literally means 'of itself'" (Paper 2012, p. 107). Paper also observes that in quoting the *Analects* (*Lunyu*: xvii, 19), the Kaifeng Jews believe that by the use of *zi* (self), this basic understanding came to Abraham as he mediated on *Tian* (God) and, upon realizing this profound "mystery" (*xuan* 玄), founded Judaism (Paper 2012, p. 107).

In his speculative theology of the Chinese Jews, Paper suggests that based on their familiarity with the two creation accounts of the Torah, the Chinese Jews would have been more likely sympathetic with the first than the second: "Removing the willed aspect of creation, this version accords with the Chinese understanding … that from the singular Dao arises male Sky and female Earth, female Yin and male Yang, which give birth to all of existence, including humans" (Paper 2012, p. 108). Paper helpfully takes into consideration a Jewish counter-tradition that exists in the Israelite popular religion, which has been abundantly demonstrated by the last several decades of archaeology. The female counterpart of God, Asherah, is Earth as well as the wife of El. She is the deity of fertility and nur-

ture. Despite its controversial nature in contemporary Jewish scholarship, Paper argues that such medieval Jewish understanding would not have been antithetical to the ancient Chinese understanding of the splitting of the singular *Dao* into the complementary pair of Sky and Earth. His essential conclusion is that "[t]he differences between the Chinese understanding of creation and the understanding that the ancestors of the Chinese Jews had when they arrived in Kaifeng may not have been strongly pronounced" (Paper 2012, p. 108). If Paper is correct, then the Spirit and *qi*, considered the power of the universe and the vitality of humanity to be united with human bodies to achieve peace and harmony, would be equally crucial for the early Chinese Jews.

3.3. The Theology of Creation of the Chinese Muslims

One of the most important marks of the integration between Chinese Islam and Chinese traditional culture is the formation of the Kalām system, which is characterized by interpreting the Islam doctrines with Confucian thoughts. Its formation took a long time and was gradually established at the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, represented by the initiation of mosque education and the interpretation of the Qur'an with Confucianism (Wang 2010, pp. 206–7). In order to explore their theology of creation, we will now analyze the text inscribed in the 1348 Stela, which reads:

> Our ancestors have treated all nations as their dwelling places, and never stopped doing good. Their foundation of life is to serve Heaven without setting forth any images.… The Creator cannot be sought after by form and traces. It is a blaspheme if one produces an image, thereby likening the Creator to an object. Only contemplate without an image to express your sincerity. The Creator can be known by the beauty of the remaining customs of the people.[22]

The Chinese Muslims' early account of the theology of creation demonstrates the following features. First, their theology explicitly acknowledges the Creator of the universe, who is invisible and should not be worshipped with any image. Second, the concept of *tian* 天 (Heaven) is taken from the Chinese worldview and worshipped as the Creator. Therefore, it is no wonder that the Qur'an is translated as *Tianzhijing* 天之经 or *Tianjing* 天经. Later stelae have frequent references to the Heaven: "the saints preach the Dao on behalf of the Heaven" (the 1495 Stela), "worship facing the west, invoke the Heaven and celebrate the saints" (the 1453 Stela), "the Upper Heaven is the most respected and greatest, without any comparison or match" (the 1496 Stela), and "worship the Heaven as the Lord" (the 1519 Stela).

Liu Zhi 刘智 (1669–1764) is a typical representative of the Muslim scholars of the Ming and Qing dynasties who unabashedly integrates the basic core and essential principles of the Muslim faith and the metaphysical resources of Confucianism. In his *Tianfang xingli* 天方性理 (or *Caaba and Neo-Confucianism*), Liu proposes that before the creation of the physical world, there existed a *Xiantian shijie* 先天世界 (an earlier world), whose origin is *Wucheng* 无称. He acknowledges that *Taiji* 太极 in *Yijing* 易经 (or Yi Ching), *Wuji* 无极 in Zhou Dunyi 周敦颐 (1017–1073)'s thought, and *Dao* can be considered as the origin of this physical world. Liu creatively developed and expanded the Muslim theology of the emergence of the universe with *qi* as a constitutive element (Ma 2006, pp. 131–32). Likewise, the al-ruh (Holy Spirit) plays an active role with humankind in creation and in revelation. The al-ruh has evidently inspired all the prophets and even Muslim believers according to the Qur'an (Shih-Ching 2006).

In sum, I have analyzed some of the earliest written records of *Jingjiao*, the Chinese Jews, and the Chinese Muslims that contain traces of the theology of creation. I have also identified that in the process of intermingling with the Chinese civilization, each religion not only borrows Chinese terminologies but also integrates in unison the Chinese metaphysical concept of the Spirit and *qi*. Based on such an observation, this paper draws some general contours toward constructing a Chinese natural theology.

4. Towards a Constructive Chinese Natural Theology

At the outset, it is essential to point out that this section does not aim at constructing a full-fledged Chinese natural theology. Instead, based on the above analysis of the Abrahamic faiths' doctrines of creation focusing on their engagement with Spirit/spirit and *Qi*, I intend to draw some general and preliminary contours toward such a constructive task.

First, with regard to constructive Christian theology, all theologies are contextual. To use the words of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen:

> For constructive Christian theology to speak to the issues, questions, and challenges of the pluralistic world, it has to open up to a dialogue with diverse voices from both inside and outside.… [T]he hegemony of aging white European and North-American men—to which company I myself belong!—must be balanced and corrected by contributions from female theologians of various agendas such as feminist, womanist, and *mujerista*; women from Africa, Asia, and Latin America; other liberationists, including black theologians of the USA and sociopolitical theologians from South America, South Africa, and Asia; and postcolonialists, as well as others. (Kärkkäinen 2013, pp. xi–xii)

To the list identified above by Kärkkäinen I shall add "Chinese theology", which is defined by Paulos Huang as "Christian theological reflection on, from, for, and about China broadly defined, as well as its people and culture" (Huang 2022, pp. 3–4).[23] Following Kärkkäinen's proposal, this article opens up a dialogue with a voice from the Global North—the natural theology of Alister McGrath—in order to address the Global South in general and the Chinese civilization in particular. Moreover, it also converses with "voices from outside" by comparing notes with the doctrines of creation from the Chinese Jews and the Chinese Muslims.

Second, in recent decades, there has been a resurgence of interest in natural theology among Catholics and Protestants. Among the Protestant natural theologians, McGrath is considered one of the most prominent contemporary defenders of natural theology (Kojonen 2020, p. 41).

McGrath establishes a theological framework, namely, a Trinitarian natural theology based on the assumption that the universe is "fine-tuned", which mainly refers to the universe's fecundity (McGrath 2009, pp. xi–xiii). One critical claim made by McGrath to provide a "renewed" natural theology is the recognition that the predominant view of the Enlightenment, namely, that "nature" designates an objective reality, is false. Instead, "nature" is an already interpreted entity, the construals of which are essentially tractable and indeterminate, highly susceptible to conceptual manipulation by the human mind (McGrath 2009, p. 6). Therefore, nature "requires *reinterpretation*" by being "seen" in a new way (McGrath 2009, p. 6). Here, the ancient Chinese Jewish theology's adoption of the Daoist concept of *ziran* joins forces with McGrath in refuting Enlightenment thought. Far from an objective reality, the Chinese Jews realize that humanity is not distanced from nature but is an organic part of it due to their ability to give birth: *sheng* 生. The Enlightenment's concept of humanity dominating nature would have been foreign to them.

After an extensive study on a spectrum of approaches to nature, ranging from cosmology through chemistry to evolutionary biology, McGrath discerns that modern science takes a stratified approach to "nature" and argues that there is no reason why an engagement with the quest for beauty in human culture, or the human longing for something unattainable, should not also be seen as integral aspects of natural theology. For him, natural theology is not limited to rational observation and reflection upon the biological or astronomical realms. McGrath adopts Augustine's doctrine of creation, acknowledging its nascent form, to embrace both primordial actuality and emergent potentiality, which provides more room for the future development of natural theology as legitimate and necessary expansion, rather than distortion or subversion, of Christian notions of creation (McGrath 2009, p. 216). McGrath's creative adaptation of Augustine's doctrine of creation is consonant with the Jewish absorption of the Chinese metaphysical concept of *Zi*, which entails the autonomous power of germination within creation.

McGrath's natural theology has enormous theological values in that his approach does not only uphold Christian tradition, and in this case, the doctrine of creation, but also nurtures a Christian way of "seeing" the natural world, a seeing from within the Christian tradition, deriving both its foundations and coherence from a Trinitarian ontology. Such a way of seeing things resonates strongly with our observation and experience of the world. He recognizes that such a natural theology not only possesses an evangelical capacity to explain nature but leads to something much more significant, the capacity to endow life with meaning (McGrath 2009, p. 220). This is significant for Chinese natural theology to stay relevant to the contemporary world while faithfully continuing our mission of transforming lives.

McGrath's suggestion that we reconsider natural theology as a mode of "seeing" nature rather than as an apologetic seems fruitful. It avoids the mistakes natural theologies have made in the past, such as focusing on "gaps" in our understanding or limiting God to a distant watchmaker. Contemporary Chinese theology has largely remained apologetic in its engagement with modern sciences in general and evolution theory in particular.[24]

However, the above comparison of the three Abrahamic faiths' doctrines of creation reveals the "blind spots" of McGrath's natural theology. First, McGrath endeavors to propose a Trinitarian natural theology, but the reference to the Holy Spirit, whether explicit or implicit, is scarce. These will raise suspicions of the "true" Trinitarian nature of his theology. In this respect, *Jingjiao*'s Trinitarian proto-natural theology, with an emphasis on the Spirit and her creative "dance" with *qi* (Feng 2023, p. 92),[25] serves as a solid foundation for constructing a Chinese natural theology. A further investigation of the word *qi* reveals that the word appears ten times in the entire Tang *Jingjiao* corpus,[26] indicating the rich potential of connecting the Holy Spirit and *qi* in the proposed natural theology. One example suffices here. In *Yishenlun* 一神论 (*Discourse on the One God*), *Mishihe* 弥施诃 (Messiah) is said to rise "from death, thanks to the strength of *qi* of the Honored One of Heaven". In the Peshitta English New Testament, Jesus the Messiah is said to be one "who was known by power and by the Holy Spirit as God's Son, and who arose from the dead" (Rom. 1:4) (Kiraz 2020, p. 419). Here, one sees that the *Jingjiao* author divides the phrase *Tianzun qili* 天尊气力 into three parts, *Tianzun*, *qi*, and *li*, and correlates them with God, the Holy Spirit, and power, respectively, thereby equating the Holy Spirit to the breath of the Honored One of Heaven.

To make up the spirit deficit in McGrath's framework, it is worth noting that Jürgen Moltmann likens the *qi* (or *Ch'I*, *Chi*) in *Daodejing* to God's *ruach* in that the latter "is onomatopoeic, echoing the tempest, like Ch'i, but it means both the breath of the eternal God and the vitality of created beings" (Moltmann 2003, p. 191). Likewise, Grace Ji-Sun Kim suggests an understanding of the Spirit as *Chi* to bring believers to a more holistic understanding of pneumatology and combat what is considered to be a limited understanding of the Spirit. Central to her thesis is the concept of Spirit—*Chi*. However, she does not limit comparisons of the Spirit to the Asian understanding of *Chi*, as is found in Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Kim 2015, p. 136). She also finds comparisons in the life energy *num* of the Kiung San African people, the *nafas* of Islam, the *prana* of India, the *waniya* of the Sioux Native American tribe, the Japanese *Ki*, and the Hawaiian *ha*. For Kim, "many cultures have words to articulate similar ideas of breath, life, and vital energy expressed by the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit" (Kim 2015, pp. 132–34). Kim's insights provide a pneumatological framework for interfaith and intercultural dialogue, which is affirmed in all three Abrahamic faiths on Chinese soil.

Second, McGrath's natural theology is short of interfaith engagement, which is arguably an indispensable task required by the increasingly pluralistic world. The similarities and differences in the doctrines of creation of the three Abrahamic faiths provide rich "ingredients" for the constructive natural theology. A few examples suffice here: (1) All three faiths' common integration of *qi* adds a hitherto-unknown dimension to the traditional Chinese understanding of *qi*. Conversely, the ubiquitous nature of *qi* in the Chinese civilization poses a challenge for religions to creatively "dance" with it in their incultur-

ation process. (2) Such commonality does not come at the cost of negating the different religious identities. Likewise, the role and function of the Holy Spirit in each Abrahamic faith cannot be confused in terms of their theological significance.

To sum up, based on a critical and sympathetic evaluation of McGrath's natural theology, a Chinese natural theology can be constructed by integrating *Jingjiao*'s proto-Trinitarian theology with a particular emphasis on the Spirit and *qi* as a common denominator among the three Abrahamic faiths in China.

5. Conclusions

The Chinese civilization has been striving for holistic wisdom in its long history of absorbing various ingredients from the Abrahamic faiths since the seventh century. In turn, *Jingjiao*, the Kaifeng Jews, and the earliest Chinese Muslims have been shown to effectively absorb the Chinese metaphysical views of *qi* in constructing their theology of creation. I have examined the earliest inscriptions in Chinese of the three sister faiths. By analyzing their theology of creation with reference to the Holy Spirit and *qi* (wind/breath), this paper has attempted a constructive Chinese natural theology, which is based on a sympathetic and critical assessment of Alister McGrath's natural theology and makes up for his spirit deficit. This paper has argued that the holistic wisdom achieved in the early integration process of the Abrahamic faiths with the Chinese worldview is centered on the spirit and *qi*, which provides a fruitful ground to construct a contemporary Chinese natural theology. With the proposed general and preliminary guidelines toward a constructive Chinese natural theology, it is the hope of this author that a door can be opened into a fruitful interfaith dialogue and science–theology conversation.

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Notes

1 The Chinese words/phrases used in this paper are written in the format of pinyin followed by the simplified Chinese characters and, if necessary, characters in Wade–Giles romanization.

2 This group is usually dismissed as "Nestorian" and therefore deemed heretical. However, Brock has strongly argued that the so-called Nestorian church has, in antiquity, preferred to self-describe itself as the "Church of the East". However, the association between the Church of the East and Nestorius is "of a very tenuous nature" and is "totally misleading and incorrect". See (Brock 1996, p. 35; Bantu 2020, p. 202). Lin Ying speculates that besides the Church of the East, another branch of Christianity also from Syria also sent their missionaries, the Fulin monks, or the Melkites, to China in the Tang dynasty. See (Lin 2006). There has been voluminous scholarly works in French, Japanese, English, and Chinese. For a selected bibliography, see (Morris and Chen 2020).

3 Discovered by the French sinologist Paul Pelliot and later catalogued as Pelliot chinois 3847 and abbreviated as P. 3847. P. 3847 contains two texts: the *Hymn in Praise of the Salvation Achieved through the Three Majesties of the Luminous Teaching* (*Jingjiao sanwei mengdu zan*) and the *Book of the Honored* (*Zunjing*), plus some final notes.

4 The Kojima manuscripts include Kojima manuscript A: *Hymn of Praise to the Most Holy One of the Luminous Teaching of Da Qin, through Which One Penetrates the Truth and Turns to the Doctrine* (*Da Qin jingjiao dasheng tongzhen guifa zan* and Kojima manuscript B: *Book of the Luminous Teaching of Da Qin on Revealing the Origin and Reaching the Foundation (Da Qin jingjiao xuanyuan zhiben jing)*. See (Nicolini-Zani 2022, p. 147). The authenticity of the Kojima manuscripts has been challenged. See (Nicolini-Zani 2022, pp. 154–55).

5 Nicolini-Zani specifies seven documents, including the Xi'an Stele and six scrolls including from Cave 17 in Dunhuang, sealed in 1036, as presumably the other two do as well (two additional fragments are hotly disputed). TEXT A: "*Stele of the Diffusion of the Luminous Teaching of Da Qin in China*" (*Da Qin Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei* 大秦景教流行中國碑); TEXT B: (1) "*Hymn in Praise of the Salvation Achieved through the Three Majesties of the Luminous Teaching*" (*Jingjiao sanwei mengdu zan* 景教三威蒙度讚); (2) "*Book of the Honored*" (*Zunjing* 尊經); TEXT C: "*Discourse on the One God*" (*Yishen lun* 一神論): I. "*Discourse on the One Godhead*" (*Yitian lun diyi* 一天論第一) II. "*Metaphorical Teaching*" (*Yu di'er* 喻第二) III. "*Discourse of the Honored One of the Universe on Almsgiving*" (*Shizun bushi lun disan* 世尊布施論第三); TEXT D: "*Book of the Lord Messiah*" (*Xuting mishisuo jing* 序聽迷詩所經); TEXT E:

"*Book on Profound and Mysterious Blessedness*" (*Zhixuan anle jing* 志玄安樂經); TEXT F: "*Book of the Luminous Teaching of Da Qin on Unveiling the Origin and Attaining the Foundation*" (*Da Qin Jingjiao xuanyuan zhiben jing* 大秦景教宣元至本經). See (Nicolini-Zani 2022, pp. 193–303). There are other methods of classification. For example, Nie Zhijun simply collects eight texts in Chinese. The eight texts are (1) TEXT D; (2) TEXT C; (3) TEXT E; (4) TEXT B (1); (5) TEXT B (2); (6) TEXT F; and (7) Sutra pillar of the *Book of the Luminous Teaching of Da Qin on Unveiling the Origin and Attaining the Foundation* (*Da Qin jingjiao xuanyuan zhiben jingchuang ji* 大秦景教宣元至本經幢記); (8) TEXT A. See (Nie 2010, pp. 330–66).

6 Li Dawei summarizes five views concerning the time of the Jews' arrival at Kaifeng: (1) pre-Zhou Dynasty (1100 BC–256 BC), which is highly unlikely; (2) Zhou Dynasty, also highly unlikely; (3) between the Jews' captivity in Babylon and mid-second century B.C.; (4) Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD); (5) Tang Dynasty (618–907); (6) Song Dynasty (960–1279). Various scholars have studied when the Jews left their native land and when they entered into China based on their correlation between the Jews' experience in their native land and the inscriptions, legends, and oral histories of the Kaifeng Jews. The majority of the scholars suggest that the Jews arrived at Kaifeng once for all, while other scholars, such as Pan Guangdan, insist that the Jews arrived at different times. See (Li 2015).

7 For the best succinct history of the Chinese Jews, see (Leslie 1972). For a work that focuses on the European reaction to the "discovery" of the Chinese Jews, see (Pollak 1983). For the most recent, and by far the most readable account, see (Xu 2003). For a recent work in Chinese, see (Song 2012).

8 According to Jordan Paper, today many assume that the term "Chinese Judaism" refers to the century and a half of European Jews living in China—that is, "Judaism in China"—rather than the "Chinese Judaism" of the last millennium. See (Paper 2012, p. 4).

9 Two stelae were from the Ming Dynasty: (1) the 1489 Stela, *Chongjian qingzhensi ji* 重建清真寺记, also called *Hongzhi bei* 弘治碑; and (2) the 1512 Stela, *Zunchong daojingsi ji* 尊崇道经寺记, also called *Zhengde bei* 正德碑. The other two were from the Qing Dynasty: (3) the 1663 Stela, *Chongjian qingzhensi ji* 重建清真寺记, also called *Kangxi bei* 康熙碑; and (4) the 1679 Stela, *Citang shugubei ji* 祠堂述古碑记.

10 The 1489 Stela is currently preserved in the Kaifeng Museum. The text was compiled by Chen Yuan. See (Chen 1982, pp. 256–59).

11 The 1512 Stela is currently preserved in the Kaifeng Museum. The text was compiled by Chen Yuan. See (Chen 1982, pp. 260–62). Chen's text was verified by Ma Baoquan. See (Ma 2021, p. 224).

12 Jin Zhong's academic title is *Kaifengfu Ruxue zengguang shengyuan* 开封府儒学增广生员.

13 Zuo Tang's official title is *Sichuan buzhengsi youcanyi* 四川布政司右参议, an advisor of the governor of Sichuan province.

14 The proposed dates are (1) Kaihuang era (581–600) of Sui Dynasty; (2) Wude era (618–626) of Tang Dynasty; (3) early Zhenguan era (627–649); (4) the second year of Yonghui era (651); and (5) the beginning of the eighth century. See (Wang 2010, pp. 106–11).

15 See (Foster 1939, p. 112). Tang Li argues similarly: "Even though Nestorians adopted many Buddhist and Daoist phrases in their texts, syncretism should not be considered a serious case". See (Tang 2002, p. 142).

16 For Nicolini-Zani, physical and spiritual balance is given by the proper flow of *qi*. Here, it seems to indicate a sort of vital breath (that of Genesis 2:7?) with which God shares life with the first man. See (Nicolini-Zani 2022, p. 266), emphasis added.

17 Amos Yong speaks of pneumatological imagination as the logic of Pentecostal theology. See (Yong 2020).

18 Johan Ferreira has expressed it in a clear and definitive manner: "Contrary to common opinion, the theology of the Tang Chinese church was not an aberrant form of Christianity with only internal or syncretistic concerns, it was consistent with traditional orthodoxy" (Ferreira 2014, p. 337). Such a statement is also accepted with absolute certainty by Matteo Nicolini-Zani (Nicolini-Zani 2022, p. 119).

19 My translation of the first several lines of the 1489 Stela is based on the text compiled by Chen Yuan. See (Chen and Chen 1981, pp. 65–68).

20 For a discussion on Pangu and the origin of universe, see (Wu 2011).

21 Wang argues Lao Zi introduces a new worldview in his framing of the concept of *zi ran* 自然. See (Wang 2019).

22 The Chinese text is recorded in (Yu and Lei 2001, chp. 4), translation mine.

23 Theologians such as Wing-hung Lam, Liu Xiaofeng, He Guanghu, Chloë Starr, and Alexander Chow have contributed to such a constructive task. See (Lam 1983; Liu 2000; He 1996; Starr 2016; Chow 2018).

24 For a theological assessment of how the theory of evolution impacted Chinese theology, see (Feng 2022, pp. 301–5).

25 Here, I follow the East Syrian—and hence, *Jingjiao*—tradition, which spoke of the Holy Spirit as a feminine figure. Johannes van Oort argues that the earliest Christians—all of whom were Jews—did the same. Such an ancient tradition was kept alive in East and West Syria, up to and including the fourth century Makarios and/or Symeon, who even influenced "modern" Protestants such as John Wesley and the Moravian leader Count von Zinzendorf. It is concluded that, in the image of the Holy Spirit as woman and mother, one may obtain a better appreciation of the fullness of the Divine. See (Van Oort 2016).

26 Once in "*Stele of the Diffusion of the Luminous Teaching of Da Qin in China*" (*Da Qin Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei*), four times in "*Discourse on the One God*" (*Yishen lun*), three times in "*Book of the Lord Messiah*" (*Xuting mishisuo jing*), and twice in "*Book of the Luminous Teaching of Da Qin on Unveiling the Origin and Attaining the Foundation*" (*Da Qin Jingjiao xuanyuan zhiben jing*).

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Article

Adapting Christianity to Hakka Culture: The Basel Mission's Activities among Indigenous People in China (1846–1931)

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Abstract: The Hakka are a branch of the Chinese Han people, who immigrated from central China to Kwangtung (Guangdong 广东) Province. They have their own cultural norms in terms of language, lineage, distribution of work roles and status of women. The trans-national Basel Mission was headquartered in the Swiss city of Basel, near the Swiss–German border. The Basel Mission was distinguished among the missions to China by its rural Hakka Christian community. This article sets out to illustrate how the Basel Mission supported and maintained the rural Hakka Christianity community by integrating Christianity with Hakka cultural precepts. Previous Christian historiographical research has generally chosen not to emphasize Hakka cultural beliefs and practices. Examining the activities of the Basel Mission from the perspective of the indigenous Hakka culture, this article aims to enhance our understanding of the cultural precepts of receptors to shape the global enterprise of missionary society.

Keywords: the Basel Mission; Hakka Christianity; Hakka cultural precepts; Christianity in China

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1. Introduction

China was already recognized as one of the world's two main mission fields by the time of the 1910 missionary conference in Edinburgh (World Missionary Conferrence 1910). In *the Reference Guide to Christian Missionary Societies in China*, Tiedemann (2009), lists 254[1] Protestant missions in China, and mentions a total of approximately 45,000 to 50,000 Protestant missionaries in China between 1807 and 1952. The Basel Mission (BM) sent more missionaries to China than other German [speaking] missions (Sun 2002). It was a trans-national Swiss-German Protestant missionary society, with its headquarters in Basel, a Swiss city on the border with Germany. However, the majority of its missionaries, as well as a large proportion of its financing, came from Germany, especially from the southwestern German state of Baden-Württemberg. The history of the BM in China goes back to 1847, as it came to an end in 1951. Its mission fields were in the highland regions of the Kwangtung (Guangdong 广东) Province and the lowland areas around Lilang (today's Shenzhen 深圳). The BM worked mainly among the Hakka people, who are known in the West for their revolutionary figures, an example being Hong Xiuquan. Indeed, the best-selling 2019 German historical novel, *God of the Barbarians*, begins with the journey of a BM missionary to join Hong Xiuquan's Taiping rebellion (Thome 2019).

The BM's language of correspondence was German. Most of the BM archives pre-1914 are in "Kurrentschrift", a type of German handwriting based on late mediaeval cursive writing. This has proved a hurdle for many researchers trying to conduct research into the history of the BM in China. Chinese scholars, such as Chi Kong Li, Wing Sze Tong, Huirao Cai, Jianbo Leng, and Yinan Luo have studied the history of the BM in China.[2] However, their research either examines the evangelical activities of the BM chronologically or focuses on the independence of the BM's Chinese Church. No existing research explores the relationship between Hakka culture and the BM's activities.

Western scholars have attached considerable importance to the meeting of and compromises made between the Hakka people and the BM. Jessie Gregory Lutz, an American

scholar of the history of Chinese Christianity, has pioneered research into the BM in China, describing how their understanding of Hakka family lineage underpinned the BM's early conversion of Hakkas to Christianity (Lutz and Lutz 1998, pp. 35, 38, 72). Her writings give insight into the geographical, social and cultural characteristics of the BM-Hakka mission fields, drawing on the autobiographies of eight Hakka Christians. Thoralf Klein focuses on how Hakka Christians reacted to the BM from the time of the late-Qing dynasty to the rise of the Chinese communist party (Klein 2002, pp. 31–40). However, neither Lutz's nor Klein's writings address how the Hakka culture shaped the activities of the BM in China. This unexplored question is of significance for two main reasons. Firstly, the Hakka Christian community was regarded as the "focal point of a new identity" (Lutz and Lutz 1998, p. 261) and "they [the Hakka Christians] reconciled Christian and Chinese facets of identity" (Constable 2013). To understand the origin of the "focal point" (as mentioned by Lutz), how the BM adapted its activities to Hakka culture needs to be fully understood. Secondly, our knowledge of indigenous practices enhances our ability to understand how the institutional culture of the BM was, in turn, influenced by Hakka culture.

This article sets out explore how the BM started its activities in China and adapted its activities to Hakka culture. The research draws on the BM archives[3], Chinese publications, and the data collected by the author during her field work to Hakka regions in Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province in 2018. It will describe how the BM began its mission venture in China, and move on to describe the cultural characteristics of Hakka people and how they influenced the BM's missionary activities and approach.

2. The Basel Mission in China and Its Evangelization of the Hakka People

Karl Friedrich Gützlaff (1803–1851) was a key figure in the BM's initiating of its mission enterprise in China. He was the strongest promoter of German missionary activities in China and one of the most influential figures in the history of Sino-German relations in the 19th century. However, his relationships with the BM were more complicated than with other German missionary societies.

Gützlaff's findings about China excited the BM's interest in working in China. In 1843, Gützlaff established the Chinese Union (Chinesischer Verein), whose Chinese name "fuhuanhui 福汉会" meant that Chinese Han people would be blessed after their conversion to Christianity (Y. Wang 1997). He recruited eligible Chinese to preach Christianity in the Chinese interior after their own conversion. The Chinese Union had over 100 members (Steiner 1915, p. 63). Gützlaff had already asked the BM to send missionaries to China in 1839 (Steiner 1915, p. 62). Since China was still closed to Christian missionaries at that time, the BM did not respond to Gützlaff's request to send missionaries. The claim that "China was open to evangelism", however, was widely heard in western missionary societies after the 1842 Treaty of Nanking. The BM thought it could not "get away from the requirements of the missionary friends at home [who wanted to respond to] the enthusiastic invitation of Gützlaff" (Steiner 1915, p. 62). It therefore sent Theodor Hamberg and Rudolf Lechler as missionaries to China in 1846. Hamberg was to be responsible for 3–4 million Hakkas, and Lechler was to be in charge of the Hoklo people in the coastal region, which extended as far as Fukien (Schlatter 1916, p. 276). In order to launch this plan, the BM Committee decided to grant 5000 Swiss francs for two years' work in China (Komittee Protokoll 15. Juli 1847, p. 164).

After the arrival in Hong Kong of Hamberg and Lechler, Gützlaff sent Hamberg to work among the Hakkas in Lilang, and Lechler to evangelize to the Hoklos in Yanzao (yanzao 盐灶) of Shantow (shantou 汕头), respectively. Each man had an assistant, who was a member of the Chinese Union. However, Lechler and Hamberg realized that China was not as open to evangelism as Gützlaff had reported in Europe, and that the Chinese Union's achievement was more fantasy than fact.[4] It seemed that the employees of the Chinese Union were actually deceiving Gützlaff. Their reports of preaching activities and successful conversions were apparently often only written with a view to earn money.

In 1849, Gützlaff went to England and mainland Europe to lobby for more support. He distributed responsibility for different parts of China to mission allies in Britain, Holland, and Germany. It was Theodor Hamberg and the BM Committee who exposed the deception of the Chinese Union while Gützlaff was gaining widespread support in Europe. Hamberg led an investigation into the Chinese Union in Hong Kong. Members of the Chinese Union confessed that they had engaged in deception. They had either invented the names of converts or sold the brochures they had been given free of charge by Gützlaff in order to make money. Some of them even spent the income on opium, it appeared. Hamberg wrote to the president of the BM, Wilhelm Hoffmann, in March 1850, saying that it looked as if Dr. Gützlaff had made an agreement with the Chinese for the purpose:

> I will give you money and opium in exchange for your telling certain lies. This way, I will make a name for myself, and you will have plenty of money. He [Gützlaff] is only too aware of the kind of mission he is running, and we [the BM] should not be following his example.[5]

After Hamberg's letters arrived in Basel, the director of the BM, was so disheartened, that he immediately decided to prevent any further publications of Gützlaff's reports (Schlatter 1916, p. 278). The BM Committee tried to prevent any further financial support going to Gützlaff. Because of Hamberg's claim and the BM's leadership questioned Gützlaff and the Chinese Union, support for Gützlaff's Chinese Union in German-speaking Europe came to an immediate end.

As a result of the uncovering of the deception of the Chinese Union, missionaries of the BM chose to work independently. In 1852, the BM mission committee sent a third missionary, Philipp Winnes, to China. At the end of 1852, Lechler, Hamberg and Winnes decided to establish a mission house in Hong Kong and expand from there to the Chinese mainland for the evangelization of the Hakka people in the Chinese interior. The reasons for their decisions were as follows:

(1) A firm mission post in Hong Kong was considered an ideal information-collection point and a place where people could stay if they were expelled from the Chinese mainland. Chinese hostility towards Christianity was still widespread.

(2) BM missionaries would always feel disadvantaged, constricted and neglected alongside the [more prosperous] British missionary societies in Hong Kong. On the other hand, they were free to put down roots according to their circumstances if they worked in the Chinese mainland (ibid., p. 292). Family ties in the Chinese mainland were more favorable than in Hong Kong for the spreading of Christianity.

(3) Hamberg and Lechler's association with the Chinese Union ensured that they had good Chinese assistants, and it also helped them master the Hakka language, enabling them to work efficiently among the Hakkas.

With its focus on the Hakkas, the BM was able to focus its manpower and financial resources on efforts such as the translation of the Bible and other liturgical texts (Klein 2002, pp. 16–17, 2021, p. 173). Its evangelical work focused on developing rural Hakka Christian communities, according to *Christian Occupation of China* (Stauffer 1922, p. 353). However, the BM was not the first organization to engage in the cultural exchange with Chinese. As early as the 17th century, as Nicolas Standaert shows, the Chinese were already influencing the Jesuits missionaries, making it possible for them "to become who they became". Their significant role in Sino-Western cultural exchange was markedly influenced by the Chinese. Broadly speaking, the "corporate culture" of the Jesuits as an institution was determined by the Chinese they encountered (Standaert 2014). In a similar manner, the "corporate culture" of the BM was influenced by the Hakka cultural characteristics.

3. Cultural Characteristics of the Hakka People as an Ethnic Group

The Hakka people are a branch of the Han Chinese, but they were marginalised by the high Han Chinese culture. They differ slightly from the Han Chinese in terms of features, customs and religious beliefs. Luo Xianglin, recognized as the founding father of Hakkology, shows in his *Introduction to Hakka Studies* that Hakka people do, indeed, belong

to the Han ethnic group. Christiansen (1998), however, disputes not only Luo Xianglin's writings, but also his views. One of his criticisms is that Luo's research evidence is poor and unconvincing. Another is that he takes a Darwinian approach to the social and moral qualities of the Hakka, which, in his view, undermines accepted scientific standards for research because it merges ideas about how racial descent and the physical environment affect community. By contrast, in his *Constructing Subjects of Knowledge Beyond the Nation: Transcultural Layers in the Formation of Hakkaology*, Thoralf Klein echoes, and implicitly, supports, Luo Xianglin's appraisal of the Hakka's special characteristics, for example, their industriousness and frugality, their ambition and readiness for action, their self-sufficiency and the (comparatively) higher status of women (Klein 2021, p. 168).

These slight differences or cultural traits distinguishing the Hakkas from other Han people predisposed them to being receptive to the BM's evangelism. However, neither Christiansen's criticism nor Klein's agreement with Luo's interpretation of the qualities of the Hakkas is comprehensive. To achieve a comprehensive representation and interpret ethnic Hakka characteristics, we should look at both points of view. In fact, the physical environment in which the Hakka lived together with their history shaped their language, their attitude towards family lineage, distribution of work roles, and the [comparatively] higher status of Hakka women.

The Hakka language is the most important factor distinguishing the Hakkas from other Han Chinese groups[6]. Indeed, Wang Dong goes as far as to define the Hakka people as a "dialect group" (D. Wang 2007, p. 35). The number of sounds used in Hakka is 619, in Mandarin, it is 532. The number of tones used in Hakka is 6, in Mandarin it is 5 [including the "neutral" tone] (Eitel 1867b, p. 66). To some extent, their mountainous living environment isolated the Hakka and prevented them from interacting with other communities, and, indeed, the Hakka language has retained more of the characteristics of ancient Chinese than other Chinese dialects. This means that translating the scriptures and liturgical literature into Hakka was the primary means of adapting Christianity to the Hakka culture.

Hakka (kejia 客家) means "guests/migrants", reflecting how the "migrations" of Hakka cultural history shaped the very character of this ethnic group. Because of turmoil and wars, Hakka people engaged in several migrations from North China to South China over a long period of time. Most scholars of the Hakkas and Hakka history agree that the Hakka people migrated five times altogether.[7] Hakka identity and characteristics emerged over the course of these migrations (Wen 2011, p. 38). Ernst Johann Eitel, a BM missionary who pioneered Hakka studies, went as far as to compare the Hakka people with the Israelites of the Old Testament (Piton 1873–1874). In the course of their migrations, the notion of family lineage emerged as crucial to the feeling of cohesion which united the Hakkas and enabled them to overcome adversity. They preserved genealogical records showing their lineage. Notes recording the migratory history of individual families are present in many of these records. After they settled in a new place, it was their lineage that bound them together in their efforts to seize arable land from the local Puntis. A family bound by lineage usually lived together in a large Hakka "roundhouses"[8], or at least in the same village. In the latter case, the village was named after the lineage's family name. Their descendants, however, chose to move to a number of nearby villages. During their frequent migrations, ancestor cult was vital to maintain their sense of lineage. Ancestors symbolized their identity, and the veneration of ancestors was embedded in Hakka social structures, serving as the lynchpin of Hakka moral values. Before embarking on a new migration, the Hakka would dig up the bones of their ancestors and carry them in clay urns to their new place of settlement. Once they had settled in a new place, they would bury their ancestors again. Respect for ancestors was also reflected in the structure of their houses. A family's room commemorating ancestors was situated in the center of any Hakka roundhouse and faced the main entrance to the house (Liu 2003).

It is common knowledge that nature nurtures culture. The mountainous landscape of Hakka country in the northeastern Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province had a profound

influence on the Hakka way of life (Wen 2011, p. 239). Essentially, where there were mountains, there were Hakkas; all Hakkas lived in the mountains. It was said that, for every eight mountains, there was only one piece of arable land. This patch of arable land was not usually sufficient to provide a living for a whole household, so the men of a household had to seek their fortunes elsewhere. The adventurous Hakka spirit which encouraged them to leave their home territory was unique (Luo 1992, p. 106). The typical pattern in Hakka households was that men would work in Hong Kong, or even in southeast Asia, while Hakka women stayed at home to tend to the farming and the family.

This pattern meant that Hakka women enjoyed a higher social status in Hakka communities than their counterparts in other Chinese ethnic groups. The social position of Hakka women distinguished them from the Puntis and Hoklos women, who lived nearby (Eitel 1867a, p. 97). Hakka women were almost as active in outdoors as Hakka men. For example, they carried heavy loads to market, took hay to the brick-kilns, and grew rice. For heavy work, they wore a "Hakka hat". They would spin yarn or make bamboo fans to sell when money was scarce. In Hakka society, women who could not farm were looked down upon (Luo 1992, p. 107). Foot binding, common elsewhere for women of status in Chinese society was unknown in Hakka culture, where women were valued for their practical skills. Because they needed to do heavy work, Hakka women did not engage in foot binding, which meant that their feet were allowed to grow to a natural size. Hakka women were expected to work in the home and in the field, and they earned respect through hard work. An elderly Hakka woman was called "po tai (婆太)" and her birthday was celebrated by a family banquet gathering. The "po tai" in question would wear special embroidered clothes and a phoenix coronet, and was afforded respect from the whole extended family at the celebration. This was quite remarkable in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Chinese women were generally still subject to what would nowadays be regarded as feudal ethics.

4. The Adaptation of the Basel Mission Activities to the Hakka Cultural Context

Corresponding to the Hakka cultural traits mentioned in the third section of this article, this part will retrace how the missionaries of the BM adapted their activities to the Hakka culture. Firstly, it will analyze how missionaries explored the Hakka language and how they translated the Bible into Hakka. Following, the creation of the rural Hakka Christian community based on the Hakka lineage and ancestor worship will be elucidated. Thirdly, it will explain how the BM localized their activities according to the Hakka work role of distribution.

4.1. Hakka Language Appropriation and the Hakka Bible as Basis to Adapt Christianity

Not knowing the Hakka language was an obstacle to the BM missionaries' work, their mother tongue being German, which belongs to the Indo-European group of languages. Mastering Hakka was key to the BM missionaries' efforts to adapt Christianity to Hakka culture. In the 1910s and the 1920s, they began learning Chinese as a first step towards learning Hakka. According to the BM magazine, *The Evangelical Messenger of the Heathens* (*Der Evangelische Heidenbote*), missionaries had to do a Chinese course before embarking on learning Hakka. The language course of 1915 is one example. BM missionaries were required to attend a two-and-a-half-month Chinese course in Pforzheim, Germany, before going to China. Gustav Adolf Gussmann, who had worked in China for 38 years (1869–1908) and his wife, were the tutors for this Chinese course. The course was held four times a year, and records show that young BM missionaries were impressed by Gussmanns' extensive knowledge of Chinese.

Missionaries began their Hakka language learning in China. The BM committee did not expect them to become Sinologists, but they had to demonstrate a good command of the spoken and written language. During their first two years in China, their main task was to learn Hakka from indigenous language teachers. Dai Wenguang, one of the first Hakka Chinese evangelists, taught Hakka to Lechler and Winnes, for example

(Eppler 1900, p. 218; Lutz and Lutz 1998, p. 58; Chappel and Lamarre 2005, p. 22). New missionaries would have annual language tests (Verordnungen für Mission, Gemeinden und Kirchen, BMA-09.1). The Hakka-German dictionary produced by Rudolf Lechler, Theodor Hamberg and their Hakka assitants was the main reference work for anyone learning Hakka. The first BM missionaries to China, in particular Lechler, compiled Hakka language textbooks and dictionaries which used a romanized rendering of Hakka words. This enabled missionaries to learn Hakka through a familiar script. In addition, BM missionaries had to learn about Hakka religious beliefs, and Hakka customs and traditions. Hakka proverbs proved a good basis for gaining insight into the Hakka mindset. BM missionary, Friedrich Lindenmeyer, who worked in Lilang and Kayintschu for 18 years (1901–1919), collected 2603 Hakka proverbs and put them into Romanized Hakka so that other BM missionaries could familiarize themselves with Hakka culture. Some proverbs, such as "a good mother gives birth to good children, and good rice seeds produce good rice", reflected the way of life, belief structure, and mindset of the Hakkas. Lindenmeyer believed that, through proverbs, missionaries could thereby learn not only the Hakka language, but also gain insight into the mindset of the Hakka (Proverbs in Hakka—romanized Hakka, written by Lindenmeyer BMA A-20,22). More importantly, as Best (2021) maintains in *Heavenly Fatherland: German Missionary Culture and Globalization in the Age of Empire*, "the respect and commitment to indigenous languages encouraged German Protestant missionaries to view non-Europeans with a sympathetic mind". Learning Hakka was a means to become familiar enough with Hakka culture to be able to preach Christianity to the Hakkas.

As stated in Section 3, the Hakka language preserves some characteristics of ancient Chinese, and it is different from Chinese Mandarin in its phonology, vocabulary and syntax. Protestant missionaries, such as Robert Morrison, William Milne, and Walter Henry Medhurst, produced several Mandarin translations of the Bible in the 1840s and 1850s. China was highly literate as a society, and it was recognized that the Christian message needed to be delivered in text form to this sophisticated civilization (Irene et al. 1999). Furthermore, the Hakka Bible was vital for the successful transmission of the BM's message of Christianity to the Hakka. Jost Oliver Zetzsche concludes from his research into Bible translations by Protestant missionaries that "the most important factor in the Chinese missionary Bible translation was missionaries' changing understanding and perception of the Chinese language" (Zetzsche 1999, p. 363). Coinciding with the Zetzsche's claim, the BM's translation of the Bible into Hakka was divided into two phases which took into account the progress the missionaries were making with the Hakka language.

In the first phase, the missionaries produced a Bible using a Latin alphabet developed in the 1850s by Karl Richard Lepsius (1810–1884), a German Egyptologist, for transcribing non-European languages. Rudolf Lechler devoted many of his 52 years (1847–1899) in China to translating the Bible into Hakka (He 1946). He translated the gospel of Matthew into colloquial Hakka using a Romanized script (Schlatter 1911, p. 203). Then, he translated the rest of the New Testament into Hakka, with the help of Philip Winnes and Charles Piton. This New Testament translation was completed in 1884 (Klein 2002, p. 183). Hakka assistants, Dai Wenguang, Kong Ayun, and Li Shin-en reviewed and revised the translation (Lutz and Lutz 1998, p. 58; Chappel and Lamarre 2005, p. 22). The BM committee was against the Chinese-character version of the Hakka Bible because they regarded it as "a specifically pagan script (eine spezifisch heidenische Schrift), and the Lepsius script was preferred as a means of freeing the Hakka from the shackles of characters" (Eppler 1900, p. 230). When the BM began its missionary work in China, the Lepsius script was adapted so as to be accessible to the Hakka people. The romanized Hakka Bible was easy for Hakka people to read if they had a good knowledge of the script (ibid., p. 324). Students at the BM mission schools were able to read it within a year, even the less able students. This would not have been possible with a script dependent on Chinese characters (ibid., p. 230). A Chinese scholar of biblical translations, Zhao (2019), believes that the romanization of Chinese for biblical translations enabled missionaries to preach to the illiterate. The efforts

of the BM missionaries to create a Lepsius-Hakka version of the Bible enabled the BM missionaries to teach illiterate Hakka people to read.

However, when the BM missionaries learnt more about the culture and needs of the Hakka, they recognized the correlation between Chinese and the Hakka language and decided to create a character-script version of the Hakka colloquial Bible. The evangelical activities of the BM worked as a learning process for them. It involved not only collaboration between the Christians and the native mission workers, but also the negotiations between the BM missionaries and the mission leaders (Klein 2002, p. 37). After interacting with the Hakka for some time, the BM missionaries, Charles Piton in particular, found that it was impossible to ignore the everyday importance of Chinese characters for the Hakka. Educated Chinese used a complex character system. Both Chinese classical literature and government documents were written in Chinese characters. Although the BM mission-school graduates had gone through the Lepsius training at the BM schools, they preferred the Wen-li version of the Bible, which was in classical Chinese and used Chinese characters (Lutz and Lutz 1998, p. 234). BM missionaries complained constantly about the committee's rejection of Chinese characters, which forced the committee to give into the Chinese [Hakka] demands in the summer of 1877 (Eppler 1900, p. 231). Lechler and his colleagues were eventually permitted to publish materials using Chinese characters. Meanwhile, translating the Bible into colloquial Hakka using Chinese characters was possible because Piton had succeeded in using them to transliterate colloquial Hakka. People only had to know 3000 (not 6000) characters to read the transliterated colloquial Hakka New Testament (ibid., p. 324). For those colloquial Hakka words for which no characters existed, he "adopted either unofficial characters known through publications in colloquial Cantonese, or used characters with an identical, or similar sounds to the words in question, then added the character mouth radical '口' to the left" [of each character to indicate that this related to the pronunciation] (Lutz and Lutz 1998, p. 234; Chappel and Lamarre 2005, pp. 324–26). Other missionaries who worked among Chinese minority groups, such as the Jingpo people, the Miao people, and the Yi people, made a significant contribution by creating characters especially for these minorities in their translations of the Bible (Zhao 2019, p. 163). The BM missionaries created many characters in their translations into Hakka and left a valuable linguistic corpus for future research into Hakka. A complete colloquial Hakka Bible using Chinese characters was first published in 1916 (Klein 2002, p. 182).

As indicated above, moving from a romanized version to a character-based version represented an attempt by the BM to adapt Christianity to the Hakka cultural context. In terms of the character script, verse 1:7 of the Acts of the Apostles (BMA II a.11) serves as a good example of how BM missionaries used the Hakka language. The style of language, the terminology, the principles underlying the translation, and the public reception would be the criteria for examining the further translation of Bible into other dialects (Zetzsche 1999, pp. 82–100). The verse in question is "it is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority". Most of the Hakka people were illiterate peasants, and colloquial Hakka was more accessible to them. With regard to vocabulary, the key term "father" was translated into Hakka as "a pa (亚爸)", and "you" as "ngi teu (禺兜)". To translate "teu" as "兜"is an example of how the BM went as far as "creating" colloquial Hakka words for their biblical translation. "Teu" is the plural marker in the Hakka. Basel missionaries borrowed the homophonous Mandarin Chinese character "兜", meaning "bag" or "helmet" in Mandarin Chinese to represent the Hakka "teu", although they are semantically unrelated. In Hakka Syntax, "m (唔)" usually appears as a negative particle before the verb (Zhang and Zhuang 2001). In the BM's Acts of the Apostles, "m" was added to precede "ti (知)", which means "know" in Mandarin Chinese, thus signifying "not to know". Semantically, "tsa (揸)" means "to grab something" in Hakka. Literally, "tsa khen" (揸权) means "to grip onto the authority". So, "set by his authority" was translated as "tsa khen". Thus, the whole verse was "koi teu sî khi, he a pa tsa khen loi thin tsit, ngi teu m s ti (该兜时期，系亚爸揸权来定唧，禺兜唔使知)". There were many other very Hakka expressions, for instance, HE was translated as "ki (佢)" and "why" was translated

as "tso mak kai (做乜嘅)". Nida (1964) concludes from his own Bible translation that a translation using dynamic equivalence results in natural expression and relates better to the listener/reader in terms of his or her own culture. In orientating their translations to the Hakka mindset and ensuring the naturalness of translated expression, the BM missionaries were, indeed, using the notion of dynamic equivalence to some extent. They wanted the Hakkas to relate and react to the Bible in the same way as Westerners had originally related and react to it. During the author's field work in the Hakka region[9], Wen Haiqing, a Hakka pastor in the city of Heyuan (Heyuan 河源), confirmed that the BM's Hakka Bible tended towards the Hakka dialect of Meizhou (Meizhou 梅州). Hakka Christians were grateful to the Basel missionaries because they "helped to create a unified, standardised 'beautiful Hakka church dialect', so that all Hakkas [irrespective of their dialect] could communicate with one another" (Constable 2013, p. 36).

4.2. Hakka Family Lineage and the Creation of a Rural Hakka Christian Community

As indicated in Section 2, the BM's main aim in China was to create a rural Hakka Christian community. Understanding the nature and importance of family lineage had proved vital for the earlier Jesuit missionaries, and also proved vital for the later Protestant missionaries in breaking down any resistance among the native population to embrace Christianity. The BM's rural Hakka Christian community was underpinned by attention to and recognition of the importance of Hakka family lineage.

Family lineage and village communities were important as social networks for creating Catholic Christian communities in the earlier period of the Qing dynasty (Zhang 2021). Hakka people typically lived in rural areas, and family lineage was an essential element in their self-identity. Around 1850, the BM missionaries experienced a spate of robberies and hostility from the local residents in the lowland regions in the Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province. As a result, these missionaries fled to Hong Kong. Jiang Jueren, a former member of the Chinese Union, suggested to Lechler that his hometown of Lilang would be a suitable place for BM evangelical work and, indeed, a mission station (Zhong 1894). He "repeatedly expressed the wish that a house could be rented for me [Lechler] in their village of Lilang" (Luo 1967, p. 7). Jiang played an important part when the BM began its work in the lowland regions. The Lin family, one of the Hakka Christian families which influenced Chinese Christianity and modern Chinese education, came from Pukak (buji 布吉), a subsidiary station to Lilang (ibid., pp. 5–6). Lin Zhengao was baptised by Hamberg, and the members of his family were the earliest Hakka Christian converts in Pukak. His son, Lin Qilian, graduated from Lilang Seminary, and subsequently devoted his whole life to evangelical work with the BM. Lin Shanyuan, a member of the third generation of the family, became the pastor of the local Hakka church.

Similarly, the family lineage of another Hakka catechist, Zhang Fuxing, helped the BM to overcome local hostility to establish itself in the highland region of northeastern Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province. In 1852, Zhang Fuxing returned to his hometown of Tschongtshun (zhangcun 樟村), to work as an evangelical preacher in 1852. Zhang Fuxing's extended family lived in nearby villages. Tschongtshun became the first BM mission station and base in the inland Hakka region of Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province. Zhang Fuxing encouraged a family member, Xu Fuguang, to convert to Christianity. In turn, Xu helped Zhang to gain access as a preacher to his (Xu's) village, and Xu sold Christian literature to his brother-in-law, Lai Xinglian. Subsequently, Zhang Fuxing, Xu Fuguang and Lai Xinglian became leading itinerant preachers for the BM in inland Hakka areas. Today, the descendants of early Hakka Christian families from the region still lead local churches. For instance, the sixth-generation descendants of Zhang Fuxing lead local churches in Tschongtshun.[10]

Tschongtshun became the centre for the BM's evangelical work in northeastern Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province. From 1926 on, Laolong (laolong 老隆), on the East River, served as the BM's local headquarters (Witschi 1965). Thanks to the family connections of the Hakka catechists, the evangelical work of the BM in the inland Hakka areas spread

to both the lowland (Unterland) and the highland (Oberland) regions. The lowland regions were made up of Lilang, Pukak, Longheu (langkou 浪口), and Tschonghangkang (zhangkengjing 樟坑径), which were near to Hong Kong and found along the coast of Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province. The highland regions were the inland mountain Hakka regions of northeastern Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province.

The connections produced by Hakka family lineage, so characteristics of the Hakka way of life, were responsible for the spread of Christianity. However, Hakka family ancestor worship stood in direct contradiction to Christian monotheistic beliefs and doctrines. In Corinthians 10:20, Christians are urged to reject idolatry. Because "pagan sacrifices are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part at both the Lord's table and the table of demons" (Hong Kong Bible Society 2012). Apart from the biblical decree, George Minamiki attributes the predicament of missionaries to something else. Missionaries came from a world where there was an enormous, and at times an unbridgeable, separation between the living and the dead and between the sacred and the profane (Minamiki 1985, p. 11). In the Hakka cultural context, how to justify the ancestor cult as bridge between descendants and forefathers was a fundamental question for the BM missionaries.

The scriptures decree that Christians must not worship "demons" or partake of food deriving from sacrifice. The fundamental problem was the symbolic significance of objects and gestures involved in rituals (ibid., p. 206). In the 17th century, Matteo Ricci, a famous Jesuits missionary to China, maintained that, in the cultural context of China, rituals associated with ancestor worship were indicative of reverence for those ancestors and the sacrificial food was an expression of this reverence (Ricci and Trigault 2019). For the Chinese, the issue was whether those who converted to Christianity were also expected to adopt Western culture (Mungello 1994, p. 3).

Faced with this apparent incompatibility, the BM decreed that Hakka Christians should not put bread, silver coins or other objects into coffins, and that a funeral should not be used as an excuse to organise a larger meal (Verordnungen für Mission, Gemeinden und Kirchen, BMA-09.1). However, as discussed in connection with the translation of the Bible, the BM's evangelisation of the Hakkas was a learning process. Later, the missionaries, Heinrich Ziegler and Johannes Dilger noted that ancestor worship was significantly more complex when it came to the Hakka cultural context. They made great efforts to interpret the symbolic meaning of the objects and gestures as used on specific occasions in ancestor worship rituals, and the BM committee analyzed their findings in detail in order to draw up a code of behaviour for Hakka Christians.

When there were funerals or banquets to celebrate the birth of boys, Hakka Christians were permitted by the BM to worship their ancestors (Komittee Protokoll 29. September 1899). The BM committee made a clear distinction between ancestor worship and idolatry. Filial piety as reflected in ancestor worship was, according to the BM, a social virtue that gave stability and permanence to Hakka families and recognized Hakka family lineage. The BM committee thought that, if they banned ancestor worship entirely, the Hakka would be reluctant to convert to Christianity. The BM committee therefore came up with a compromise interpretation of ancestor worship vis à vis biblical doctrines, which was the BM's way of supporting Hakka belief in family lineage. The key question for the BM committee was whether the Hakka Christians could actually rid themselves of the notion of ancestor worship. If they could, eating sacrificial meat during festivities connected with funerals meant that they were simply enjoying a meat-based dishes to which they were entitled by virtue of lineage affiliation. Those Christians who had not been present at the graveyard (i.e., had not engaged in ancestor worship) during a funeral were permitted to eat the sacrificial meat from ancestral property and also the meat from animals slaughtered in honour of the ancestors. Attending a family ritual and traditional festive gatherings enabled Hakka Christians to maintain their family affiliation and share in their banquets connected with family lineage. All this means that the BM were adapting the doctrines of

Christianity to Hakka culture. In other words, the BM had interpreted Christian thought in such a way that Hakka Christians could avoid any identity conflict by the BM's adaptation of Christianity to their culture. Hakka Christians felt they were able to maintain their Hakka identity and still practice Christianity. The BM's accommodation of the Hakka notion of lineage had made this possible.

4.3. Hakka Work Role Distribution and the Sustainability of the Rural Hakka Christian Community

Covell (1995) concludes from his case studies of the Christians among the Chinese minority that "a missionary must take people to where they are in their understanding and their life situations and help them move along to a point where the gospel message and its lifestyle make sense". Teaching the Hakkas how to reconcile their lives with the message of the Bible came second only to creating a rural Hakka Christian community. In other words, the sustainability of the rural Hakka Christian community was dependent on how the BM missionaries motivated the local residents to interpret their lives according to the precepts of Christianity. As analyzed in Section 2 above, Hakka work role distribution prescribed that the husband should try to find work and earn for the family in Hong Kong or overseas, while his wife should stay at home and took care of their extended family and the farming of their land. The following aims to set out how the BM made use of this work role distribution to sustain the Hakka rural Christian community.

Elisabeth Oehler-Heimerdinger's "Bible women" (see below) in Tschonghangkang is a possible illustration of how traditional Hakka work role distribution influenced the BM's evangelical agenda. Elisabeth Oehler-Heimerdinger was the "mission bride"[11] of Wilhelm Oehler, the inspector of the BM to China after working in mission station Tschonghangkang. From 1909 to 1920, the couple worked together in Tschonghangkang. By then, every extended family household in Tschonghangkang had one or two men working in port cities in America, Australia, Britain, and Indonesia. As a result, many wives were acutely lonely, and some were even abandoned by their husbands. In such writings of hers as *What Awaits the Ho Moi: The Fate of Chinese Women (Der Weg der Ho Moi: Lebensschicksal chinesischer Frauen)*[12], she depicted the sorrowful lives of Hakka women. In addition to taking care of the missionary household, missionising to women and supervising the activities of the Bible women were the most important parts of Oehler-Heimerdinger's work (Oehler 1959).

Oehler-Heimerdinger organised local women, creating an "association of young women and girls". These women and girls were known as the "Bible women". With the help of her Hakka assistant, she trained the "Bible women" in Christian storytelling and preaching. On behalf of the BM, the "Bible women" would contact the home-bound Hakka wives. Carrying everything they needed in large, brightly coloured cloths, the "Bible women" went to non-Christian villages, trying to talk to the women who lived there. When Hakka women complained about their concerns, for example, their husbands' infidelities, that their sons lived abroad, or expressed their concern because they had no sons, the "Bible women" were adept at talking to them and providing them with succor and advice based on their own experience (Oehler-Heimerdinger 1925). The "Bible women" would give them comfort, recounting the story of Adam and Eve, because it seemed that Hakka women were quite interested in it. From 1883 to 1902, the number of converted Chinese in Tschonghangkang amounted to just 24. In 1913, a total of 129 adults and 37 children were baptised in Tschonghangkang (Schlatter 1916, p. 386). Oehler-Heimerdinger's evangelical strategy was universal among the BM female missionaries in the mountainous Hakka regions. Gertrud Schaeppi, a BM female missionary was responsible for the itinerant preaching to the Hakka women scattered in the different villages in Lenphin (lianping 连平). "Bible women" there were still ill-educated. Further, they themselves could not read, and no one taught them to do so (Schaeppi 1943, p. 70). Schaeppi organised a group of "Bible women" modeled on Oehler-Heimerdinger's to teach Hakka women in Lenphin to "pass on what they have received" (ibid.).

In the general Synod of the BM in China in 1924, BM missionaries decided to formally set up a Bible Women's School in Tschhonglok (changle 长乐), which was built in 1925

(Ärtzlichen und Frauenmission BMA-3.28). Hakka women aged between 35 and 45 could register at the school. The Hakka focus on the domestic environment inspired the BM to designate a "house mother" (Sill 2010) as the central symbol of the BM's Christian womanhood in the Hakka context. Relying on the Bible and church history, Chinese assistants, Wan Enhong, Chen Tianle and Zhang De'en, edited the pamphlet called *Nvtu Jing*《女徒镜》(*Mirror for the Female Disciples*) in colloquial Hakka with a view to cultivate the notion of the virtuous "house mother". It was a guideline according to which Hakka women could conduct how they should behave on a daily basis (BMA. III. c. 51, p. 2).

These guidelines made clear that the BM's work among Hakka women was designed to develop the profile of domestic role of women. The BM's work among Hakka women was different from that of US missions in China. US female missionaries in China in the 20th century encouraged Chinese women to rebel against doing housework (Hunter 1984). However, through the *Mirror for the Female Disciples*, the BM encouraged Hakka women to be good wives. It included twelve doctrines. Four of the doctrines focused on how to be a good Christian, and the others pertained to family life. In the doctrines relating to family life, Hakka women were encouraged to respect and love their husbands, treat their parents-in-law with due respect, raise children in a loving environment, try their utmost to help anybody visiting from afar (BMA. III. c. 51, pp. 3–8). Hakka women were being encouraged through the BM's "Bible women" and the *Mirror for Female Disciples* to play a more significant role in both the household and the community. In this way, the BM's recognition and appreciation of the Hakka women's situation, as well as the conversion of Hakka women to Christianity, helped to sustain the notion of the Hakka rural Christian community.

In terms of the male role, Hakka men were accustomed to seeking work away from home (e.g., in Hong Kong, the USA). From the 1850s, there was a cooli trade between China and Cuba. This resulted in widespread migration among people from the coastal areas of southeast China to overseas destinations in search of well-paid work. The BM helped Hakka Christians to emigrate to the West Indies, Guyana, California and Australia, especially to the North Borneo and the Sandwich Islands which now belong to the Hawaiian Islands. BM missionaries, Rudolf Lechler in particular, maintained close contact with Hakka Christians scattered all over the world. BM Hakka rural Christian communities transformed into "diaspora communities" to relocate overseas.

In 1859, 67 Hakka Christians from Hong Kong and 10 from Lilang emigrated to British West Indies. The sugar plantations there were short of workers following the abolition of slavery, and British immigration policy favoured employing Christians and their families (Schlatter 1916, p. 308). As a result of this widespread emigration from China, the BM lost a considerable number of Hakka converts to Christianity, having renounced ancestor worship and what the BM saw as idolatry. North Borneo came to be the most important among the "diaspora mission fields" of the BM. Around 1880 and 1890, BM Hakka Christians arrived in considerable numbers in North Borneo as free labour. As the British Society for Propagation of Gospel had appointed a reverend missionary to take care of the English-speaking people in North Borneo, the BM initially put the care of the Hakka emigrants to him in his hands. Because of the increase in the number of Hakka emigrants and their spiritual needs, the BM developed its own Christian communities in North Borneo. In 1883, the BM was "the first" mission to open its own church for the Chinese Christians in Kudat [in North Borneo] (Wong 2000). Around 1903, three quarters of Chinese Christians in North Borneo were associated with the BM (*Der Evangelische Heidenbote* 1903, p. 89). In 1906, the BM sent missionary Wilhelm Ebert to establish a mission station in Sabah, North Borneo (Schlatter 1916, p. 420). By about 1908, some 800 Christians were settled in six communities, and new churches were built at a cost of 4000 US dollars (ibid.). Most of the Chinese living in Pontianak and Singtawang in West Borneo were Hakka people. The BM took over responsibility for the care of the Chinese communities in Pontianak and Singtawang after the sudden departure of the former (Methodist) missionaries in 1933 (*Der Evangelische Heidenbote* 1939, p. 18). Hans Bart, a BM missionary from Bern, Switzerland, worked

in these communities with his wife, supported by two Chinese pastors, Lo Schau-on in Pontianak, and Lo En-zhu in Singkavang (ibid.).

The Sandwich Islands of modern-day Hawaii were also attractive to the Hakka Christians. Hakka emigrants commonly worked as plantation workers, cooks, laundresses and nursemaids. The Hakka emigrants to the Sandwich Islands were unlike their compatriots in North Borneo in that they took the initiative to establish their own churches. Some of the emigrants were Lilang Seminary graduates and staff from the BM mission stations in China. A former graduate who worked as preacher in Kohala in the northwestern part of the Sandwich Islands wrote to Lechler in 1879, "I have been in Kohala for eight months, and there are 26 Chinese Christians here . . . my work has not been in vain for there are seven candidates for baptism" (*Der Evangelische Heidenbote* 1879, p. 52). Chinese Christians in Honolulu raised 5250 US dollars and established a church in 1881 (Lechler 1887, p. 21). An elder and the deacon of this church were BM Hakka Christians. The elder was Li a Tschhong, and the son of a BM Hakka deacon in China called Li Tschin Kau. He had had a British education in Hong Kong and was appointed by the Hawaiian government as a Chinese court interpreter in 1883 (Lechler 1887, p. 22). Lam en Luk was the deacon in question, and he had worked at the Chinese mission station of Tschhonglok.

Emigrant Hakka Christians maintained their contact with the BM in China as follows. A large number demonstrated their loyalty to the BM by sending money to Hakka churches in China on an annual basis. Hakka Christians in Honolulu collected 150 US dollars and asked Tschinhin-Si, a Hakka Christian, to forward the money, together with a letter, to Lechler when he returned to China in 1879 (*Der Evangelische Heidenbote* 1879, p. 52). In the year of Lechler's departure from the Sandwich Islands in 1886, the money they sent to the BM mission fields in China even amounted to as much as 2000 US dollars (Schlatter 1911, p. 185). Ku(Goo) kim, an elder of the Chinese church in Honolulu, returned to his Hakka home of Meizhou in 1892 to build a school and a church (Lutz 2009, p. 145). BM Christians in North Borneo tried to help needy people in China, even though their business interests had suffered significantly from the decline in rubber price and the trade standstill following the Sino-Japanese War. In 1939, a theatre performance was organised at Singkawang's playhouse in North Borneo, and almost 10,000 Swiss Francs were raised in a single evening (*Der Evangelische Heidenbote* 1939, p. 18). In fact, BM's emigrants were still dependent on the BM missionaries for spiritual advice, and they wrote to Lechler to share the joys and regrets about their emigrant life. One emigrant to Georgetown in California went as far as writing to Lechler to update his life and ask whether he should move to the Sandwich Islands in order to preach there (*Der Evangelische Heidenbote* 1881, p. 86). Hakka Christians from Hawaii invited and paid for the Lechlers (husband and wife) to visit them during their 1887 furlough, and 80 Hakka Christians gathered to welcome them (Schlatter 1911, p. 184). The BM Seminary established at the mission station in Lilang sent graduates to overseas Hakka churches. Marie Lechler, Rudolf Lechler's wife, had founded a girls' school in Hong Kong, and some of its graduates married Hakka Christians. For example, one graduate of Marie Lechler's girls' school married Lam en Luk, the deacon of the Chinese church in Honolulu. The Lechlers even brought two graduates, Fa Yung and Men Yin, who were engaged to Hakka emigrants in Hawaii, on their furlough visit in 1886 (Lechler 1887, p. 2; Lutz and Lutz 1998, p. 145). One of Marie Lechler's students who had emigrated to Honolulu recalled in 1931 how Lecher and his wife saved her from a Hong Kong brothel at the age of 10 and took care of her (A Letter from Honolulu, 20 Oct., 1931. BMA-10.38.13). It is clear that there was a good relationship of trust between BM Hakka emigrants and Lechler.

Considering the above, the author demonstrates in this article that BM missionaries were flexible enough to adapt to the Hakka mindset and Hakka beliefs, and reached out to Hakka emigrants also. In his research into the Hoklos, Christian emigrants to Southeast Asia, Zhu Feng finds that the Methodist Episcopal Church provided support for Hoklo Christians to enable them to emigrate to Southeast Asia and find somewhere else to live when their home was under threat (Zhu 2009). Similarly, the BM supported Hakka people to emigrate from their homeland to overseas and to 'export' their Hakka lifestyle and beliefs.

Most importantly, Christianity helped Hakka emigrants to integrate with local Christian societies in their destination countries (Constable 2013, p. 201). Even if emigration marked out this ethnic group, Hakka Christian communities overseas offered a sanctuary for new emigrants from the Hakka homeland, who had to become accustomed to completely new surroundings.

5. Conclusions

Combining findings from German and Chinese materials with data from the author's field work, this article follows the emergence of the BM mission enterprise in China, and it gives a holistic view of how the BM adapted its activities and attitude to take account of Hakka culture. As Jessie Gregory Lutz maintains: "on the fringes of the Confucian mainstream, the Hakka were often considered more open than other Han Chinese to heterodox teachings: to popular and Buddhist sects, to Christianity, and, indeed, Taiping Christianity" (Lutz 2009, p. 142). Examining the BM's activities among the Hakka, the author agrees with Lutz in part. Both parties (the BM and the Hakkas) were constantly at pains to accommodate each other. It was a matter of constant negotiation for both parties, and very importantly, BM missionaries learnt about Hakka culture and adapted Christianity to it. They responded to the culture of the Hakkas and created a unique rural Hakka Christian community. Their flexibility in adapting their evangelical activities can be explained by the characteristics of the BM itself. The BM was a mission which targeted people from the lower social classes (Tong 2002). Before the World War I, 60 to 70 percent of the BM missionaries came from Baden-Württemberg, in southwestern Germany (Jenkins 1980). Most of these German missionaries came from a traditional village background (Jenkins 1989); they were farmers and craftsmen before they embarked on missionary work (Schlatter 1965, p. 18). This meant that there was considerable common ground between typical BM missionaries and the Hakkas they preached to. This gave them a natural empathy with the mentality and way of life of the Hakkas. Through Hakka emigration, Hakka Christianity then expanded to places such as North Borneo, the Sandwich Islands, California, and Australia. The relationship was truly interactive, each party benefiting from and accommodating the other, and the culture of the BM and its global mission enterprise was enriched by contact with the Hakkas.

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Notes

1 Tiedemann does not include any Catholic missionary societies in his account. Among the 254 missions, four missions were Japanese.

2 For more detailed research findings of Chinese scholars, please refer to the following works: Li, Chi Kong. 1993. *Symposium on Christianity and Modern Chinese Culture*. Taipei: Cosmic Light Press; Tong, Wing Sze. 2002. *Study of a Hakka Mission in Southern China: from the Basel Mission to the Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Chinese Study Center on Chinese Religion & Culture; Cai, Huiyao. 2006. Essay on the History of Spreading Christianity in Shenzhen in the Late Qing Dynasty. *Bulletin of Historical Research*. no. 36:131–152; The Study of the Basel Mission and Guangdong Hakka Immigration to Southeast Asia. *Journal of Shantou University*, no. 06:31–34; Leng, Jianbo. 2014; Luo, Yinan. 2017. *Belief Identity and National Identity: the Independence Process*

of the Basel Mission in the Hakka Area of Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province. Ph.D. dissertation, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China.

3 The Basel Mission Archives is located at Missionsstrasse 21, Basel, Switzerland. They contain reports, historical photographic records and maps of the BM mission fields. A catalogue of the archives is available at https://www.bmarchives.org (accessed on 10 July 2022).

4 Hamberg's battle with Gützlaff over the Chinese Union, please see (Schlyter 2008, pp. 96–138).

5 "Ich will euch Geld und Opium geben, ihr gebt mir zweckmäßige Lügen; dadurch mache ich mir einen Namen, und an Geld wird es nicht fehlen. Das sind die Grundzüge einer Mission, die er mehr oder weniger wissentlich treibt. Wir wollen nicht seinem Beispiel folgen" (Schlatter 1916, pp. 280–81).

6 The Han people are the majority in China. The concept of Han people came into being during the Han dynasty (B.C. 202-A.D.220), when China was unified. The ancestors of the Han lived in the interior of China, but they also inter-married with the neighbouring minorities on the Chinese border.

7 Rebellions and wars were responsible for the first three times. Minority groups on the Chinese border attacked central China at the end of the Eastern Jing Dynasty, and the Han people of central China fled from their hometowns and went to the region in the south of Henan and Hubei. Then, due to the Huangchao Rebellion (874–883), they migrated from Henan and Hubei to southeastern Jiangxi and southeastern Fujian. In 1276, they were forced to migrate further south several times, because the Mongols overran the whole of China. Finally, the Hakkas arrived in what is now the northeastern part of Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province and settled there, believing that the mountains would protect them from wars. This region is seen as the Hakka homeland, and the city of Kayintschu (Meizhou 梅州) is sometimes even called the hometown of the Hakkas. However, the Puntis -local to the region- saw them as intruders and the two groups were constantly at war with each other over the limited arable land available and other resources, such as eligibility to attend the imperial examination. Later, because of their increasing population and the limited arable land available in the mountain regions where they lived, a new weave of migration began. They moved from northeast Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province to Sichuan, Guangxi, Taiwan, and Hainan island. Some even emigrated overseas.

8 In Chinese, Lung Wai housing (weilongwu 围龙屋). It is circular, multi-storey, fortress-like dwellings designed for defensive purposes with walls of adobe or tamped earth which were almost a metre thick.

9 A visit to the Hakka church in Heyuan city. Date and time: 31 January 2018, 9:00–11:00.

10 The author found this out during her field work in Tschongolk on 28 January 2018. She visited the commemorative ancestral room of Zhang Fuxing and interviewed Zhang Weiwen and Zhang Renhe, who belong, respectively, to the fourth and fifth generations of Christians in Zhang's family.

11 The BM prescribed that a missionary should search for a bride and had regulations governing their marriage. A male missionary could apply to the BM committee to find a bride for him in the mission's home base. The bride could communicate with missionaries in BM's mission fields in China, India, Ghana and Cameroon by writing to them. As a pre-requisite to becoming a mission bride she had to pass the examination of the BM. Thereafter, she could travel to one of the mission fields to marry her missionary bridegroom. More information for the mission bride may be found in Konard, Dagmar. 2013. *Missionsbräute: Pietistinnen des 19. Jahrhunderts in der Basler Mission*. Münster: Waxmann Verlag GmbH.

12 For publication information for the book, see Oehler-Heimerdinger. 1932. *Der Weg der Ho Moi: Lebensschicksal chinesischer Bibelfrauen in China: Bilder aus dem chinesischen Frauenleben*. Stuttgart and Basel: Missionsverlag G. m. b. H.

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Article

Bringing Chinese Christianity to Southeast Asia: Constructing Transnational Chinese Evangelicalism across China and Southeast Asia, 1930s to 1960s

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Abstract: This paper takes its cue from studies in Chinese religious transnationalism to offer an interpretation of how a group of Chinese evangelical leaders constructed their visions and versions of transnational Christianity across China and Southeast Asia through the 1930s and 1960s. Two representative organisations are examined. The first concerns the transnational network of Chinese evangelistic bands that the prominent revivalist-evangelist John Sung established across China and Southeast Asia in the 1930s and 1940s. The bands' sources reveal how they played a key role in imbuing a transnational landscape and communal sense of spiritual revival into the imaginations of the Chinese churches. The second case evaluates the cross-border institutional-building work of the Evangelize China Fellowship, a major transnational Chinese evangelical grouping founded by Sung's colleague Andrew Gih after World War II. The analysis reveals how the Fellowship utilised a faith-based developmental agenda to promote Christianity among the overseas Chinese communities across Southeast Asia, Taiwan and Hong Kong in the 1950s to 1960s. In all, paying attention to Chinese Christian imaginaries of Southeast Asia enables us to understand how they formed faith adherents across Asia into transnational ethno-religious communities.

Keywords: Chinese Christianity; evangelicalism; John Sung; Andrew Gih; religious transnationalism

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1. Introduction

In Tan Chee-Beng's volume on Chinese transnational networks, he highlights that transnationalism has been a 'very significant dimension' since the Chinese people began to migrate to non-Chinese lands as they created networks which allowed them to maintain ties and contact with their relatives in China. Scholars have only been able to recover these aspects of Chinese history when they began to adopt transnationalism as an analytical lens for their research.[1] According to Julia Huang, when research in Chinese transnationalism was still in its infancy during the 1960s, religion was one of its main areas of focus (J. C. Huang 2003, p. 214). By the 1970s, with the opening up of the sub-field of Chinese diaspora studies by Wang Gungwu, scholars shifted their emphases to secular issues such as patterns of migration and re-migration, networks, identity, and the political, intellectual, and cultural aspects of state-led transnationalism (J. Huang 2010, pp. 1–21).

Within these studies, although religion formed part of the analyses, it was not the central theme. It was only around the early 2000s that the study of religion re-emerged as a primary area of interest among scholars of Chinese transnationalism, many whom have drawn on 'dynamic', de-territorialised approaches to analyse Chinese religious transnationalism. Julia Huang explains that their focus was on the multi-dimensional aspects and consequences of religious border crossings rather than constructions of Chinese religions. Another concern was religious adherents who saw themselves as 'social actors' knowledgeable of 'transnational conditions [who] . . . engaged themselves with border-crossing organisational and individual practice' (J. C. Huang 2003, p. 215). Tan, on the other hand,

has promoted the study of religious affiliations after migration and the transnationalising of these affiliations (Tan 2015, p. xxx).

A relevant study which exemplifies this dynamic approach is Bernard Formoso's examination of De Jiao ('Teaching of Virtues'), a syncretistic sect which emerged out of the Chaoshan region as a reaction against the Second Sino–Japanese war and secular materialism in China. Formoso shows how the sect adjusted its vision of the restoration of the Chinese civilisation through Confucian ethics to the Southeast Asian contexts by focusing on the preservation of the 'cohesiveness and the cultural identity of the local Chinese communities'. Application of this strategy however differed according to country, such as in Thailand, where De Jiao groups emphasised the retention of useful practices over the preservation of Chinese culture in order to adapt to the nation's assimilationist policies (Formoso 2010, pp. 1, 54 and chp. 2).

Some historians have also drawn on a dynamic approach to reconstruct the histories of different religious actors and their transnational networks. Kenneth Dean has surveyed the expansion of the Chinese temple network and the establishment of independent Buddhist monasteries from Fujian to Southeast Asia from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. He shows how these Southeast Asian Chinese institutions can be seen as 'informal, transpersonal, translocal, networked religious orders' due to their maintenance of ties with temples in Southeastern China and their 'provision of ritual frameworks' to the local Chinese communities (Dean 2019, pp. 104–12, 118). Jack Meng-Tat Chia's recent study of the transnational careers of three Chinese Buddhist monks in maritime Southeast Asia shows how they became 'agents of knowledge production' in localising and 'reconfiguring Buddhist ideas through contestation and negotiation'. One of the monks, Chuk Mor, became a prominent promoter of a 'this-worldly' and 'orthodox' version of Chinese Buddhism for postcolonial Malaysia that was 'based on the principles of Human Life Buddhism'. Chuk Mor's efforts were oriented towards reforming the syncretic, other-worldly practices of the Malaysian Chinese Buddhists and creating a new Chinese Malaysian Buddhist identity that was based on his version of Buddhist modernism (Chia 2020, pp. 3, 46–76, 158).

Over the last twenty years, studies on Chinese Christian transnationalism—which make up a small proportion of the largely China-centred scholarship on Chinese Christianity—have utilised similar dynamic approaches to re-construct the different ways in which the Chinese transnationalised their faith. They have focused on the autonomy and agency of Chinese Christians in actualising their faith in transnational spaces. These studies can be considered as a transnational correction of the dominant China-centred or 'particularist' approach in studies in Chinese Christianity (See, Lian 2013, p. 2; Cabrita and Maxwell 2017, pp. 7–14). This latter approach mainly examines Christianity as a local religion in relation to mainland China, with little attention to transnational interactions, connections and affiliations. Joseph Tse-Hei Lee and Jean DeBernardi have contributed to this dynamic interpretation through their investigations of nineteenth-century Chinese Protestant networks. In Lee's analysis, he shows how Chaozhou Chinese who had converted to Baptist Christianity while working in Siam returned home to evangelise their friends and relatives long before the Baptist missionaries arrived (Lee 2003, pp. 21–38). DeBernardi considers how evangelical ideas and practices were circulated through letters and publications in Singapore and Malaya, and how Brethren missionaries and their Chinese counterparts sought to strengthen transnational community ties for the disparate Brethren communities there. It was through these avenues that global news about revival and Pentecostal movements arrived, often stirring up revivals led by the diasporic Christians.[2] Some studies in the history of Catholicism in China have also examined the transnational movements and global imaginations of the missionaries and Chinese believers (Brockey 2008; Menegon 2009; Sachsenmaier 2018). Recently, new research has emerged on Catholic work among the diasporic Chinese during the Cold War (Taylor 2022, pp. 151–69; Tan 2022).

This paper therefore aims to advance the study of Chinese Christianity as a transnational movement by examining how individuals introduced and promoted their organisational models of evangelicalism in Southeast Asia during the 1930s to 1960s.[3] I analyse

the organisations which were founded by two of the most influential Chinese revivalist-evangelists in the twentieth century—John Sung (Song Shangjie, 1901–1944) and Andrew Gih (Ji Zhiwen, 1901–1985). The former has been characterised as the 'single most powerful figure in Chinese revivalism in the mid-1930s', while the latter enjoyed a long and successful career in the Chinese revival scene from the 1930s. After the Second World War, he became a 'well-known revivalist in Hong Kong and overseas Chinese communities until his death in the 1980s' (Bays 1993, p. 172). Specifically, the paper looks at the transterritorial expansion of their institutions across Southeast Asia and argues that they attempted to contextualise their visions of Chinese Christianity in the region by constructing revivalist and developmental spaces to meet the needs of the Chinese communities living in the region. In particular, I draw inspiration from the studies by Formoso and Chia which demonstrate how the leaders of De Jiao and Buddhist modernism attempted to adapt their ideas and initiatives to the postcolonial Southeast Asian contexts that they became part of. For Sung, he sought to meet the hopes of spiritual revitalisation in China and Southeast Asia by introducing his version of revivalist-evangelism through his evangelistic band organisation. This organisational structure enabled him and the bands to establish an extraterritorial transnational revivalist space during the 1930s and 1940s. On the other hand, Gih's emphasis on creating a multi-centred, de-territorialised transnational Evangelize China Fellowship (ECF, Zhongguo Budaohui) structure necessitated the production of an evangelical developmental agenda for the Chinese communities across Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan during the 1950s and 1960s. This was because this structure promoted the localisation of ECF's activities, thereby encouraging a broader focus on developing local institutions that were concerned about religious, talent development, and social matters in their postcolonial contexts.

2. Production of a Chinese Revivalist Space: Transnational Chinese Evangelistic Bands (1930s to 1940s)

The evangelistic bands started by John Sung in the 1930s developed as an extra-territorial transnational network. This meant that the bands were created on the basis of their own transterritorial logic of ethnic-based outreach and organisational format that emanated from the territorial limits of China to the extra-territorial colonial cities of Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. In other words, they can be considered a religious alternative to the 'transterritorial discourses' and institutions (such as Chinese-medium schools) that were utilised by statist actors and nationalistic professionals to 'domesticate' Chinese transnationals living outside China (Duara 1998, p. 667). Studies which have examined the revivalistic work of Sung have consistently placed the emphasis on the impact of his work but have paid little attention to his organisational genius.[4] The bands served as a long-term strategy for Sung to sustain the effects of his itinerant revival meetings by developing revitalised, independent Chinese churches. Moreover, this organisational model was utilised by hundreds and thousands of bands across China and Southeast Asia to catalyse a transnational Chinese revivalistic movement. Therefore, through these bands, Sung was able to produce a transnational Chinese revivalist space. We should note that the use of such an organisational model as a vehicle for long-term revivalism is not unprecedented in the Chinese context. The early twentieth-century revivalist Ding Limei (1871–1936) employed a similar model for the Chinese Student Volunteer Movement which he established across China (Lian 2010, pp. 37–39; Tow 1988, pp. 33–43). However, what is unprecedented is the way in which Sung's evangelistic band model was able to become a successful entity in forming a transnational community of Chinese evangelists.

A key condition as to why Sung was able to propagate his model widely across China and Southeast Asia was due to the emergence of a critical mass of Protestants, who provided the crucial 'infrastructure' through which revivalist-evangelists could operate. In China, the mission churches experienced rapid growth. Although the total number of Christians represented less than one percent of the population of late imperial China, from 1889 to 1906 church membership grew by almost five times, from 37,000 to 178,000.[5] In the 1920s, it

had grown to about 500,000 and by 1949, church membership increased to approximately 835,000 members (Bays 2012, p. 94; Chao 1986, p. 53). Overall, Christians in the mission or denominational churches made up approximately 75 percent of all Protestants in China during the first half of the twentieth century (the independent churches had attracted about 200,000 people by 1949). The significantly heightened Protestant presence within China, although still fragmented and scattered, provided communities of believers to serve as 'bases of operation' for the different revivalist-evangelists.

The revivalist-evangelists were also able to extend their influence across Southeast Asia because they could access the extensive diasporic Christian networks—mainly denominational and independent churches that were already established—across both the urban and rural areas in Southeast Asia. Moreover, dialect and familial ties were often interconnected with particular denominations and were used by the missionaries and the Chinese themselves for the purposes of proselytisation and the establishment of Christian businesses.[6]

The development of these diasporic Christian networks came as a consequence of mass Chinese migration to Malaya and Singapore, especially after 1874, as well as the migration of substantial numbers of Chinese to the Dutch East Indies. For instance, from 1882–1932, more than 100,000 Chinese migrated to British Malaya annually, resulting in the creation of settlements with a high percentage of Chinese, such as in Singapore, Penang and Perak (Kuhn 2008, p. 148; Chia 2020, pp. 17–18). Missionaries and pastors who were sent from China managed to evangelise some migrants and establish a number of church congregations along linguistic lines for these new converts; there were also a few waves of Christian (mainly Methodist) migrants from Fuzhou to Sibu (in Sarawak) and Sitiawan in British Malaya from 1901–1903, who created Chinese–Christian settlements in these two places (Sng 2002, pp. 145–49; See also Roxborogh 2014, pp. 32–33).

Another condition for Sung's capacity to extend his evangelistic band model to Southeast Asia was due to the openness and enthusiasm of the Chinese churches in Southeast Asia to receive, participate and promote his model of evangelicalism. As has been argued recently, the church leaders in Singapore were crucial intermediaries in enabling the popularisation of Sung's evangelistic bands in Singapore, and by extension, across British Malaya and certain parts of the Dutch East Indies. Due to their desire to revitalise the Chinese churches in Southeast Asia during the mid-1930s, these leaders invited Sung to conduct his revival meetings in Singapore and British Malaya in 1935. This opened up the opportunity for Sung to replicate his China-based revivalistic successes in Southeast Asia and itinerate across over thirty cities in the region, establishing evangelistic bands for the diasporic Chinese communities in these locales. Crucially, the diasporic Chinese leaders of Sung's bands became important figures in organising and extending the influence of the bands in the various locales through evangelistic and revivalistic work. One such leader was Leona Wu (Wu Jingling, 1898–1974), the President of the bands in Singapore and the overall pastoral leader of the bands across Southeast Asia. Wu played a crucial role 'establishing' the bands as the 'integral extra-ecclesiastical structure that partnered with the churches [in Singapore] to sustain and augment the fervor of revivalism' while also 'expanding' Sung's band model by founding a theological seminary in Singapore as a formal training ground for members of the evangelistic bands across Southeast Asia (Sim 2018, pp. 38–65).

The openness to Chinese revivalistic models of evangelicalism was not limited to Sung's work. Two other prominent revivalist-evangelists, Lim Puay Hian (Lin Peixuan, 1901–1975) and Timothy Dzao (Zhao Shiguang, 1908–1973), though not as successful as Sung, also covered an extensive swathe of territory in China and Southeast Asia. Between 1933 and 1953, Lim travelled to over 230 cities and villages across South China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Siam, Malaya, Brunei, North Borneo, Burma and the Dutch East Indies. In these 20 years, the recorded number of people (mostly Chinese and Overseas Chinese nationals) that had converted at his revival meetings amounted to approximately 3900. About 2870 people also committed themselves to regular Christian work, such as evangelism, and

1379 evangelistic bands were formed by Lim across these regions (Lim 1953, pp. 16–95). Between 1936 and 1949, Dzao preached to at least 4500 people (both Chinese and Overseas Chinese nationals, as well as native Dyaks in the Dutch East Indies) and managed to oversee the conversion of about 1200, including a whole tribe of Dyaks (Dzao 1958, pp. 48–214).

A word should be mentioned about the publications produced by the evangelistic bands which were established by Sung after his revival campaigns. The bands were encouraged to publish their evangelistic experiences in nationwide magazines which were compiled and disseminated to bands across China and Southeast Asia. These magazines typically took the name of *Quanguo Jidutu Budaotuan Tuankan* or Nationwide Evangelistic Bands (or Leagues) Magazine. Three of such magazines were published from 1935 to 1936; they were usually compiled by the Band or League of a particular locality. For instance, the inaugural magazine in 1935 was edited by Hangzhou Evangelistic League after Sung conducted a month-long nationwide Bible study meeting in Hangzhou. Other extant magazines are publications of specific local evangelistic bands. These include the 1936, 1937 and 1946 magazines of the Singapore Christian Evangelistic League, and the 1937 magazine of the Sibu Christian Evangelistic Band. Other relevant sources include reports of Sung's revival meetings and the Malayan evangelistic bands which were published in the Malayan Chinese Methodist periodical, *Nanzhong* (*Southern Bell*).

3. Extra-Territorial Transnational Organisational Structure

The evangelistic bands were set up as an organisational model that was meant to be established and implemented in a particular locality after the end of a revival campaign. This model, which was replicated across China and Southeast Asia, was crucial in putting in place an institutional structure that enabled the local and trans-local production of revivalism across these regions. The genius of this model lay in its simplicity of delineating a comprehensive structure and template for the organisation of evangelistic work across multiple regions. This structure was likely derived from a three-part 'Spiritual Work Organisation Method (*linggong zuzhi fa*)' that the Bethel Worldwide Evangelistic Band (Boteli Huanyou Budaotuan) hoped to implement around China as part of its itinerant work (Gih 1963, pp. 80–87). Led by Andrew Gih for a good part of the 1930s and 1940s, the Band was formed under the authority of the Bethel Mission, an indigenous 'faith missions' organisation started by independent missionaries Shi Meiyu (1873–1954) and Jenny Hughes (1873–1951). The Band was meant to perform the function of on-demand itinerant evangelism and revivalism in order to meet the needs of spiritual revitalisation by churches across China. As Gih describes it, the bands could 'depart at anytime [and] go to any place' in order to meet the demands of revival.[7] Sung joined the Band in 1931, becoming its most popular member, before reportedly leaving in acrimonious circumstances in 1934.

The evangelistic bands were independently financed and managed teams of two to five persons who were grouped into a league or coalition, which would usually take the name of the city or area to which they belonged. In larger cities the bands would typically be sub-divided into districts (*qu*) each of which was usually under the oversight of a local church. For example, the 1935 report of the Beiping League explained that they had over 500 members who were spread across over 90 evangelistic bands and grouped into 14 districts.[8] An executive committee at the League level maintained oversight over all the bands, as well as committees at the district level, and sometimes at the level of each individual band. Typically, the Nationwide Evangelistic Band Magazines would provide details on membership and accounts of activities.[9]

Band membership was primarily drawn from churches and Christian institutions like schools and seminaries. New converts and revitalised believers were then incorporated into these bands. In Singapore and Sibu, two of the major Southeast Asian centres for the evangelistic bands, mainline denominational Chinese churches provided the main sources of membership. From the mid-1930s to early 1940s, the popularity of the bands meant that they effectively became the 'lay evangelistic arms' of most of the Chinese churches that were divided along denominational and dialect lines.[10] Churches were also

important sources of band membership in China, but there was more variation. In Nanjing, band members came from a combination of churches and Christian schools, including the University of Nanking and Ginling Women's Theological Seminary. Churches were the main organising units for bands located in various cities across Fujian province, though Christian schools also provided members.[11] Crucially, two commonalities cut across the bands in China and Southeast Asia. Firstly, most people who joined the bands came from what Daryl Ireland identifies as the 'petty urbanite (*xiaoshimin*)' or the 'lower middle class' who had the leisure time and literacy levels to attend Sung's meetings. Secondly, many band members were women (Ireland 2020, chps. 5 and 6). Occupational and gender data gathered from the various publications confirm these observations. For instance, in the 1937 nationwide Bible Study meeting in South China, most of the participants were teachers, students, preachers, and medical personnel, with a small minority identified as farmers and artisans. There were also more female participants—627 and 311 female adult and student participants, in comparison to 544 and 197 male adult and student participants, respectively.[12] In Singapore, a list of band members who committed themselves to the prospect of full-time Christian work were mainly teachers, students, homemakers, and church workers. Women dominated this list. Out of the 58 members, 40 were women (Sim 2018, pp. 52, 54). Therefore, building on Ireland's thesis, the evangelistic bands were able to cut across denominational, institutional and dialect divisions in China and Southeast Asia as an alignment of interests occurred between this particular class-gender mix of Christians and the bands. Regular, team-based evangelism became the way to express their faith.

Having a uniform setup in many cities and rural villages across China, as well as in Southeast Asia (after 1935) meant that the evangelistic work of every locality was seen through similar eyes. Typically, the Leagues that reported their work in the Nationwide Evangelistic Band Magazines would provide a breakdown of their committee structure and leadership positions, the number of districts and bands, and accounts of the different types of evangelistic and training activities or spiritual meetings which they encouraged their members to participate in. For instance, in the 1936 report of the Shanghai Evangelistic League, the leader Zhu Qihuan gave a detailed report on the number of positions and people sitting on the executive committee, the five different types of meetings which were held regularly, and the ten types of evangelistic work which were undertaken.[13] Local evangelistic band magazines reported in more detail on the committee structure and work of the districts or individual bands. More broadly, what this meant is that through these publications, numerous cities and rural villages across China and Southeast Asia were being concurrently re-imagined as sites for evangelistic mission through the framework of the bands.

The rapid development and growth of the evangelistic bands during the John Sung revivals also led to the formation of an organisational structure which connected the different regions together. This occurred in the 1936 nationwide Evangelistic Band Bible study conference where representatives from the Leagues across China and Southeast Asia were in attendance. In this meeting, the main leaders of different Leagues met to formulate a plan to establish a central platform to facilitate easy communication across the two regions. This plan also came with a new extra-territorial geographical mapping. The different Leagues were grouped into eight macro-districts across China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia. The eight macro-districts were: North China, Central China, East China, Northern Min and Southern Min (both in Fujian), Hong Kong–Guangdong, Taiwan and Nanyang (the typical Chinese term used for Southeast Asia in that period). What this meant was that the local League structures were re-imagined on a transnational scale—the Leagues of various cities within a particular region were grouped into a macro-district. A leader from one of the Leagues in the macro-district was also appointed as the primary pastoral leader; this person was responsible for visiting, training and encouraging the Leagues in his or her macro-district.[14]

For the first time, then, a transnational mapping of the areas which were impacted by Sung's revivals was constructed, presenting the bands with a macro view of the whole evangelistic strategy around the region. This point is brought home if one scrutinises the 1937 and 1946 Singapore Christian Evangelistic League prayer guides, where readers are encouraged to pray for the work of various local and external evangelistic bands.[15] The prayer guides also presented a reinterpretation of the transnational areas mapped by the various Leagues and macro-districts: they were non-Christian spaces which required spiritual attention.[16]

This mapping is significant as it created new, religious 'corridors' that went beyond particularistic church, place-based and dialect ties to connect evangelistic bands across China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Chinese Christians with no prior relations became linked to each other as a result of their participation in local evangelistic bands with a similar class–gender mix. The concept 'corridor' is borrowed from Philip Kuhn's work of the history of Chinese migration. Corridors, in Kuhn's terms, explain how internal and overseas Chinese migrants remained connected to their hometowns even after emigration. As they were considered as temporary migrants or sojourners, they created and sustained corridors which contributed to their hometowns and prepared for the eventuality of their return. This included 'busy channels of money, social transactions, and culture'. Specifically, this meant that corridors 'served as extensions of the hometown that embraced compatriots far away, a realm of interests and affections that linked people over great distances' (Kuhn 2008, pp. 46, 49). With the help of writings and reports from various Evangelistic League publications which articulated ideas about what it meant to be a member of such bands across China and Southeast Asia, a corridor which shared information about team-based evangelism among transnational Chinese communities was created. In other words, these publications became a crucial tool that projected a new evangelistic band mapping and its concomitant connections over the members' particularistic ties to churches, denominations, educational institutions, and dialects. These older corridors would have only connected Christians in Southeast Asia to their hometown churches and families in South China. Together with physical avenues like nationwide or regional Bible Study meetings which facilitated movement across China and Southeast Asia, this new corridor enabled the creation of a transnational community, based on a similar class–gender mix, that was committed to team-based evangelism.

4. An Imagined Community of Evangelistic Bands

This 'transnationalisation' of the evangelistic band imagination and connections served as a basis for them to build a community through their shared practices, values and beliefs. With a transnational structure in place, the bands were now able to view their own evangelistic work in light of similar work performed by other bands across the eight macro-districts. Band members could understand the significance of their work as one piece within a larger jigsaw of bands that were labouring simultaneously to evangelise their own localities. The effect that this created was one in which bands in Singapore would see themselves as participating in similar League organisational structures, adopting similar methods of evangelism, and working towards the same goals as their counterparts in Taipei or Guangzhou. This setup also gave them a concrete sense of being part of a transnational community of evangelists. This was well-expressed in the lines of a hymn titled 'Dedicated to all Comrades of the Evangelistic Bands at Home and Abroad (Xiangei Guoneiwai Budaotuan Zhu Tongzhi)' that was composed by a member of the Nanjing Evangelistic League. In the final verse of the song, he encourages sick band members to persevere in their Gospel work: 'Brothers and sisters! Are you physically weak!?/If [you] are unable to go out and work, bear the responsibility of prayer at home!/Send "pamphlets" [and engage in] evangelism through publications[,] for this is what we are able to do.'[17]

This community was partially imagined through evangelistic reporting and visual images. All the evangelistic bands placed an emphasis on compiling their work experiences and methods for the purpose of sharing. As mentioned above, a commonly utilised method

was a general report about the status of a particular League and district that was published in either the nationwide or local magazines. Although there were standard items (such as the different types of evangelistic work undertaken) that were reported, writers had the leeway to write about other matters which were considered relevant. The 1935 Shantou Evangelistic League report, for example, complained that the churches in their region were preventing them from carrying out their evangelistic work due to the troublemaking of one or two unaffiliated independent evangelists.[18]

It was common to share the outlines and template of the evangelistic work of every single band in a particular locality. This enabled band members to get a broad sense of the repertoires of stock evangelistic practices which could be employed, as well as the type of responses one could expect. A perusal of the band reports in the 1936 and 1937 Singapore and Sibu magazines, respectively, conveys a sense of simultaneity and varied similarity on the locations they evangelised, the number and type of audiences, the topics which were preached and the varied responses of the audience. For instance, Band number one in Singapore reported that when they discussed some truths on Jesus Christ's Gospel to some Hinghwa Chinese people along Muar Street, they were met with disinterest because most of these people were 'vegetarians' (Poon 2015, p. 32). The Sibu evangelistic band magazine offered more terse reports. Band number one for instance reported that in Nancun (Southern Village), over 10 people listened to testimonies regarding salvation through Jesus Christ. It concluded that 'some believed [and] some did not believe'. Band nine managed to revitalise the faith of some Christians, saying that those who were 'previously lukewarm [in spiritual life] became full of life again' after hearing some parables, including one on the prodigal son.[19] Similarly, an account from the Xiamen band in China reported that the 'living' testimonies of two patients who were being ministered to by their members—one who recovered after prayer, and the other who experienced 'peace' before death—enabled the band to bring about approximately 180 conversions.[20]

Such reports served as evidence for the effectiveness of the bands' evangelistic methods. What bound their reports together, however, was the type of Cross-centred Gospel that they preached. This can be seen in John Sung's guide to evangelistic work which was published in *Nanzhong* in 1937. In this guide, Sung suggested that the band members should preach a set of topics that stressed men's sinful rebellion against the sovereign God and that salvation for men's sins is obtained through the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross.[21] This can be seen in the band reports of the 1937 Sibu magazine—quite a number of bands preached on topics such as the cross, salvation through Jesus Christ and the parable of the prodigal son.[22] In sum, by participating in the reporting of their evangelistic work, the bands played a role in creating a shared religious community. That is to say (by way of appropriation of Benedict Anderson's concept of nation as an imagined political community), though the members of the evangelistic bands across the eight macro-districts 'will never know most of their fellow-members' or even meet them, these reports provided an avenue for them to know and learn about each other's local evangelistic work and situations, thereby enabling the fostering of shared spiritual bonds (Anderson 2006, pp. 6–7).

Finally, visual images were another effective way to convey that the bands, though separated by geographical distance, were concretely part of the same religious community. The main way in which this was enacted was through the printing and publication of group photographs of the various Leagues in the magazines. For instance, large group images of a particular locality's League were a prime way of projecting this image. In these pictures, men, women and children carrying white triangular cross flags became a ubiquitous sign demonstrating the formation of a local League; different bands across China were also pictured using modern equipment like boats and loudspeakers to carry out their evangelistic tasks. On a broader level, it shows that these people had become part of a larger transnational movement which utilised the organisational structures set in place by Sung and the Bethel Band to engage in similar Gospel work and goals. The sameness in terms of the way they displayed their faith and carried out their tasks, as

visualised through the mosaic of pictures, became a way of projecting and constructing the imagination of one big transnational religious community.[23]

This sameness and transnational community did not last long. Sung died in 1944 and mainland China came under Communist rule in 1949. Connections with bands in China were thus quickly severed. Bands across Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia struggled to reconstitute themselves. With the loss of Sung's popular revivalism and the emergence of other Chinese revivalist-evangelists and evangelical groups, the evangelistic bands could not regain their pre-war impetus and momentum. Singapore and Sibu were two of the centres that managed to reorganise the bands as a cohesive movement after the Second World War, but they faced the challenge of attracting a younger generation of members and renewing their movement. Without strong leadership to re-start, reorganise and unite the bands under a renewed transnational structure that was fit for the times, the Sung-inspired model of Christianity could not regain its place as a popular religious movement (Ireland 2020, pp. 166–67; Sim 2018, p. 62).

5. Constructing a Chinese Evangelical Developmental Space: Evangelize China Fellowship (1940s to 1960s)

In the *Fiftieth Anniversary Commemorative Magazine* of ECF published in 1997, a graphic provided a visual summary of the Fellowship's history of transnational expansion. The graphic drew a contrast between 1947, when it was a children's orphanage in Shanghai, and 1997, when ECF had become a global enterprise with established work in nine Asian countries and the United States (Szeto [1997] 2001, pp. 6–7, 68). The ECF became multi-centred and de-territorial, with its institutional structure decentralised across the world, especially in Asia. The term 'de-territorial' refers specifically to the itinerant, cross-border thinking of revivalist-evangelists like Gih and the multi-national nature of their enterprises. The thinking and nature of these revivalist-evangelists and their organisations was increasingly conceived on discourses emphasising worldwide ethnic-based evangelistic plans that focused on reaching and equipping Chinese (and some non-Chinese) living outside China, and less on an imaginary which viewed China as the central source of theological, organisational and human resources for Chinese Christian communities across the world. Andrew Gih's style of leadership and itinerant revivalist-evangelistic work were important factors in the conception of ECF's thinking and work. Gih was the President (*huizhang*) of the Fellowship for 31 years, retiring in 1978. Despite his long years of leadership, Gih ensured that the Fellowship maintained a decentralised structure with authority in the hands of local workers. Gih's regular itinerant work also meant that he maintained a rather 'de-territorialised' career and was never really settled in a particular locale until he retired in 1978 (Gih 2001, p. 77). What this meant was that the Fellowship was focused on localising its operations right from the beginning and adapting its local bases to the socio-political environs of the different postcolonial countries or territories they were based in. This necessitated a broad developmental agenda which focused not merely on evangelism and church planting, but also on the building of educational and social institutions, particularly for the grooming of local Chinese talent to take over the reins of the local/national ECF operations.

From an organisational angle, Gih's de-territorialised and multi-centred thinking was reflected in two ways. The first was the creation of three different 'headquarters': Hong Kong (relocated from Shanghai), America, and Singapore. Gih made a strategic decision to establish an ECF headquarters in California in 1955 (Szeto [1997] 2001, p. 63). ECF probably became the first Chinese evangelical organisation to locate its main centre of administration in the West; by 1960, California became Gih's permanent home base until his retirement. Singapore, on the other hand, became ECF's 'field' headquarters in Southeast Asia.

Due to its proximity to mainland China, Hong Kong became ECF's publication nerve centre in 1949. Central to this was the creation of the Fellowship's Chinese-language organ *Shengming* (*The Life*) and its publication arm Sheng Tao (Holy Word) Press in Hong Kong. *Shengming* was originally published as three different quarterlies in 1949 and produced for the purpose of supplying churches and people inside China with regular Christian

publications from Hong Kong. *Shengming* was eventually circulated to Chinese Protestants across the world, becoming one of the few regularly published magazines produced by a Chinese evangelical organisation during the 1950s to 1970s (Gih 1975, pp. 60–61). In 1960, for instance, the magazine was sold from Hong Kong to distributors and supporters in parts of Southeast Asia, Taiwan, Australia, North America, France, and even the West Indies.[24] *Shengming* regularly reported about the activities of the different ECF branch organisations in Asia, building a sense of a multi-centred transnational ECF community. Sheng Tao, on the other hand, became one of the more prominent Christian presses in Hong Kong during the same period. Its books were advertised through *Shengming*, enabling it to sell its products—including the writings of Gih and his associates—to the transnational community of subscribers.

The second aspect of Gih's transnational thinking was his continued insistence on maintaining the organisation as a 'fellowship' instead of allowing it to evolve into a denomination with strong centralised powers. What Gih and his Board of Directors wanted to create was a non-paternalistic organisation that promoted 'administrative autonomy (*xingzheng zili*)' and 'financial self-support (*jingji ziyang*)' for all its local units across the world through a congregational-like model of property ownership, governance, and financing. They were essentially establishing an organisational structure that would encourage the development of independent congregations and religious workers (Gih 2001, p. 91). While the headquarters would provide transnational spiritual leadership and support, such as strategies and leadership training, local units were encouraged to practice administrative and financial independence by incorporating themselves as charities with their local governments, while ensuring that their properties were managed by a locally appointed Board (Gih 2001, pp. 91–93). As a result, the model facilitated the establishment and development of substantial local networks of ECF entities in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Indonesia that were able to groom a high number of locally trained leaders.

Reports of these entities in *Shengming* provide a sense of what it meant to be part of ECF's transnational multi-centred community. As ECF's official Chinese-language organ, it compiled and published reports of the ongoing developments and work of the local entities in the different nations and territories. Regular reports about Gih's itinerant work, as well as updates on the transnational work of Gih's ECF associates and different Chinese revivalist-evangelists were also supplied.[25] The collation of individual reports about particular institutions, and combined reports and photographs of the different local work across Asia demonstrated that the organisation was a diverse transnational fellowship of like-minded ECF entities. Thus, unlike Sung's evangelistic bands which primarily followed a standard model originally deriving from China, the ECF model stressed the development of local entities that arose out of local needs and prioritised the development of local Chinese talent and control, while subscribing to the Fellowship's overall ethnic-based mission to reach the diasporic Chinese. To extend the notion of 'corridor', ECF's imagination of a corridor was not like the evangelistic bands—one which connected Chinese Christians across different territories with a set of similar practices and culture. Instead, it was more like an umbrella structure which oversaw, identified and addressed the specific developmental and evangelistic needs of various localities or territories under the ECF's broad agenda. This meant the recognition of a range of diasporic Chinese groups that became part of ECF churches or social institutions or were being ministered to by ECF-supported preachers or missionaries. These groups included socially disadvantaged refugees and orphans, new migrants, students, and existing Chinese churches in places like Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. In short, ECF became the corridor that connected disparate groups of Chinese Christians under its organisational brand.

A comparison of the work in Indonesia and Hong Kong allows us to see the diversity within ECF. The work in Indonesia was focused largely on the development of local Chinese preachers and students through the provision of theological training and education. In general, the work in Indonesia through the 1950s and 1960s can be divided into two

phases: the first phase (the 1950s) saw the establishment of theological and educational institutions; the second phase (late 1950s to late 1960s) brought an autonomous, locally trained leadership with a new emphasis on the establishment of church congregations and evangelism (Szeto [1997] 2001, pp. 63–64). The latter phase came partly as a result of political circumstances due to widespread anti-sinitism such as confiscation of non-Indonesian (mostly Chinese) properties and institutions by the Soekarno-led government in 1955, and the implementation of a discriminatory law against rural Chinese businesses in 1959 (Kuhn 2008, pp. 288–89).

During the 1950s, Indonesia represented one of ECF's most important areas of developmental work for the diasporic Chinese. Like many revivalist-evangelists of his era, Gih only became open to the prospect of evangelising the Chinese there after he was forced to take his work out of China. He visited Singapore and Indonesia in 1951 because he was considering the prospect of transferring his work from Hong Kong due to the fear that the Korean War—and thereby, communism—might spill over to the colony. By visiting Indonesia, Gih became aware of the large numbers of Chinese in the new nation-state; he also realised that the Chinese churches there were in need of theological colleges to train their pastors. Gih's newfound concern for the Chinese in Indonesia spurred him to establish the Southeast Asia Bible College in 1952 in Bandung, West Java (it moved to Malang, East Java in 1954) to train full-time workers for the Chinese churches and as missionaries to the unevangelised areas in the nation. A Christian high school was also started as a means to offset communist teachings which were proliferating in the Chinese school circles. Revival campaigns were conducted around Indonesia, not only for the purpose of spiritual renewal, but also to raise the required finances to fund the building of the College. According to Gih's later account, by 1970, 85 percent of Indonesia's Chinese churches would be 'manned' by graduates from this College. Twenty schools, two Bible colleges and 50 churches were also established in Indonesia by ECF during the same year.[26]

This evolution in trajectory of local development can be observed in *Shengming* through three individual articles about the Bible College. The first article, 'Shengdao Shenxueyuan Xunli [Official Visit of the Southeast Asia Bible College]', provided a historical account of the College's development since it was founded in 1952. It focused on the leadership of its first Vice-Principal Xu Gongsui, a Chinese foreign affairs officer who became a pastor. Xu was the de-facto leader of the College as Gih, who was the Principal, spent most of his time on his itinerant revivalist-evangelistic work across the world. The account described the contribution of the College in educating five batches of religious workers and stressed that it was admitting considerably well-educated students who had already attained a Bachelor's degree, or at least Junior High School level qualifications.[27] The further emphasis towards local development was captured by the next two articles. One reported on the ordination ceremony of Peter Wongso (Huang Bide, b. 1932), a graduate of the College's pioneering batch who went on to become its Principal by the late 1960s.[28] The final report focused on ECF's new strategy of sending College graduates to establish new churches in areas like central Java which had substantial Chinese communities but no presence of ethnic churches; sponsoring graduates to work in non-ECF Chinese churches in order to alleviate the lack of pastoral workers; and teaching their students Bahasa Indonesia in order to enable them to start evangelistic work among the indigenous people groups in the nation-state.[29] Gih also pursued a policy of decentralisation, placing all the ECF institutions in Indonesia under the charge of a board of directors who were all citizens by the mid-1950s. This was partly driven by political circumstances, as in 1955, the Soekarno-led government confiscated properties and institutions in Indonesia which did not belong to Indonesian citizens—many Chinese properties were confiscated as a result of this policy. ECF fortuitously survived the confiscation, thereby allowing Gih to move quickly to localise the control of the Fellowship's property (Gih 1975, pp. 84–87).

The stress on the development of local talent was less pronounced in the Hong Kong reports. As mentioned, Hong Kong was the first location that ECF relocated to, and it became the centre of the Fellowship's publication enterprise for the Chinese Christians

across the world. On top of that, during the 1950s and 1960s, ECF was active in establishing churches and schools in the British colony—a total of seven churches and schools were founded during the 1960s (Szeto [1997] 2001, p. 64). Unlike Indonesia, the Fellowship's first foray into educational work in Hong Kong in 1961 was not about the development of local Christian talent but about the provision of educational and social services to a poor area in Kowloon where residents—who were mainly refugees—were housed in public flats. A total of HKD 300,000 was borrowed from the government to build the campus.[30] The willingness of the state to act as a lender to ECF suggests that the opening of this school (and other ECF schools subsequently) could have also been in response to policies introduced by the colonial authorities to solicit partners from the non-state sector. This included churches, chambers of commerce and clan unions that were recruited to develop primary and secondary education institutions from the 1950s and 1960s because of the influx of refugees from China into the colony (Wong 2015, pp. 220–21). ECF's work in Taiwan also focused on the establishment of churches, mission chapels and orphanages—a total of nine such institutions were established by 1965 (Szeto [1997] 2001, pp. 63–64). The difference was that a group of ECF workers, including Paul Shen (Shen Baoluo, 1917–2011, a trusted associate of Gih from Hong Kong), was sent to Taiwan to establish these entities among new immigrants from the mainland (*waishengren*), the rural areas, and marginalised groups like the orphans.[31] While the training of local talent took place, it developed at a much slower rate than in Indonesia as the impetus was to expand its evangelistic and social work rather than to emphasise talent development.

In spite of ECF's multi-centred, deterritorialised, and de-centralised structure, the organisation would struggle to reform and reorganise the overall direction and structure of the Fellowship during the late 1970s. The leadership was held back by Gih, who wielded strong influence and respect as the founder and President of the Fellowship. Specifically, Gih's unilateral decisions to delay his retirement and appoint a successor as ECF President threw the Board's restructuring plans into disarray. This brought about a period of 'uncertainty' which left 'many on the [ECF] fields . . . confused'. That was because Gih's successor, Richard Chen, resigned three months after proposing 'a series of new policies and programs.' These problems were eventually resolved in 1980 with the appointment of a new President and General Director, Paul Szeto (Situ Chaozheng, b. 1940), and the initiation of 'a major reform of structure and ministry' which was fully supported by the Board. This included plans to re-enter China to establish social and educational ministries, expand the scope of their publication work, and encourage the local ECF churches to develop their own missionary programmes (Szeto [1997] 2001, pp. 66–67).

6. Conclusions

The evangelistic bands and ECF represent two different models of Chinese Christianity which were introduced into Southeast Asia during the colonial and postcolonial periods. I have shown that their organisational structures were pivotal components in shaping the visions and agendas of Sung and Gih in Southeast Asia; in the case of Sung through the use of a similar evangelistic band structure, which was replicated across China and Southeast Asia (and nested under a macro-district mapping), the evangelistic bands were able to create a transnational revivalist space and community. Moreover, the imagination of such a space was also produced and re-produced through their involvement in regular evangelistic activities, and the sharing of testimonies and outreach strategies through publications. Sung's bands can thus be considered as a popular Chinese force that arrived in Southeast Asia to teach the Chinese communities about Christianity through a brand of ethnic-based evangelicalism that was inspired by Sung and fully organised by the Chinese people. In sum, the revivalist space was created by what Mayfair Yang calls 'their own internal mechanism and definitions of boundaries and movements through space, which are not reducible to the political orders outside the ritual [or religious] polity' (Yang 2004, p. 228).

Gih's developmental agenda, on the other hand, developed organically along with his organisation of ECF as a multi-centred, de-territorialised structure across Southeast Asia,

Hong Kong, Taiwan and North America. The developmental thrust of his organisation's work fitted with the localising emphasis of ECF as it sought to establish useful institutions that developed local talent and addressed the social needs of the Chinese communities in specific postcolonial contexts. In a way, ECF faced a similar predicament to De Jiao and the modernist Buddhist monks. All these groups had to adapt their organisations to the evolving postcolonial contexts and shape different ways of implementing their work in the new Southeast Asian nation-states. While Chuk Mor saw the need to reform syncretic practices with his Buddhist modernism in Malaysia, Gih embarked on the construction of Christian schools and seminaries in order to supply locally trained leaders for the growing communities of Chinese Christians while also providing faith-based schooling alternatives. Both men, in the last analysis, sought to influence the Chinese communities with new religiously mediated ethnic-based affiliations that emerged from their visions but were fitted according to the postcolonial contexts.

Finally, the two cases presented here make a contribution to what has been called the 'polycentric history of world Christianity', that is, 'tak[ing] into account the variety of regional centers of expansion, plurality of actors, multiplicity of indigenous initiatives, and local appropriations of Christianity' (Koschorke 2016, p. 34). In many senses, the two organisations can be directly identified with this definition because they comprised multiple nodes or centres, and their work was driven by a diversity of actors who were mostly Chinese. While Sung's evangelistic band model can be seen more as a broad implementation of a China-centred version of Christianity across multiple sites in China and Southeast Asia, I have also illustrated that the various evangelistic band members and leaders articulated their agency through this model across different sites, while, concurrently, perceiving themselves as part of a transnational religious community. Importantly, they projected a religious corridor of evangelistic band practices, culture and connections that went beyond their particularistic denominational, hometown, and dialect ties. ECF, on the other hand, was able to maintain a sense of a transnational community through its umbrella structure and *Shengming*, as well as foster local versions of ECF's model in particular postcolonial contexts. To conclude, the two cases point to the array of transterritorial organisational models that arose out of Chinese Christianity during the twentieth century, and the need for scholars to attend to the integrity, sophistication and influence of these models in the context of different polities and an interconnected world.

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Notes

1 Tan (2007, p. 2). Broadly defined, transnationalism is 'an approach to history that focuses on a whole range of connections that transcend politically bounded territories and connect various parts of the world to one another.' Some examples of transnational history include the reconstruction of networks of businessmen, conservative thinkers or the analysis of 'processes' such as the creation of the working-class across different continents and countries. See (Bayly et al. 2006, p. 1446).

2 DeBernardi (2015, pp. 66–71). See also her recent monograph, DeBernardi (2020, p. 14).

3 Following David Bebbington, evangelicalism is defined by its key theological emphases: conversion (desire for all to turn to Jesus Christ), biblicism (Bible as highest authority in life), activism (evangelistic and social action) and crucicentrism (centrality of Christ's death and resurrection for salvation). See Bebbington (1989, pp. 1–19) and Bebbington (2005, chp. 1).

4 See, for example, Bays (2012, pp. 137–38); Lian (2010, pp. 144–45); an exception is the article and monograph by (Ireland 2012, 2020, chp. 6).

5 Bays (1996, p. 308). See also Chao (1986, p. 53), for the compiled statistics on number of Protestant communicants in China from 1876 to 1949.

6 See for instance Cai (2018, pp. 81–101, 105–17) and (Li 2018).

7 Gih (1963, p. 76). Faith missions was an independent, non-denominational missionary organisational model popularised the founder of China Inland Mission John Hudson Taylor. Its two distinctive features were its intense focus on direct evangelism and the 'faith principle' of not directly soliciting for financial help, believing that God would intervene and provide supernaturally. See Carpenter (1999, pp. 98–99).

8 'Beiping Jidutu Budaotuan Gongzuo zhi Qingkuang [The Working Situations of Beiping Christian Evangelistic League]', in *Quanguo Jidutu Budaotuan Chajing Dahui Tekan* [Nationwide Christian Evangelistic Leagues' Bible Study Conference], no. 1, 1935, 17–18.

9 See, for example Zhu, Qihuan. Shanghai Jidutu Budaotuan de Baogao [Report of the Shanghai Christian Evangelistic League]. Jidutu Bu-daotuan Yuankan, no. 1, 1936, 43.

10 Sim (2015, p. 49), and *Shaluoyue Weili Gonghui Jidutu Budaotuan Sishi Zhounian Jiniankan* [The Fortieth Anniversary Commemorative Magazine of the Sarawak Methodist Christian Evangelistic Band], ed. (Sibu, Sarawak, 1973).

11 'Nanjing Jidutu Budaotuan Baogao [Nanjing Christian Evangelistic League Report]', *Quanguo Jidutu Budaotuan Chajing Dahui Tekan*, 1935, 24, Peng Xun and Cai Xuru, 'Fujian Zhangzhou Qu Jidutu Budaotuan Baogao [Fujian Zhangzhou District Christian Evangelistic League Report]' and Zhang Qinan, 'Fujian Huian Jidutu Budaotuan Baogao [Fujian Huian Christian Evangelistic League Report]', *Quanguo Jidutu Budaotuan Chajing Dahui*, 1935, pp. 16–17, and Sun Disheng, 'Fujian Minnan Yongcun Dehua Datian Qu Zong Budaotuan Baogao [The Overall Report of Fujian Minnan Yongcun Dehua Datian District]', in *Quanguo Jidutu Budaotuan Baogaoshu* [The Nationwide Christian Evangelistic Leagues' Report], no. 2, 1936, pp. 14–15.

12 'Zhuli Yijiu Sanqinian Huananqu Chajing Dahui Chuxi Huiyuan Tongjibiao [The Statistical Table of Participating Members in the 1937 AD South China District Bible Study Conference]', in *Zhonghua Quanguo Jidutu Budaotuan Huananqu Chajing Dahui Baogaoshu* [Chinese Nationwide Christian Evangelistic Leagues South China District Bible Study Conference Report], 1937, pp. 50–51.

13 Zhu Qihuan, 'Shanghai Jidutu Budaotuan de Baogao [Report of the Shanghai Christian Evangelistic League]', *Jidutu Budaotuan Yuankan*, no. 1, 1936, p. 43.

14 'Gequ Jidutu Budaotuan Yilan Biao [Overview Guide to Evangelistic Leagues of all Districts]', 'Gequ Zhengfu Weiban Tongxunchu [The Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs of the Working Committee of the Communications Point]', 'Weibanhui Yijue An [Decisions of Working Committee During Meetings]', 'Jidutu Budaotuan Zong Tongxunchu Jianzhang [The Constitution of the Main Communications Point of the Christian Evangelistic League]', *Jidutu Budaotuan Tuankan*, 1936, pp. 51–56. This information was also published respectively in the Zhuang Jiqing, eds., *Xingzhou Jidutu Budaotuankan* [Singapore Christian Evangelistic Band Magazine], no. 2 (Singapore: Singapore Christian Evangelistic Band, 1937), 96–100, *Shalaoyue Shiwu Jidutu Budaotuan Tuankan* [Sarawak Sibu Christian Preaching Band Magazine] (Singapore: Xingzhou Yinwu Gongsi, 1937), pp. 67–68 and *Nanzhong* 9, no. 10 (Oct. 1936), pp. 17–20.

15 'Haineiwai Budaotuan Liandaobiao [Combined Prayer Guide for Evangelistic Bands at Home and Bands At Home And Abroad]', in *Singapore Christian Evangelistic Band Magazine: Fifth Edition*, unpaginated.

16 Leona Wu, 'Qingyuan Zhunei Jingai de Budaotuan Yuan [May the Evangelistic Band Members in the Lord]', in *Xingzhou Jidutu Budaotuan Tuankan* [Singapore Christian Evangelistic Band Magazine], 1937, p. 54.

17 Zhou Jichen, 'Xiangei Guoneiwai Budaotuan Zhu Tongzhi [Dedicated to all Comrades of the Evangelistic Bands at Home and Abroad]', *Jidutu Budaotuan Tuankan*, 1936, unpaginated. See also Leona Wu, 'Fakanci [Foreword]', in Zhuang Jiqing et al., eds, *Singapore Christian Evangelistic Band Magazine*, 1936, p. 5.

18 'Shantou Jidutu Budaotuan Gongzuo de Baogao [Shantou Christian Evangelistic League Work Report]', *Quanguo Jidutu Budaotuan Chajing Dahui Tekan*, 1935, pp. 20–21.

19 'Shaolaoyue Shiwu Jidutu Budaotuan Gedui Baogaoshu [The Reports of Every Team in the Sarawak Sibu Christian Preaching Band]," in *Shalaoyue Shiwu Jidutu Budaotuan Tuankan*, pp. 34–35.

20 'Fujian Xiamen Jidutu Budaotuan Chengchi Zhijin de Gaikuang [The General State of the Fujian Xiamen Christian Evangelistic League Since its Establishment], *Quanguo Jidutu Budaotuan Chajing Dahui Tekan*, 1935, p. 27.

21 John Sung, "Budaodui Gongzuo Zhinan Shitiao [Guide to Ten Ways of Work for the Evangelistic Teams]," *Nanzhong* 10, no. 5, May 1937, p. 21.

22 'Shaolaoyue Shiwu Jidutu Budaotuan Gedui Baogaoshu', pp. 21–29.

23 See for example photographs in *Quanguo Jidutu Budaotuan Baogaoshu*, no. 2, 1936.

[24] Gih (1961, pp. 49–51), and 'Shengming Shuangyuekan Gedi Dailichu [Representative Offices' of The Life Bi-monthly Magazine In Different Locales]', *Shengming*, Jun 1960, back page.

[25] See for instance, 'Shuling de Shijie [The Spiritual World]', *Shengming*, no. 54–5, Jul 1958, p. 37.

[26] Gih (1973, pp. 22–27, 33–37). The narrative in this paragraph closely follows Sim (2020, p. 286).

[27] Wu Enbo, 'Shengdao Shenxueyuan Xunli [Official Visit of the Southeast Asia Bible College]', *Shengming*, no. 50, Mar 1958, pp. 28–29.

[28] 'ECF de Xishi [A Happy Event for ECF]. *Shengming*, no. 58, Nov 1958, pp. 28–30.

[29] Xu Gongsui, 'Shengdao Shenxueyuan yu Yinni Huayu Jiaohui [Southeast Asia Bible College and the Indonesian Chinese-speaking Churches', *Shengming*, no. 78, May 1971, p. 9.

[30] Zhu Jianji, 'Shengdao Xuexiao Jianjie [A Brief Introduction to Holy Word School]', *Shengming*, no. 94, Dec 1963, p. 40.

[31] See Sun Xuxian, 'Zhonggguo Budaohui zai Taiwan Shinian Shigong Gaiyao [A Summary of Evangelize China Fellowship's Ten Years of Ministry Work in Taiwan]', *Shengming*, no. 73, Apr 1960, pp. 14–17, and 'Zhongguo Budaohui Gefang Huiwen [News of the Local Associations of Evangelize China Fellowship]', *Shengming*, no. 79, Jun 1961, pp. 32–34.

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Mind the Doxastic Space: Examining the Social Epistemology of the Ethiopian Wax and Gold Tradition

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Abstract: The wax and gold tradition is mainly known as an Ethiopian literary system that plays with layers of meanings. It has also established itself as a system of knowledge and/or belief production and validation. However, its social ramifications have presented scholars with conundrums that divide their views. For some, it is an Ethiopian traditional society's crowning achievement of erudition—a poetic form that infiltrated communication, psychology, and social interaction. For others, it is a breeding ground for social vices, i.e., mutual suspicion, deception, duplicity, etc., because its autochthonous nature means it is inept in terms of modernizing and unifying the society. In this essay, I aim to argue that there is one critical historical element that holds the key to the conflicting social ramifications of the wax and gold system and, yet, is neglected by both sides of the debate: the original doxastic space of *qine* (poetry) and *sem ena werq* (wax and gold system)—a hermeneutic tool that deciphers the meaning of poems. This literary system was born in the space of worship and liturgy. I will contend, therefore, that a shift of doxastic space from sacred to *saeculum* (the world) is the reason not only for the behavior of doxastic agents but also for the social outcome of the knowledge they create.

Keywords: Ethiopia; wax and gold; social epistemology; social harmony; cultural innovation; indigenous knowledge

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1. Introduction

After conducting ethnographic research, Levine published his book, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture*, in 1965. The book pulls together sociological, anthropological, and literary horizons to understand the tension between tradition and modernity in Ethiopia from a pragmatist's point of view (p. 13). He then goes on to deploy the wax and gold tradition—the literary system that plays with layers of meaning—as a metaphor that captures these dynamics. Claiming that the tradition is an Amhara cultural innovation, he extrapolates the significance to the whole of Ethiopia. He asserts that the wax and gold is "...simply a more refined and stylized...manner of communicating" (p. 9). At the initial glance, Levine depicts the tradition as charming, innovative, and even seductive. However, it is as if his closer investigation found out that secretiveness and indirection are the hallmarks of the wax and gold style of communication.

As a style of communication, Levine surmises, the wax and gold tradition has shaped the psychological and social character of the people. Despite the innovative potential, the tradition has become a breeding ground for social vices. The reason is that this culture has failed to come to grips with modernity. As a result, it has produced a social epistemic framework that fails to lay down the ground for unity and social harmony. Instead, the ambiguity and plurality of meaning in the wax and gold tradition are used for deliberate conceit, dissimulation, and self-assertion (p. 248). Territorial mentality and social discord, as a result, are very prevalent social ills in Ethiopia.

Levine's bold assertions sparked responses and critiques from some Ethiopian scholars. Maimire counters Levine's claim by pointing out that his project has no intention to account

for Ethiopian self-understanding. Instead, his work is mainly driven by the impetus to offer legitimation to the Western self-understanding using Ethiopia as a mirror. All Levine's work accomplishes is illustrating a *tabula rasa* theorization which has very little contribution to the constructive transformation of Ethiopian society (Maimire 2005, pp. 2–3). Messay blames Levine for dehistoricizing and essentializing the wax and gold system, disregarding the contextual background of each *qine* (poem). Furthermore, Messay argues that the nature of Ethiopian religiosity militates against Levine's idea of the prevalence of the cult of ambiguity, dissimulation, and deceit. This is because, according to Messay, religion cannot be cultivated independently of loyalty and steadfastness (Messay 1999, p. 181). He then goes on to affirm the social benefits of *qine* by quoting from Mahteme Selassie Wolde Meskel: They "...teach patience to those who suffer, moderation to those who are happy, to the former eventually becoming the later" (Wolde Meskel 1970, p. 67).

This article is motivated by two factors. Firstly, the national unity of Ethiopia is at stake. The social fabric that used to glue together diverse ethnic and religious groups is fracturing. Religious and cultural values that used to give epistemic direction that transcends ethnic boundaries are rendered either outdated or even oppressive. The national discursive space is littered by toxicity that comes from mutual suspicion. It is a good time, therefore, to revisit the debate which seems to add value to the ongoing conversation on social trust and national unity. Secondly, this article aims to bring a fresh perspective into this debate by highlighting the significance of the doxastic space in which the *qine* and wax and gold systems originated. *Qine* was born in the context of liturgy and worship where the human and divine horizons meet each other. This sacred space elicits different doxastic postures—a sense of awe, humility, and curiosity—from doxastic agents compared to the knowledge production process in the *saeculum*. This aspect of the wax and gold tradition, I contend, is entirely ignored by Levine and not sufficiently explored by Maimire and Messay in their response to Levine.

I venture to argue, therefore, that the de-regionalization of the wax and gold system from its original doxastic space has rendered it an orphan hermeneutics. Out of its original doxastic space, the wax and gold system has become a breeding ground for social vices. The reason is that the epistemic process in the *saeculum* lacks the purifying force that elicits humility and reflexivity which only a worshipful posture would offer. I will support this argument by giving a comparative analysis of the use of *qine* and how their meanings are postulated either to seek a divine window in social issues or to project power, seek revenge on supposed enemies, and plant seeds of mutual suspicion. By implication, I will argue that the current Ethiopian discursive space can be transformed by bringing intellectual humility and self-reflexivity.

2. Awe and Aesthetics: The Theological Origins of the Wax and Gold Tradition

Historically, *Qine* (poetry) was an important dimension of the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC hereafter). According to Maimire Mennasemay, *qine* was composed in Ge'ez—the church's liturgical language—between the 6th and 13th centuries. However, as Amharic evolved into becoming the Ethiopian *lingua franca*,[1] by the same virtue, it became the language of *qine*. In its Ge'ez form, the purpose of *qine* was mainly theological—"...dealing with the fallen conditions of humanity and the consolation and salvation that awaits the faithful" (Maimire n.d., p. 1). In the EOTC's tradition, mastering *qine* is an endeavor that takes years of education, discipline, and spiritual reflection. The reason is that it is a rich and complex literary system with multiple genres known as *qine bet* ("the houses of *qine*"). Alaka Imbaqom Kalewold, one of the well-known *qine* scholars, points out that each *qine* house has its own unique style, structure, and rhetorical trope (Kalewold 1970, pp. 26–27).

One of the common characteristics of *qine* is mystery (ምስጢር). The rationale for connecting mystery to *qine* is anchored on theological backdrops of early church fathers such as John Chrysostom.[2] God, in this tradition, is conceived to be utterly incomprehensible—he is totally other and immeasurably majestic. Being in his presence elicits a sense of awe,

trembling, and mental disarray in the submergence of contradicting feelings of fear and delight at the same time (Roosien 2017, pp. 2–4). Rudolf Otto captures this as *mysterium tremendum*. *Tremendum* denotes a tremor-like overwhelming fear in the presence of a majestic being, while *mysterium* portrays unapproachability.[3] Human response to the awe-inspiring presence of God is personal nothingness, on the one hand, and an "aesthetic rapture and moral exaltation [. . .]", on the other (Otto 2021, p. 17). The sheer inability to fully grasp and articulate the divine produces a sense of human fragility, which results in dependence and religious humility. *Qine*, therefore, is meant to capture these complex dynamics in the context of liturgy and worship. It is also important to stress that religious and aesthetic awe share borders. In fact, Phillip Quinn argues in his article, "Religious Awe, Aesthetic Awe" (Quinn 1997), that it is almost impossible to make a clear demarcation between "purely aesthetic awe and purely religious awe as they both possess aesthetic characteristics" (pp. 290–95).

Awe is emotion—it is a deep stimulus that goes beyond understanding. Such an emotion, according to Keltner and Haidt (2003), is generated by two central appraisals: perceptual vastness and the need for the accommodation of an overpowering experience into the current mental structure (pp. 297–3145). Vastness shows a rapturous departure from one's normal frame of reference, while accommodation signifies humans' struggle to domesticate the awe-eliciting experience into normal mental schema. This demonstrates that the emotion of awe is triggered by a conscious or subconscious assessment of an event or a phenomenon. Therefore, it is safe to say that awe is an epistemic experience. A. J. Heschel, a Jewish theologian and philosopher, adds a stronger theological accent to this epistemic process. In his book *God in Search of Man*, "The Bible", he claims, "does not preach awe as a form of intellectual resignation [. . .]. Its intention seems to be that awe is a way of wisdom" (1955, pp. 74–75). His contention seems to be supported by the Bible as it asserts, "The fear (awe) of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding" (Job 28: 28).

In the same vein, in the Ethiopian poetic tradition, creative obscuring of meaning (መመስጠር) is as valuable as revealing it because it represents the incomprehensibility of the divine horizon. It is also important to underline that awe inspires curiosity. Empirical research findings by C. L. Anderson et al. indicate that "awe is an epistemic emotion" that "moves people to be curious about the world and pursue such curiosity in acts of exploration and innovation" (Anderson et al. 2020, p. 762). The wax and gold system, therefore, represents the aspect of accommodation in an awe-inspiring experience. In other words, it is a hermeneutic (deciphering) tool that is triggered by curiosity to make sense of the total otherness of the majestic encounter.

Dan Levene et al. (2016, p. 6) argue that the metaphor "wax and gold" for this hermeneutic system is taken from *cira perdue*—an ancient gold-casting technique. In this process, a "master pattern" is sculpted in wax before being covered with clay and heated in fire. The heating process forces the wax to melt away leaving an empty space to be filled with liquid gold. The upper ceramic mold becomes a temporary structure in which the golden object is cast. However, when the inner golden structure is solidified, the ceramic structure is broken away leaving the golden object in its original shape sculpted by wax. Levine defines the wax and gold tradition as a "poetic form which is built on two semantic layers". The apparent literal layer is called *wax*, while the hidden and "actual" layer is known as *gold* (Levine 1965, p. 5). Messay elaborates: "The prototype being the superposition within a single verb of the apparent meaning in the hidden significance, ambiguity, or *double-entendre* pervades the whole style" (Messay 1999, p. 180).

Let us now consider an example of this literary system to have a better understanding of how it works. Alaka Gebre-Hana, an EOTC priest, was also a famous poet. Once, he was invited to his friend's house for dinner. While waiting for the meal to be served, he was revolted to see a rat jump out of the *mesob* (=a traditional breadbasket) where they put *enjera* (=an Ethiopian staple food), which is usually served with diverse stews and sauces known as *wett*. Aleka Gebre-Hana was known for his "quick and biting wit", to

borrow Levine's words, and unleashing scathing criticisms, even over the authorities, when he thought necessary. The hosts, however, were not aware of the fact that the priest had seen the "party crasher"—*ayt* (= a rat). Aleka-Gebre-Hana is now confronted with two contradicting truths. The first truth is the praiseworthy kindness of the hosting family, whereas the second truth is the determination of the family to serve him unhygienic food. At the end of the dinner, he, as a priest, had to say words of blessing. He then went on to employ a poetic form that requires the wax and gold interpretive approach to do justice to his gratitude and displeasure at the same time. He said:

በላነው ጠጣነው ከእጀራው ከወጡ (Bellanew tettanew ke enjeraw ke wettu)

እግዚአብሔር ይስጥልኝ ከሞሶቡ አይጡ (Egziabeher yestelegne ke mesobu aytu)

We have eaten and drunk, from the *enjera* and the *wett*

May God bless you, your *mesob* (breadbasket) may remain full

To decipher the meaning of *qine*, the wax and gold system uses three interpretive steps. The first step is identifying *hebre-qal*—the word or words with double layers. Maimire calls the *hebre-qal* a "harmonizer or bridge" (Maimire n.d., p. 2). In its original context of worship, the *hebre-qal* is laden with theological significance. It typifies the meeting place of the divine and human realms. It is a place where intellectual curiosity is triggered through the feeling of awe and disorientation. The second step is understanding the wax layer—the meaning that is immediately accessible. This is normally achieved through a literal reading of the *qine*. The meaning at the wax layer is imperfect or even an intentional disguise. However, this does not mean that the wax-level meaning is always a mere window to the golden meaning. It has the capability of conveying some truth in its own right. The third step is excavating the veiled or hidden "golden" meaning. The golden meaning constitutes the *telos* of communication precisely because it takes the contemplating individual closer to the divine abode of meaning.

The *hebere-qal* (the double-layered word) in this poem is *aytu*. Its manifest meaning (wax) renders "I have enjoyed your food, and I pray that *you may have plenty on your table*". The intended (surplus) meaning (gold), however, is far from an innocent blessing—the word *aytu* can also mean "that rat". The gold rendition therefore is "I have eaten your food but do not think that I did not see *that rat* jumping out of the *mesob*". While he used the wax (the meaning on the surface) to express his gratitude, his main intention (the gold) was to criticize his friend for serving him unhygienic food (Girma 2011, p. 175).

3. Poesis and Ethiopian Social Epistemology

Now let us consider the wax and gold system as an Ethiopian version of social epistemology before evaluating its social ramifications. Epistemology is a philosophical exercise through which knowledge and beliefs are created and justified. In the Western philosophical tradition, until recently, this exercise was constrained to individuals as a *doxastic* (believing or non-believing) agent. In other words, it is a means by which individuals venture to determine what is true and believable without relying on others. Thinkers such as Descartes and John Lock insisted that valid knowledge can be developed through intellectual self-reliance as opposed to communal collaborative acts (Goldman and O'Connor 2021). People in the business of acquiring incontrovertible knowledge are advised to distance themselves from traditional and religious influences. This is precisely because preunderstandings coming from social norms and religious dogmas can invite opacity, instead of objective clarity, into the process of the acquisition and validation of knowledge and beliefs.

In recent years, however, social epistemology has gained traction as a valid means of achieving doxastic outcomes. The major reason, according to Steve Fuller, is the crisis in "...science's status as the exemplar of rationality for society at large" and the increasing rejection of excessive "scientization of social judgment" (Fuller 2002, p. ix). More importantly, there is a growing recognition, by scholars in this area, of the benefits of epistemic diversity to the process of inquiry. The benefits, as outlined by Miriam Solomon, include the division

of cognitive labor which allows people to "…work on different aspects of a problem rather than simply attempt to replicate each other's work", adding a range of knowledge from groups with different emotional intelligence and social skills and reducing the chances that valuable ideas are left out (Solomon 2014, p. 257). Intentional or unwitting, these dynamics bring Western epistemology one step closer to African, and therefore, Ethiopian philosophy. This is because, in Ethiopian culture, knowledge is inherently social. After all, in this context, both the formation and validity of knowledge are determined by communal and religious conditions.

Let us now investigate how the Western version of social epistemology is articulated before establishing the wax and gold tradition as an Ethiopian epistemological category.

In his article "A Guide to Social Epistemology", Alvin Goldman outlines three types of social epistemology. The first one is what he calls "individual doxastic agent social epistemology". It focuses on how individual belief-forming agents respond to social sources of evidence. The second type is depicted as "collective doxastic agent social epistemology", which captures how collective belief-forming agents such as juries and committees go for communal acquisition of knowledge and form a shared belief. The third type is "system-oriented social epistemology"—it investigates knowledge-creation and belief-forming mechanisms in the entire social system. Examples he gives of the system-oriented social epistemology are the jury system and academic peer review groups (Goldman 2011, pp. 11–20).

The main value of Godman's systematic sketch of social epistemology lies in three useful insights it offers. Firstly, it makes a compelling case for the formation and justification of knowledge and belief by a collective body. Secondly, it effectively demonstrates how knowledge can be created and shared within an intentionally designed and structured social group, i.e., juries and committees. Thirdly, it gives a helpful tool by which doxastic claims are evaluated and justified. This includes induction, perception, memory, and testimony (p. 11). One of the shortcomings with the types of social epistemology as articulated by him, however, is that it is limiting, especially in articulating a non-Western doxastic attitude. To wit, all the epistemic categories he offers assume a high degree of intentionality in the process of knowledge acquisition and validation. This highly formalized and modernist epistemic approach excludes the role of informal and non-modernist doxastic agents, such as traditional elders, indigenous sages, cultural social groups[4], etc., in the formation of belief and knowledge. While these doxastic agents play an important role in the formation and adjudication of beliefs, they are not formally institutionalized. Furthermore, from the examples given (i.e., juries, peer review groups, etc.) one can deduce that the classification is limited to doxastic agents within a compartmentalized institutional parameter such as the justice system and academic knowledge validation system. This marginalizes the knowledge-creation and legitimization process in less structured and more porous cultures.

As a response to the Western epistemic process as elucidated by Goldman, I, in what follows, attempt to discuss doxastic agents and the knowledge-creation process, tools of knowledge creation, and the means of validation of knowledge in the wax and gold tradition.

In the wax and gold epistemic tradition, knowledge is created by key religious leaders (i.e., clergies and theologians), cultural figures (i.e., elders, poets, sages, and singers), and government officials or political thinkers. These doxastic agents do not necessarily gain their credence from their academic (analytic) qualifications or solitary intellectual exercises (like Descartes). Instead, their intellectual authority is drawn from the position they obtained through their service to society. This includes their experience of negotiating complex matters, capturing the imagination of society through artistic performance, mediating in the context of conflict, and wisdom in deliberating on the direction of their community (Oruka 1990, pp. 26–28).

In this tradition, knowledge and beliefs are not created in silos guided by solitary contemplative processes. Alan B. Dixon points out, in his study of the Ethiopian indigenous knowledge system, that the knowledge acquisition process is very communal and informal.

The communal acquisition of knowledge, though, has different faces such as intergenerational, intercommunal, and intra-communal (Dixon 2005, pp. 311–17). Intergenerational acquisition of knowledge and belief takes place within tight mentoring spheres in family and extended family settings. These settings are used to pass on important social norms, valuable belief systems, and essential social and technical skills that help the new generation to negotiate their space in the religious, social and economic milieus. Reta Regasa's research on indigenous knowledge of medicinal plant practices in Ethiopia shows that family-based medicine accounts for the highest (71%) of healing (Regassa 2013, p. 520). The same applies to knowledge and belief acquisition and validation.

While intergenerational acquisition might be dogmatic in the sense that the older generation wants to cement certain values and beliefs in the consciousness of the younger generation, intercommunal acquisition of knowledge is more open. This is because it allows individuals to learn from what works for others within the community. It also opens a critical space even though managing the social damage of criticism requires a level of witticism. The sharp edge of criticism is carefully managed by adding entertaining and innocent-looking poetic tropes. Intra-communal acquisition of knowledge, on the other hand, requires stepping outside one's immediate communal boundaries. Movements such as internal migration and family visits can provide opportunities to acquire new knowledge and share beliefs outside their immediate community. Even when knowledge is created by prominent individuals, it is done with full awareness of and respect for religious principles, social norms, and political relevance.

On the surface, it looks like the wax and gold epistemic posture comes with the risk of totalitarian parameters that impinges upon people's freedom to create and validate knowledge. The story of Zara Yacob—an Ethiopian philosopher who faced persecution because he criticized the Church's theological stands—can serve as a telling example. However, this does not necessarily mean the knowledge and beliefs shared from the top will be unconditionally endorsed by society. History shows that a change of theological or ecclesiastical position costs some political leaders their position. King Susenyos who was converted to Catholicism under the influence of Jesuit missionaries was dethroned after a popular civil and religious unrest (Abera 2016, p. 432). Lij Eyasu, the heir of Emperor Memilik, was ousted from power when he brought some radical reformist agenda. His reformist plans elicited great hostility from the political and religious establishment because it was feared that his plans would put the existing religious and social order at risk (Omer 2014, p. 86). In this vein, new knowledge categories might be met with a forceful rejection when the belief or knowledge created does not fit with the existing social norms.

Moreover, the poetic form that the wax and gold system deploys leaves a space for subaltern doxastic agents to stream their critical voices. The "dark and deep" space, to borrow Gerard's words, of poesis shields marginal epistemic agents from hostile and domineering epistemic forces. This is because, firstly, the wax level is playful and has great entertainment value. Secondly, excavating the golden meaning leaves considerable room for interpretive pluralism. An example might elucidate this. Bereket—which literally means blessing—is a popular name in Ethiopia. Once, a maligned politician named Bereket was visiting a village which made the inhabitants tense. Openly opposing his presence would come with forceful repercussions from the government. However, there is one tool that helps them to channel their displeasure with his presence and, yet, get away with no major consequence. Thus, *Azmaris* (local minstrels)—important indigenous doxastic agents—subscribed to wax and gold systems to make their feelings known. They sang:

በረከት ከሰው ቤት ሲገባ ሲወጣ (Bereket kesew bet sigeba siweta)

እኔም ቤት አልቀረ መርገም ይዞ መጣ (Enem bet alqere mergem yizo meta)

When *Bereket* (a blessing) visited people's house

It also came to mine, but only with a curse.

Bereket is the key word with a double-layered meaning. It could be a common noun—a blessing, to be specific. However, it could also be a proper noun—the name of a person

(the politician in this case). The wax level of this poem shows that the minstrel is lamenting something others consider to be a blessing that has proven to be undesirable to him. The intention at this level, therefore, seems to be educating the audience not to take for granted things that are usually considered to be "blessings". The golden meaning of the poem, however, is criticizing the politician—who did not live up to his name—for daring to visit their village. In doing so, they are generating certain knowledge about the popular feeling not only toward the individual politician but also about the political establishment that he was representing.

How is knowledge validated in the wax and gold tradition? The Ethiopian epistemic approach—this might apply to African philosophy in general—tends to focus on practical holism rather than analytic abstraction. In other words, the philosophical problems that Ethiopians deal with are not of an abstract conceptual nature—they are real problems that involve actual intervention. This does not mean, however, that rationality has no place in such an epistemic exercise. In fact, rationality is not a Western invention. It rather is an irreducible aspect of being human (Ani 2013, pp. 300–2), and as Kaphagawani and Malherbe rightly pointed out, "To be human is to be rational [. . .]" (p. 209). However, it is also useful to highlight that these doxastic agents use rationality without analytic awareness.

Furthermore, unlike the Western epistemic process, knowledge and beliefs are not necessarily justified based on factual veracity. In fact, some of the shared knowledge is enveloped in mythologies, stories, and legends. These myths often involve the enemy who is often hell-bent on subverting the truth, larger-than-life heroes who are committed to restoring the truth, and God the ultimate source of truth. As I argued elsewhere (Girma 2022, p. 26), myths are often used as a way of negotiating a common space and embracing or excluding what is considered to be the other. As a nation with a long religious and political history, Ethiopians often felt they faced enemies of a religious and political nature. Providing a powerful narration of the foundations of its statehood was tantamount to survival. Mythology as a tool of knowledge belief creation is important because it provides a Socratic form of *poesis*. The reason is that raw facts are not only too narrow but also too dull, lacking flair in a philosophical culture of practical holism. This is precisely because an argument, to be considered valuable, needs to combine persuasion, problem-solving capacity, and entertainment.

An example is an Ethiopian indigenous court system known as *Shengo* or *Teteyeq*. The litigation method is called *Mught*. Edward Ullendorff, an eminent Ethiopianist, writes, "Their sense of honour and justice is satisfied once the matter has been properly argued out: thus they will present a case with a great dexterity and a distinct flair for oratory" (Ullendorff 1960, p. 46). Tsegaye Beru adds, "Back when there is (*sic*) no major sport engaging the people, litigation was a national pastime where everyone in the neighborhood, including young children would attend just about any court proceeding" (Tsegaye 2013, p. 345). The poetic space created in such settings comes with a challenge of ambiguity. In the meantime, it is liberating in the sense that it invites the others (attendees of the court in this case) for a communal meaning creation journey. Therefore, presenting the bare facts is not enough to win the case. The jury must also be entertained.

The wax and gold tradition offers the epistemic process with flair, entertainment, belief, and knowledge. In Ethiopian culture, therefore, the knowledge-creation process is not compartmentalized—it is not confined to institutional and professional spheres. It is fluid and holistic in that beliefs and knowledge formed by epistemic agents can infiltrate different levels and spheres of society. The reason for the easy flow of knowledge and belief is a higher level of social interdependence compared to individualistic cultures. The same applies to individual–society relationships (Oyeshile 2006, p. 103). For example, Ethiopian culture like any society has individual doxastic agents. The difference between the Western and Ethiopian epistemic processes lies in the fact that individuals as doxastic agents are not isolated from the community. They are positively open to tradition and religious principles to inform their epistemic attitude including the formation and validation of knowledge. This is different from the Cartesian exercise where the individual must take a distance from

religious and traditional influences to arrive at an indubitable conclusion about the validity of a belief or disbelief.

4. Wax and Gold Tradition: Social Ramifications

In my book, *Understanding Religion and Social Change in Ethiopia* (2012), I characterized the wax and gold tradition as a "philosophical paradigm"—bearing the hint of the Ethiopian ideological terrain from the Axumite Dynasty to the twilight of the Solomonic Dynasty (Girma 2012). Doubtless, wax and gold tradition as a literary system does not always neatly fit into a paradigm. The reason is that it goes beyond the aforementioned range of time. However, as I indicated above, this tradition is more than a literary device—it is also an epistemic framework betraying an element of pre-modern and patristic philosophy. Patristic philosophy, on the other hand, is a composition of the Christian thought of early centuries conceptualized using elements of Greek philosophy. My depiction of the wax and gold tradition as a paradigm, therefore, has to do with the philosophical category that pervades the literary system.

How did this play in the Ethiopian construction of social reality? To have a better understanding of this, it seems to be imperative to sketch a generic "Ethiopian worldview". It is legitimate to ask, at this point, whether there could be such a thing as the Ethiopian worldview. In fact, is it not true that the wax and gold tradition itself is a cultural product of EOTC's liturgical tradition and northern Semitic languages? True, Ethiopia is a culturally diverse country. It is beyond contention that the wax and gold tradition was invented within a specific geographical and cultural location in Ethiopia. However, it is equally undeniable that the Semitic culture and the EOTC have played a seminal role, for better or worse, in creating a system of thinking embraced by many Ethiopians beyond the northern regions. I always insisted, as a non-northerner and non-Orthodox myself, that it is nearly impossible to understand the "we" of the Ethiopian way of life without fully accounting for the cultural and religious values created and promoted by political, ecclesiastical, and intellectual leaders in the past. As Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann rightly explained, "Only a limited group of people in any given society engage in theorizing, in the business of "ideas", in the construction of *weltanschauungen* (worldviews). But anyone in society participates in its "knowledge" in one way or another" (1966, p. 27). The Ethiopian past and its collective memory are shaped for the most part by drawing elements of politics and theology. John Markakis, therefore, is right to characterize Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity as "*weltanschauung* of a refined, literate culture which remained distinct and isolated from its neighbors in the Horn of Africa" (1974, p. 1). The Ethiopian worldview, therefore, is that which makes Ethiopia different from its neighbors as well as the rest of the world.

This distinct understanding of national individuality serves as a map. Even though it does not provide us with a fully detailed and all-agreed-upon itinerary, it gives people a general orientation in a world full of conflicting ideas and beliefs (Griffioen 2012, p. 25). This is the reason why, as the account of Levine shows, Gonderes and Manzes differ on the details of their philosophy of life despite both being Amhara and Christians (Levine 1965, p. 48). However, that does not mean they are inherently dissimilar. They share generic elements of the Christian worldview as well as Amhara culture. More importantly, Ethiopian belief in the Transcendent has brought together even Muslims and Christians, not to mention ethnic groups. Embedded in the Ethiopian generic conception of Transcendent are shared values and norms. We could mention the national values of *fereha-egziabeher* (the fear of God), *mechachal* (toleration), and *mekebabel* (reciprocity) as worldview elements undercutting every Ethiopian religion as well as cultural group. The overarching rationale here is that, in the Ethiopian worldview, Transcendent is not fully comprehensible, and yet, it is the most perfect horizon that provides critiques and examples to guide and sustain social covenant.

From the analysis above, it is possible to surmise that *qine* was borne out of spiritual dynamics that bring together the sublime (the divine) and the imperfect (the human) dimensions. However, as it stands, the social ramifications of the wax and gold tradition

are a subject of debate. Levine (1965) starts his seminal book *Wax and Gold* by recognizing the wax and gold system as a cultural innovation and adding that he was "seduced by the charm" of the Ethiopian traditional life" (p. vii). He then points out that, drawing from the worldview of the militaristic Manz and pious Gondar, the wax and gold system offers two important social and political benefits. On the other hand, the militaristic outlook offers a sense of homeland, whereas piety benefits society by giving a realistic and humanitarian outlook that is often exhibited by the peasants (p. 94). In other words, ordinary citizens do not expect moral purity from their political leaders—they are fully aware of human imperfection. In the meantime, the self-centered nature of *Realpolitik* does not discourage them from endeavoring to contain human conflict and seek arrangements for human interest.

He then blames political leaders for "inhumanitarian (sic) impulse" and the masses for uncritical conservatism, the combination of which made the wax and gold tradition stagnant and dangerous. The outcome is that this cultural innovation has become an instrument for "self-assertion through litigious disputes" (p. 248), "deception" (p. 250), "secrecy" (p. 252), "domination" (p. 253), and veiled insult, breeding mutual suspicion (p. 251). Because of this, he argues, the day-to-day communication is littered with "lookout for latent meaning and hidden motives" (p. 251). James Bruce—an eighteenth-century Scottish traveler who reportedly spent several years in North Africa and Ethiopia—seems to re-enforce Levine's claim. In his *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*, Bruce (1790) points out that dissimulation and ambiguity are as natural as breathing among all ranks of people in Ethiopia (1967, p. 83).

Levine's characterization of the wax and gold tradition is met with forceful responses from Ethiopian scholars. Maimire, a political philosopher, is one of them. He postulates his objection by pointing out that Levine's study is not motivated by the need to understand Ethiopia. Instead, he argues, it is closely tied to the "West's quest of comparative self-understanding" (Maimire 2005, p. 3). It is an extension of *tabula rasa* theorization that adds very little value, if at all, for Ethiopians in terms of forming their own knowledge. By providing anamorphic reading of Ethiopian culture, Levine's task, according to Maimire, is producing surplus knowledge that highlights the positive side of his own (Western) society from a new point of view, while leaving the Ethiopian self-understanding opaque.

Messay's defense of the wax and gold tradition is more substantive compared to Maimire's ideological response. In his book Survival and Modernization (Messay 1999), he starts by criticizing Levine for failing to acknowledge the place the literary trope occupies in Ethiopian social practices (Messay 1999, p. 180). According to Messay, Levine tends to stress the pivotal place of authority and individualism as opposed to its poetic nature. In addition, Messay points out that Levine's list of the social functions of the wax and gold tradition does not replicate the Ethiopian way of life, nor does it reflect the true nature of the literary tradition itself. All Levine's argument can accomplish, Messay explains, is to provide a justification for Bruce's unfair depiction of Ethiopian social practices. Two reasons are in order: First, Messay explains that deep religiosity in Ethiopia contradicts the use of deception and self-exertion to advance individualistic interest. He adds, "The very survival of Ethiopia, this unfailing commitment to Christianity and to a long-standing sociopolitical system, militates against the importance attached by Levine to the 'cult of ambiguity'" (Messay 1999, p. 181). Furthermore, Messay argues that authority in Ethiopia is displayed and affirmed with great ostentation, and ambiguity and dissimulation do not fit very well in this scenario.

Messay then subscribes to Albert S. Gerard's understanding of the wax and gold tradition in Ethiopia. A specialist in comparative literature, Gerard describes the Ethiopian trope as "a unique kind of wisdom, dark and deep" (Gerard 1971, p. 274). It, according to Gerard, has a unique philosophical significance "affording exercise in fathoming secrets which open the mind and thereby enhance the student's ability to approach the divine mysteries". In doing so, Gerard connects the wax and gold method with the Aristotelian claim that "metaphor is the essence of poetry" (Gerard 1971, p. 274). Messay then takes

advantage to make further elaborations on the manifest meaning (wax) not only veiling reality but also usurping the place of reality by passing itself off as the truth. In contrast, the dark and deeper meaning is thought to be "propaedeutic" to exploring the religious truth. Messay then argues that the wax and gold system is no different from methods of attempting to grasp truth in Western thinking (1981, p. 181). His illustration comes from Platonic thinking in ancient Greek. The simile of Plato's cave, for example, "presents the visible or the physical world as a projected and distorted image of the true world". "Knowledge," he adds, "consists in the ascent of the mind from appearance to reality". The main objective of knowledge, according to Messay, therefore is to restore the truth by way of "denouncing the usurpation and recovering the veiled, hidden reality". The wax and gold trope is no different (Messay 1999, p.182).

Maimire's objection that Levine's project has more to do with Western comparative self-understanding (within the framework of the Enlightenment notion of the noble savage) than capturing the internal logic of the wax and gold system is warranted within the wider scheme of how Western scholarship approaches Africa. However, his critique fails to recognize the evident adverse effects of wax and gold social epistemology and offers compelling reasons why this is the case. *Ashmur* and *shimut*, techniques through which two friends insult one another using a third person or object as a recipient, take their cue from the wax and gold tradition. A popular example of this is when Aleqa Gebere-Hana greeted a donkey driver "እንዴት አደራችሁ?"—how was your (plural) night?—dehumanizing the person by putting him and the donkey at the same level. Messay demonstrates the place and value of the wax and gold tradition in a very insightful manner. Again, he tends to paint a more optimistic picture of wax and gold eschewing its potential to breed mutual suspicion and, as a result, social discord.

I would argue that pivotal space and time in the evolution of the wax and gold epistemology are not fully accounted for in these scholarly debates: the birthplace of the wax and gold system and the historical instance in which the wax and gold tradition was de-regionalized from its birthplace. Wit, worship, and liturgy are the birthplaces of the wax and gold tradition. Worship demands a different posture from a doxastic agent. As we discussed earlier, in the context of worship, *qine* represents the meeting place of the divine and human. The doxastic posture of the agent is that of awe and humility, on the one hand, and intellectual curiosity and reflexivity, on the other. The doxastic goal is gaining access to the divine mind through humble but curious spirit. The vices surrounding the knowledge-creation process are cleansed and purified because of the presence of the divine, which shapes the doxastic outcome.

In this context, the language of *qine* was Ge'ez, the EOTC liturgical language which is not accessible to the masses. Then, as Maimire pointed out, Amharic became the Ethiopian *lingua franca* transporting *qine* from the sacred space of worship to the *saeculum* (the world). Outside the feeling of awe and humility that comes from the divine presence, *qine* became an orphaned communication technique. Disentangled from its spiritual and moral roots, it falls prey to those who instrumentalize it to accomplish other ambitions. Outside the divine shadow, power, sex, and control often become the driving forces shaping the public imagination of *qine*.

Therefore, it is safe to say that the wax and gold tradition has become a mixed blessing. On some occasions, it is still used to convey messages about human fragility and the need to connect with the divine realm. Let us look at the following example:

ሸክላን በሩቅ ሲያዩት ብረትን ይስላል (sheklan beruq siyayut beret yiselal)

ለመረመረው ሰው ገፅ-ኦፈርኖሯል (lemerememerew sew *gel-afer* noroal)

Looking from afar, clay looks like it can sharpen an iron,

It is only dust when you closely examine.

The double-layered words are *gel-afer (clay-dust).* Maimire suggests a "four-eyed approach" to fathom the meaning of this poem by way of dissecting the sounds and shapes of the two words (Maimire 2005, p. 11), but I will focus on two. The manifest meaning aims

to describe how illusive clay is when it is looked at from a distance. The poet, therefore, conveys a message that clay from afar might look very strong to the extent that one could mistake it for a metal and start to sharpen another iron with it. However, if one takes time to examine it, the poet concludes, they will find out that it is just dust. Emerging amid the utterance of these two combined words is another word "*gela-afer*" (human body–dust). The golden meaning, therefore, is that human beings look invincible to a naïve observer. However, closer contemplation (or examination) reveals that they are just dust. Through a powerful reminder of the inevitable death, this poem, therefore, is meant to highlight the insignificance of humans in the presence of the timeless divine. The humbling awareness of human fragility is the source of the "humanitarian" and "reasonable" outlook of the Ethiopian commoners that Levine rightly observed. In this sense, it is a tool that critiques and corrects social vices such as individualism, self-assertion, deception, and mutual suspicion. The awareness of the divine presence in everyday life and imminent death calls for solidarity and togetherness instead of division and mutual destruction.

On other occasions, the wax and gold system is used to create toxic knowledge. There are poems that, for example, promote revenge and aggression instead of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. Let us look at the following popular *qine*:

የምን ጠላ ጠላ የምን ጠጅ ጥጅ (yemin tella tella, yemin teji teji)

ጠላትን ሲሸኙት ቡና አርጎ ነው እንጂ (telaten sishegnut buna-argo new enji)

Why bother preparing *tella*, why bother preparing *teji*[5]

Offering simple coffee is the best way to see off your enemies.

The words with double layers are *buna-argo*. The logic behind the wax-level meaning is anchored in the Ethiopian *yilugnta* (shame) culture. This tradition is strong enough to force people to entertain someone even when they deeply resent them. The main cultural current behind this particular *yilugnta* tradition emanates from the Christian value of *fereha-egziabeher* (fear of God). Therefore, the poet advises those who are meant to host their enemies not to bother about an elaborate banquet with prestigious local drinks—just offer them simple *buna* (coffee). The gold-level meaning, however, reveals that the author has more sinister intentions than just reducing the entertainment to a simple coffee ceremony. This is because, when the two words—*buna-argo*—are combined, the way they sound can also be interpreted as "breaking something into pieces" or "turning someone into ashes". The intention of the poem, therefore, is to create a different knowledge category in which enemies can be treated more harshly than the culture usually allows.

What is fascinating about this *qine* is that the doxastic agent behaves differently compared to the previous one. As a result, the usual *qine* knowledge-creation flow from the distorted material order to the sublime spiritual order is reversed. In fact, the doxastic agent mocks the value of spiritual order—showing kindness to the enemy—by using it as a disguise to channel their vindictive message. Instead of crafting social knowledge that emancipates them from the operative cycle of revenge, they promote a lust for revenge and desire to project power.

Ethiopia is a nation with a difficult and complex history that has struggled to find a working formula that does justice for its diversity. As a result, it continues to experience political disarray. Political consensus on important issues, i.e., state building (crafting political architecture that holds diverse ethnic and religious groups together) and nation building (finding a chemistry that helps people to forge a common identity), has proven hard to come by. Its discursive space seems to be splintering at an alarming pace. Each group comes with its own formulation of reality. Very few, if at all, are willing to embrace the humility that enables them to enter the world of their political interlocutors or reflexive courage for self-critique. This is a clear demonstration of how the wax and gold tradition—as an orphan hermeneutic de-regionalized from its natural space of humility and reflection—can put a strain on the social fabric and promote division and violence.

As Maimire expertly puts it, "...all Ethiopian social practices, norms, institutions and circumstances have a *sem ena werq* structure and could be treated as *qine-analogues*" (Maimire

2014, pp. 42–43). *Qine* had the potential to provide a discursive space in which knowledge can be formed and validated through questioning, imagining, and critiquing. However, *qine* itself needs to be reoriented to the space where the political interlocutors have common anchorage and points of reference. Without an anchorage that transcends ethnic and religious divides, it is nearly impossible to form a common knowledge and forge a common identity. An example of such an anchorage is the concept of *fereha-egziabeher*—the fear of God. *Fereha-egziabeher* is more than a religious slogan or maxim. It is a highly reverent and the most persistent awareness of the ideals and values of the ultimate (divine) horizon among the masses. Deregionalizing *qine* and the wax and gold system from that area has proven to be costly. In as much as moving forward toward modernizing Ethiopia's discursive space it is also critical to look back and revisit indigenous value systems in which the discourse is anchored.

5. Conclusions

This article set out to examine the role of the wax and gold paradigm as social epistemology. Wax is a symbol of an earthly order, full of distortion and disorientation. However, it must be stressed that it also has great value in that it facilitates a meeting place for the imperfect and sublime realms. Gold is a symbol of emancipation from worldly distortion in two ways. Firstly, it fosters intellectual curiosity, a culture of healthy questioning and critical thinking. Secondly, the worship dimension that the golden meaning brings helps the doxastic agents to check their motives and behavior vis-à-vis cultural religious norms. *Qine* can be useful outside the worship context, but the examples we examined demonstrated that it can produce orphan hermeneutics with negative social consequences. The reason for this is its disconnection from the moral anchorage that religious aura and spiritual reflections provide.

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Notes

1 There is no scholarly consensus on when exactly Amharic became the Ethiopian lingua franca. Read Ronny Meyer's (2006), "Amharic as *lingua franca* in Ethiopia". *Lissan: Journal of African Languages and Linguistics* 20, no. 1/2: 117–132 for an insightful detour of the evolution of the Amharic language into the national *lingua franca*.

2 John Chrysostom, known as ዮሐንስ አፈወርቅ (Yohannes the golden mouth), is one of the highly regarded church fathers in the Ethiopian Orthodox church.

3 The Amharic equivalent can be ፈርሃ-እግዚአብሔር—fear of God. While *fereha-egziabeher* is used as moral uprightness that assumes the presence of God in all spheres of life, *mysterium tremendum* is a spiritual or religious phenomenon that takes place in a specific experience of worship.

4 There are numerous informal and traditional doxastic agents in Ethiopia who shape. Examples are *Afersata* and *Shengo* which are traditional jury systems, *Gada* tradition of Oromos which focuses on social organisation and distribution of power; *Edir* and *Equb* which look into financial and social welfare of the society.

5 *Tella* and *Teji* are popular local drinks usually prepared for special occasions.

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Article

A Christian Pluralistic Hypothesis: To Bonhoeffer and beyond—A World Christianity

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Abstract: This essay investigates Bonhoeffer's undeveloped concept of "Unconscious Christianity" and how a protracted understanding of his religionless Christianity in a culture "come of age" points to a viable Christian pluralistic hypothesis—how Christ and the Spirit are redemptively active outside the church. Bonhoeffer's living faith action transcends his theology, revealing unconscious dynamics within our interactions that reveal antecedent relational dynamics that open to the redemptive process, which transcend but do not obviate the cognitive elements of faith. New scriptural themes and concepts of relationality and perichoretic metaphysics bring greater biblical coherence and meaning to one particular biblical passage that has apparently remained meaningless (Matt 12:32). This new meaning and coherence within the scriptures radically alter Christianity's relationship to the outside world and transforms our understanding of the Great Commission.

Keywords: Christian pluralistic hypothesis; Matthew 12:32; Bonhoeffer; *perichoresis*; *analogia spiritus*; trinitarian metaphysics; relational metaphysics

> Aslan: "Child [Emesh], all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me. . . . I take to me the services which thou hast done to him. . . . Therefore if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is I who reward, . . . unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek". (Lewis 1956, p. 202).
>
> It is to the prodigals—to those who exhaust all their strength in pursuing what seems to them good and who, after their strength has failed, go on impotently desiring—that the memory of their Father's house comes back. If the son had lived economically he would never have thought of returning. (Weil 1956, p. 211).

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1. Introduction

This essay represents a pneumological undertaking and paradigmatic shift in considering a developing understanding of *perichoresis* as a metaphysical shift from *analogia entis* or *analogia relationis* to *analogia spiritus*. Such novel orientations allow us to offer a viable Christian pluralistic hypothesis theologically and biblically. The thesis takes root in Bonhoeffer's interdisciplinary consideration of social theory that begins with *Sanctorum Communio* and culminates in his undeveloped concept of "unconscious Christian" in his prison letters and papers, similar to Rahner's "anonymous Christian". From this trajectory, we will explore the dynamics of *perichoresis* as a theological and biblical precedent for how the redemptive work of Christ and the Spirit might be active in and outside the church. Unlike the recent work of those like Amos Yong, who are beneficially working at other levels in understanding the work on the Spirit, this thesis seeks to understand the activity of spirit at a more metaphysical level within human and divine relations—one that reveals its power by bringing more significant meaning to heretofore enigmatic Scriptures.

2. Bonhoeffer's Lived Faith and Unconscious Christianity

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a confirmed pacifist, admired Mahatma Gandhi, and even made plans to visit India to meet with him, which never materialized (Zimmermann

2019, p. 3). He maintained his pacifist convictions both before and, surprisingly, after his authorizing the failed assassination of Adolf Hitler, which led to his imprisonment and eventual execution. In an act of lived religious faith of Abrahamic proportions, he believed God led him beyond his penultimate faith convictions (*fides reflexa*), theology, morals (pacificism), and reason via a transcendent faith (*fides directa*) similar to Kierkegaard's "teleological suspension of the ethical". He also questioned the genuineness of the Christian faith in the German Lutheran Church leadership, the vast majority of German "Christians" supporting the Third Reich, and even those remaining compliantly silent (McLaughlin 2020, pp. 155–56; Bonhoeffer 2005, pp. 139–44). Furthermore, he was beginning to consider that non-professing Christians who signed the assassination authorization or identified and resisted the evil within the Third Reich were nevertheless directly acting with Christ as "unconscious Christians" (McLaughlin 2020, p. 157). Being a psychiatrist's son might have sensitized Bonhoeffer to the unconscious dynamics of human action within faith experiences, especially as he tried to make sense of his troubled socio-political world.

During his time in prison, the seeds of a Christian pluralistic hypothesis began to grow. His use of concepts like "unconscious Christianity", "religionless Christianity", and "the world come of age" marked the beginning of a significant theological deviation from his past in search of social and relational criteria that might expose the redemptive activity of the Spirit and Christ beyond the cultic convictions and activity of the church. In a letter to his friend, Eberhart Bethge, he shorthanded three referenced passages that indicate unconscious expressions of the Christian faith in an outline for a future book (Bonhoeffer 2009, p. 491): (1) "Left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing", referring to Matt 6:3, (2) "Mt 25", referring to the unconscious action within our faith and knowing experiences, as well as the cognitive confusion this creates for many learning about their unconscious actions (Matt 25: 31–46), (3) "Not knowing what to pray", which refers to Rom 8:26b, "for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that the very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words". All these indicate potential unconscious action within faith experiences. The actions that expose unconscious Christians for Bonhoeffer are "goodness" reflected in a person's actions and a person's Christlike "being for others" who are suffering. These thoughts were embryonic, remaining undeveloped due to his premature death.

3. Bonhoeffer and Spirit: The Pulsation between Time and Eternity within Our Relationships

We must consider Bonhoeffer's theological context and position before fully understanding his thoughts on a viable Christian pluralistic hypothesis. He was quite drawn to Karl Barth and the emerging neo-orthodoxy as Barth attempted to correct the abuses of Hegel's liberal Protestantism and concept of Absolute Spirit. Contrary to Hegel, Barth and Bonhoeffer argued that the divine and human spirit were distinct. Nevertheless, Barth maintained a strong Christological emphasis over that of the Spirit of God. Toward the end of his life, however, Barth conceded to Schleiermacher the following:

> What I have already intimated here and there to good friends, would be the possibility of a theology of the third article, in other words, a theology predominantly and decisively of the Holy Spirit. Everything which needs to be said, considered and believed about God the Father and God the Son in an understanding of the first and second articles might be shown and illuminated in its foundations through God the Holy Spirit. (Barth 1982, p. 278)

He refrained from doing so because he thought it was "still too difficult to distinguish between God's Spirit and man's spirit". Compounding the problem was the general continental portmanteau of crashing the original Greek concepts of νοῦς and πνεῦμα into a single word (e.g., *geist*, *esprit*, and *geest*). Furthermore, though Barth was unwilling to give such quarter to liberalism in developing a more robust pneumatology, which led to his ardent Christology, Bonhoeffer's interdisciplinary sensitivity to emerging disciplines of study that were beginning to further acknowledge analogies between divine and human spirit emboldened the younger Bonhoeffer to tread where Barth would not. His doctoral

thesis, *Sanctorum Communio*, investigates the relationship between the divine and human spirit within a Christian social theory. Bonhoeffer was sensing what D B Dabney would later argue—that the word constructs upon a *preceding* breath (spirit):

> We must insist against Barth that it is the *Spirit* of God and not simply the *Word* of God that is properly basic to Christian theology, then against Schleiermacher we must maintain that it is the Spirit *of* God and not *human* spirituality that is the proper subject matter for an appropriate prolegomenon to theology. . . . The Spirit of God is not human spirit aspiring to the divine, but neither is it the subjectivity of God making an object of the human. . . . Rather than *sub*jective or *ob*jective, the Spirit is better conceived as *trans*jective; that is to say, that by which we as individuals are transcended, engaged, oriented beyond ourselves, and related to God and neighbor from the very beginning. (Dabney 1996, pp. 160–61)

Dabney's consideration suggests that a metaphysical grounding (contingency) for faith and theology would better rest in a trinitarian coupling of Christ *and* the Spirit, acknowledging the asymmetrical priority of God's Spirit (breath of God). The revisioning Bonhoeffer in prison was beginning to have similar considerations. This also parallels the convictions of Kierkegaard that humanity is a relationship between the temporal and the eternal that creates our social mutuality as a positive third term while maintaining and intensifying the polarities (Loder and Neidhardt 1992, p. 209):

> Man is a [relation between two factors] . . . the temporal and the eternal. . . . In a relation between two, the relation is the third term as a negative unity. . . . If on the contrary the relation relates itself to its own self, the relation is then the positive third term. . . . If this relation which relates itself to its own self is constituted by another, the relation doubtless is the third term, but this relation (the third term) is in turn a relation relating itself to that which constituted the whole relation. (Kierkegaard 1941, p. 146)

The emergent third term of the relationship is spirit and becomes self or social relations. Bonhoeffer also reflects on this same dynamic:

> Two wills encountering one another form a structure. A third person joining them sees not just one person connected to the other; rather, the will of the structure, as a third factor, resists the newcomer with a resistance not identical with the wills of the two individuals. Sometimes this is even more powerful than that of either individual—or than the sum of all the individuals, if this is at all conceivable. Precisely this structure is objective spirit. (Bonhoeffer 1998, p. 98)

For Bonhoeffer, "objective spirit" is the emergent social structure of community, a living, tangible social relationality. Reflecting the shape of the Trinity, human developmentalist and theologian James Loder is further convinced that "the reality of mutuality becomes self-conscious, or aware of itself as such" (Loder and Neidhardt 1992, p. 291).

The peculiar uniqueness and necessity embodied within the concept of the Trinity is an incarnational imperative of mutuality (IIM)—a divine incarnation that is in and part of the world, not outside it. The IIM maintains that true *filial* intimacy between humanity and God is only possible if an aspect of God becomes human and an aspect of humanity becomes divine. This happens in the Incarnation of God in Christ (bringing the temporal into the godhead) and the complementarity of the Spirit of God (infinite totality) coming into a holistic relationship with the human spirit—the small infinity (bringing the eternal into a *co-conditioning* relationship with human spirit, for eternity transcends cause-and-effect temporality). Zimmermann presents Bonhoeffer's paralleling dynamics in ethics as "the free act of the human will in '*immediate* relationship with God's will,' a relation to be established anew for each concrete occasion . . . 'in the distressful decision of the moment. . . . Only through the depths of our earth and the storms of human conscience does an eternal perspective open up to us'" (Zimmermann 2019, p. 8).[1] In maintaining Kierkegaard's "infinite qualitative difference", such a relationality can only occur through an existential pulsing (tension) between the systole of the eternal and the diastole of the

temporal. Without this, God and humanity cannot have a genuine filial relationship. *Both* time and eternity potentially condition humanity through this cycling from within, not from outside, our interactions. We have all experienced this phenomenon of the two conditioning aspects of the eternal/spirit and time/word every time we are convicted of sin. Loder gives an example of the asymmetric priority of Spirit:

> To be convicted of sin . . . would be unbearable . . . if it were not that such a realization is preceded by the grace that makes such a realization not only bearable but profoundly generative of a new being. The Creator Spirit must create *ex nihilo* in individuals as it created at the beginning of the whole of creation. Thus, mortification precedes the illumination in our accounting of it, but in the sphere of the spirit, the illumination precedes and anticipates the mortification. (Loder 1998, p. 116)

The grace and righteousness of Christ are 'evident only in the sphere of the Spirit'; therefore, pre-conscious *analogia spiritus* must engage before regenerative gestalt. Similarly, Bonhoeffer affirms such dynamics in quoting Augustine, "'You would not seek me if you had not already found me'" (Zimmermann 2019, p. 249). Furthermore, in Bonhoeffer's words, "The person ever and again arises and passes away in time. The person does not exist timelessly; a person is not static, but dynamic. . . . The person is re-created again and again in the perpetual flux of life" (Bonhoeffer 1998, p. 48). Bonhoeffer's sensitivity to these subtle, often unacknowledged dynamics within social relations, eventually opens the door for his later considerations of unconscious actions within faith and provides grounds for a Christian pluralistic hypothesis. Likewise, Bonhoeffer's willingness to fully opening to the Other *and* differentiate from the majority in full autonomy creates his eventual political stand for which he would literally have to pick up his cross.

4. A Viable Christian Pluralistic Hypothesis

Today, we live in a much smaller world than Bonhoeffer's because of advances in travel, communication, geo-economics, and extreme social migration. The world is becoming a smaller community daily, and virtually all religions and ethnicities are becoming neighbors, attending the same schools, and working side by side. To avoid exasperating its relationship with the world, the church must theologically finish Bonhoeffer's concerns for developing a lived understanding of how Christ and the Spirit might be redemptively active outside of Christianity. Such a theological undertaking would allow the church to better discern its faith development inside the church and identify the possibility of it outside the church. Customarily, we believe Christ's redemptive action is at odds with, constantly subverting, and transforming the social dynamics of the world. Still, the scriptures also teach that all creation is held together by the creating activity of Christ and the Trinity (Col 1) and, therefore, capable of exhibiting Christ's and the Spirit's redemptive patterns everywhere in the world. For Bonhoeffer, such redemptive dynamics ultimately have no cultic exclusivity even though, for him, they are uniquely and only perfectly found within the Trinity. For "God . . . [is] not at the boundaries but at the center, not in weakness but in strength; . . . God's "beyond" is not what is beyond our cognition! God is the beyond in the midst of our life. . . . The church stands . . . in the center of the village" (Bonhoeffer 2009, pp. 366–67). He finds God powerfully evident in the midst of his sociology, psychology, or under every rock he overturns. Yet, he maintains the uniqueness of Christ's divinity and that all who come to the Father come through Christ. Nevertheless, with Kierkegaard, he was beginning to believe that the *how* of faith was somehow asymmetrically prior to and bore more of the revelational and redemptive weight than the *what* of faith, even though both inextricably connect.

Bonhoeffer's redemptive criteria demonstrating Christian faith, "goodness" and "being for others", express two of the characteristics of love. Though he certainly would have developed these further, alone they remain theologically unfinished and problematic. Goodness alone flounders in our postmodern world as a significant theological marker for redemption. When God suggests that after all of David's life decisions, Jacob's manner of

attaining the blessing, and Job's caustic addressing of God, that these men's hearts were indeed after God all along; goodness becomes a problematic criterion to theologically and socially implement. Likewise, being for others who are suffering eventually falls short of the full wealth of what Paul expresses in love, for he begins by saying, "though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, *but have not love*, it profits me nothing (1 Cor 13:3, my emphasis)". He is suggesting that "being for others" can happen without love. Love is much more complex than typically acknowledged; it also "rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things [resists denial], . . . and endures all things." All of which expand our givenness, not just to the other, but to the knowing event and relationship as a whole (spirit) through which we encounter the other. This leads to the unfinished theological project: what is love?

If God is love, we must critically consider the notion of *perichoresis*—the internal relationship of the Trinity within a social understanding of the Trinity—as its highest expression. In this respect, the human reflection of *perichoresis* becomes a limited and analogical reflection of that ultimate relationality through which we might relate to others and the world. Though it is an emerging dynamic that we experience only in part between us, it is a relationality that is still largely beyond us and into which we are being transformed from one degree to another (2 Cor 3:18). Any behavioral criterion evidencing the Christian faith must begin with a critical understanding of this dynamic. Technically, *perichoresis* exhibits an irreducible relationality that both mediates our *mutuality* while maintaining and intensifying our *personhood* (individuality). In an undistorted relationship to God's spirit, human spirit reflects this divine nature and relationality: "Subjective spirit becomes eternally significant only *in relation to* the absolute spirit" (Bonhoeffer 1998, p. 48, my emphasis). Such a call to relationship invites us to first fully open ourselves to the Other (other persons, God, the world, and even the self, i.e., *holistically* entering our relations) *and* then back into differentiated personhood—for the Trinity never collapses into sheer oneness or Hegelian synthesis. A critical study of Bonhoeffer's dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, a Christian social theory, reveals his sensitivity to these perichoretic dynamics even though he never uses the term.[2] In this respect, Bonhoeffer defines being, not as substance, but ultimately in relational terms (Zimmermann 2019, p. 192), which point toward the metaphysics of *perichoresis* and a more profound logic of the spirit as the unconscious dynamics within Christian redemption.

The current issues of pluralism become problematic when we fail to acknowledge these more subtle dynamics within the faith experience and the scriptures (e.g., Bonhoeffer's reference to Matt 25). Such subtleties help to parse genuine from disingenuous aspects of faith, and more problematic for the church, expose potential genuine faith outside the church. Ecclesial confessions and practices defining belief and catechism are needed to center a spiritual community. However, the possibility of genuine Christian faith occurring unconsciously outside the church would have been somewhat disorienting to the early church. The early church's lack of social development may have left it ill-equipped to speculatively cope with what is far more discernable today.

On the other hand, if we can redemptively encounter Christ unconsciously, what is the value of consciously knowing the person and story of Christ? This is similar to intuiting something before it consciously emerges in contrast to the knowledge of that thing after one becomes more conscious of it. For example, every scientific discovery starts with an intuition that something is there—a *holistic* initiatory encounter with a new aspect of reality. The scientist *experiences* something of that reality, then slowly generates identifiable patterns emerging from it, and finally, it bursts forth in a more detailed and functional gestalt. With this conscious encounter comes greater understanding and intimacy through which we engage and know the world, the point being that it is the *openness* (weakness) of the scientist that precipitates reality being able to affect the scientist. It is no different with our personal encounter with Christ. Therefore, nurturing openness between the church and the world might be more important than correctly communicating its (necessary) creeds and

theological dogma. Though cultic practices help define the identity of the Christian faith and unify its members, an overarching exclusivism does not, or does so only pathologically.

Some traditionally difficult passages and scriptural themes present these relational dynamics that provide a viable pluralistic hypothesis. Such passages should caution against sectarian exclusivity and relax any unconscious imperialistic expectations and overdetermining of relations between Christianity and those outside the church. If Christ is salvifically active in the lives of others outside Christianity, then Christians would do better to consider the Great Commission as invitation to consciously knowing Christ while relaxing (not negating) the necessity of a conscious confession of him for salvation. If Christian theology could reveal how Christ's redemption might ultimately span outside Christianity yet maintain that consciously knowing Christ offers greater fullness of life than otherwise, it would transform Christianity's relationship to the outside world.

Yes, Christianity and the scriptures boldly state that Jesus Christ is the unique and exclusive Son of God through whom all humanity must come to know God fully; however, Christ himself noted that *how* he is known takes antecedent precedence (asymmetrical priority) over *what* or who is known. Christianity claims that knowing Christ is necessary for salvation, but powerful scriptural precedent clearly indicates that such a knowing is often unconscious. This, however, does not detract from the Christian imperative that Christ be known; it simply expands how this happens and how Christ must be known while considering each person's contextual capacity to know. These passages also state that *how* Christ is known has everything to do with whether he actually is known, therefore adding a preceding relational disposition or contingency to that knowing. Without this deeper understanding of how Christ is active in the world, Christianity remains dysfunctional with cognitive imperatives rendering its witness to the truth inappropriately imperialistic.

5. Extending Bonhoeffer's Exegesis beyond Bonhoeffer

Christian theology attempts to read and employ the whole scriptural witness to its fullest coherence and meaning. To the degree we abandon whole passages and themes in the scriptures because of their theological inhospitableness or apparent incoherence, we live with a dysfunctional theology.

Few passages in the New Testament speak of the resurrected, and even fewer indicate an unconscious criteria indicating their redemption. In Matt 25:31–46, many of the resurrected seem confused as Christ states to each person whether they lovingly related to him or not. There will be many who thought they never encountered him but did, and those who thought they did but did not. "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to me. . . . Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me". Only those who never practiced Christianity or never consciously believed in Christ would be confused by being identified as having related in some way meaningfully to him, even if through others. Moreover, only those who thought themselves Christ believers would be confused by Christ identifying them as never having loved him, even if through others. If they were loving and genuinely open to knowing "the least of these", then it appears Christ identifies this as loving him. There seems to be a subtle, even hidden, relational criterion at play here that initiates the redemptive process and genuine faith.

Matthew 25 is further clarified when Jesus reveals in Matt 7:21–23 that "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven. . . . Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, . . . and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me!" Note that Christ does not say a few or some 'Christians', but *many*, and not that he once knew them and later he did not; he *never* knew them. Therefore, Christ's constant call to believe and follow him carries the soteriological criterion that such belief necessitates *authentic* relationship and a *genuine* knowing of him. Just like beliefs, knowing a person is conditioned by *how* we relate as much as to whom or what we relate.

Even more shocking, Jesus requires this antecedent *how* of belief over the cognitive aspect of belief in him! This presents a more precise idea of the *necessary* preceding activity—a relational disposition. After the Pharisees misidentified him as working with Satan, Christ, knowing their theological sophistication dissects their accusation, revealing their unconscious dispositional mistake and presuppositional closure to knowing his complete identity. *He resituates salvation from what is thought about him to* how *they came to those thoughts*. "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, *it will be forgiven him*; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him" (Matt 12:32, my emphasis). To know Christ as God (1 Cor 2), one must allow the wholeness of Christ (God)—the Holy Spirit—to affect *their whole self*—their spirit—in order for that relationship to be genuine. Only in such encounters can our knowledge and understanding transform to new states of knowing Christ *in his divinity*, knowing the truth of others and ourselves, and knowing the genuine truth of anything (1 Cor 8:1–2). This parallels his insistence that those who want to know him must pick up their cross daily (Matt 10:37–39; Luke 14:26,27,33) and become spirit, exposing themselves to the Spirit of God (2 Cor 3:16–18). To the degree a person bifurcates into multiple selves, harboring untouchable beliefs hidden from conditioning by the truth of the Other (the world), they cannot truly know the Other or the world—they imprison the self within self. We must constantly allow our knowledge, beliefs, and actions to expand into greater fullness of life, which often necessitates re-paradigming. With this, Paul indicates that transformation into the image of Christ is an ongoing series of transformations for every true Christian throughout their lifetime, for the church through history, and the world through time—from one degree to another (2 Cor 3:18; 1 Cor 15:20–28).

Jeremiah says a person will seek God and find God when they search for God with *all* their heart (Jer 29:13), not a portion of their heart, not with a bifurcated soul in which they suppress various aspects of self. When the heart wills one thing (passion), the person becomes spirit—they are whole.[3] The Pharisees' undertow of professional and religious status, theological acumen, employment security, power, and privilege was not allowing them into the swirling transformative matrix of the forming relational unity wherein they could fully experience and identify Christ within his fullness—the Spirit of Christ (of God). When participants consciously or subconsciously withhold themselves or part of themselves from the emerging matrix of the relationship (not the other, but that which mediates the relationship), they, in their freedom, bind the two hands of the Irenaean God (Christ and the Spirit). Within Christianity, the disposition of closedness is sin, not the antiquated failure to maintain established laws and moral codes.

Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus insists that to encounter the Other genuinely, to be transformed, "it is necessary to risk everything". Encounter with a living God necessitates vulnerably opening all of oneself to the unknown. Only in entering our weakness in humility can the Spirit relate God's fullness to our fullness. Kierkegaard hints at the *how* of belief in a short parable:

> If one who lives in the midst of Christendom goes up to the house of God, the house of the true God, with the true conception of God in his knowledge, and prays, but prays in a false spirit; and one who lives in an idolatrous community prays with the *entire passion of the infinite*, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol: where is there most truth? The one prays in truth to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol. (Kierkegaard 1941, p. 179, my emphasis)

Likewise, in neo-Platonic language, Noel O'Donoghue similarly notes the following:

> Sharing then, participation (in the active sense) is, at the source, at once the sharing of infinite sharing, and the giving of an infinite capacity for receiving: infinities meet in the finite. The creature is no less infinite than the creator, in the infinity of its radical dependence, its radical nothingness: on this ground rests the infinity of its receptivity: *homo capax Dei*. The mystic makes his own of this negative immensity of openness to the infinite that shares its own being, and in

> this lived appropriation, *experiences the logic of infinity*, experiences that finitude reaching to the infinite, which is the centre of all creativity as it is the centre of all prayer. (O'Donoghue 1979, p. 177, my emphasis)

Spirit, both divine and human, is our infinity, all that we are. Only when the Spirit of God guides us into all truth (John 16:7–15) and engages our whole self (our spirit) can we truly know Christ in the dynamic exchange of *analogia spiritus*. This is the necessary state of openness (the cross) Jesus requires for being known as the Christ, as God (Matt 12:32). Unless we release all that we are into the dynamic, transformative matrix of our relations with the Spirit of God, Christ in truth remains unknown—any truth will remain unknown, despite one's convictions otherwise. Only through the *logic of the spirit* does the drunken babbling become prophetically meaningful (Acts 2).

After all else that the New Testament says about the necessity of belief in Christ, how is it that Christ says that blaspheming and speaking against him will be forgiven? The only answer is that he is here exposing a necessary antecedent quality of personal openness that allows the fullness of truth within and between us. If we resist, blaspheme, speak against, or close off from this holistic antecedent encounter and conditioning by the spirit of the Other, they (or Christ) are never truly known or loved. This is the meaning of Matt 12:32. No other understanding of this passage is coherent with the balance of the scriptures, nor is its meaning accommodated within any theologies I have yet encountered, exposing their scriptural incoherence. Truth or genuine encounter with another is not a sword one possesses and wields across time, it is an emergent gift in each moment of every interaction. We might better understand it as the quality of relationship (Eph 6:17).

The two largest commentaries on Matthew that presumably researched every accessible consideration on this passage concede that Matt 12:32 is meaningless in relation to the rest of the New Testament and current theology.[4] Nevertheless, this essay's theological thesis offers a feasible and coherent understanding of this passage that accommodates and coheres with the rest of the New Testament. It also expands our theological understanding of how Christ's redemption might be active outside formal Christianity and fully expresses what Bonhoeffer theologically sensed in his letters to Bethge. Such aspirations in Bonhoeffer reveal the emergence of a greater understanding of faith beyond the current development of existing theologies, including his own. To the degree any person picks up their own cross daily, thereby allowing themselves to fully enter their relationships (love), they are already on the redemptive road, whether they know it as such or not, regardless of their existing faith confession. Those outside a confessional faith in Christ may indeed be handicapped in their redemptive development, but we can all imagine with Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer how some outside the Christian faith might indeed be further along in their redemptive pilgrimage than many professing Christians. Though Bonhoeffer was unable in his given context and allotted time to fully articulate these ideas theologically, he lived that faith and knowledge before any coherent and final theological gestalt had emerged.

6. The Asymmetrical Priority of Spirit: Relational Disposition and *Analogia Spiritus*

For Bonhoeffer, a Christian pluralistic hypothesis in no way relaxes the uniqueness of Christ yet acknowledges that redemption cannot be tied emphatically to a faith confession alone. Each person develops within their own unique context, the complexity of which exceeds everyone but Christ's purview of that salvation. This is what signals the Bible's constant admonishment against judgment on such ultimate matters. How the church structures and guides its community is one thing, and there are times when communities might find it expedient to exclude specific individuals or groups. Nevertheless, emphatic judgment on the ultimate state of salvation, according to Christ, is a matter of that person's asymmetrically prior receptivity to the Spirit of God that facilitates their knowing Christ that then, and only then, brings fuller meaning to all experiences and confessions of that faith.

When the Spirit's antecedent role is given asymmetrical priority (not exclusivity) in salvation over confessional belief, it transforms our understanding of how Christ's

redemption works in the world. We continue to boldly proclaim the gospel because the full knowledge of Christ precipitates and expedites an increasingly greater fullness of life, which is much more difficult for the pagan who, at best, only indirectly and anonymously encounters Christ through a potentially genuine openness to God. Therefore, Christians can humbly release themselves from the *necessity* of a confessed belief for salvation, knowing that a person's genuine faith in Christ transcends all such confessions. As noted by Bonhoeffer earlier, this dynamic of spirit-to-Spirit encounter transcending our words and knowledge was well known by Paul: "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit, . . . [making] intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom 8:16,26). Any other understanding of Matthew 12:32 or leaving it to be meaningless creates scriptural incoherence. Christians should continue to call others to salvation in Christ because it is necessary for a *complete* knowing of God and greater fullness of life, but not exclusively for salvation. The shape of evangelism must emerge contextually, and therefore, we need to critically assess the shape of evangelism within each context and for each individual.

Kierkegaard suggests we proclaim the gospel without coercion or expecting specific results. Truth and belief would be better thought of as a way of becoming rather than a result.

> It requires a discipline of the spirit to honor every human being, so as not to venture directly to meddle with his God-relationship. . . . Wherever the subjective is of importance in knowledge, and where appropriation thus constitutes the crux of the matter, the process of communication is a work of art, and doubly reflected. Its very first form is precisely the subtle principle that the personalities must be held devoutly apart from one another, and not permitted to fuse or coagulate into objectivity. It is at this point that objectivity and subjectivity part from one another. (Kierkegaard 1941, p. 73)

Because of the unique transjective character of this antecedent dynamic (disposition), Kierkegaard insists we can only communicate the gospel indirectly—the listener must ultimately complete the meaning of Christ for themself within their own meaning frame and subjective rendering spirit-to-Spirit. Only then is the Spirit of God free to attest to the listener's fullness (spirit). Therefore, only to the degree that persons fully constitute in relation to the fulness of God's Spirit will they constitute in truth. Using the metaphor of electricity, human beings must wire to God in 'parallel' rather than 'series'. Humans transmit information between humans, but all knowledge of God and knowing God in Christ, even in collective worship or the public exercise of theology, must transpire in the analogia spiritus—where spirit holistically interacts with Spirit and its eternal conditioning (1 Cor 2)—"for flesh and blood have not revealed this to you" (Matt 16:17). When the disciples on the road to Emmaus and the Ethiopian in the chariot experience the moment of analogia spiritus, Jesus and Phillip immediately disappear because the truth is now their own as they encounter a living Christ in his fullness—the authority is then internalized within them in co-conditioning action (Luke 24:13–35; Acts 8:26–40). The truth of God or identifying Christ as God cannot be communicated in 'series' from one person directly to another, technically, even from Christ (Matt 13:32). The Spirit mediates/translates the words of another into the listener's own meaning-frame, just as on that portenting day of Pentecost when all who were open to the truth heard it in their own mother tongue and meaning-frame regardless of the speaker's spoken language or meaning frame. Faith must emerge from within a person as their own faith, "for flesh and blood has not revealed this" (Matt 16:17–19). If a person's faith is not their own, they in fact do not know Christ.

In the end, there will be many whom Christ will welcome in heaven who never "confessed his name" and some who "spoke against" his name. Is it that difficult to consider that a young man's flaming atheistic anger at the church and 'Christ' because he was repeatedly raped by his Sunday school teacher might evidence his openness to the truth and injustice that unknowingly expresses an anonymous faith in Christ? We have no idea how much, if any, genuine faith such an individual ever encounters in others in their ecclesial interactions. It is simply not our call to make with any final certitude.

After centuries of missionary efforts to Japan and India, why do these cultures remain seemingly untouched by the gospel in any confessional response, yet Ireland and Korea were deeply affected to confessional response in mass within a few generations? This alone indicates how the existing relational development of a culture within its existing religious, cultural, and social dynamics conditions how Christ is understood, known, and *emerges within* that culture. Therefore, it is not the immediate conscious response to the gospel that expresses its full redemptive activity as much as each person's willingness to fully encounter and know the Other (desire for perichoretic or loving relations). If God thought it important enough to develop the nation of Israel and its faith (relationality) for thousands of years to then appropriately experience, identify, and understand Christ, then the relational development embodied within various religions and cultures certainly plays significant and diverse roles in how each experience and understand Christ (Endo 1969). Alistair MacFadyen tells us that the Christian mission is "not so much the conversion of everyone and every particular 'world' to Christianity, but their conversion to the future in which their own truth may be fulfilled, and *the universalization of the conditions of dialogue*" (MacFadyen 1993, p. 447, my emphasis—perichoresis). Understanding that our knowing Christ transcends our cultic practice allows the Church to freely love the world without diluting it with coercive agendas and inappropriate unconscious expectations. If Christ has all the time in the world (pun intended), the church should also.

Paul tells us in Romans 14 that various communities and degrees of Christian faith can exist side by side and that such paralleling communities are acceptable. The conditional development of a person or people and how Christ will genuinely emerge from within their faith experience cannot be predetermined. If Christians would trust in the Spirit of Christ's internal mediating ability to ultimately unite and translate difference (Acts 2:5–13), then they could relax their attempts to unify through forced external cultic practices and doctrinal dogma and alternatively offer such practices as supplemental and as invitation to greater intimacy with him.

7. The Complementarity of the Word: Co-Conditioning Action with Christ

The Spirit and Christ facilitate a reflective differentiate unity throughout creation and uniquely in humanity and all human relations. Word takes shape upon a forbearing breath and cannot be separated in their existential tension. Genuine openness and givenness to the Other necessitates that the whole of the participants enter into the whole of the relationship (Kierkegaard's notion of passion) in order to become a complete and differentiated person. Abraham and Jacob demonstrate the difference. Jacob fully enters the relationship expressing his desire to retain his ill-gotten blessing. Abraham hears the word of God and, like Job in the presence of God's transcendence, remains silent and obeys. Jacob, who maintains full autonomy, experiences God in complete perichoretic differentiation ("come of age") and passionately exposes his full desire to God (wrestling)—*concealing not the profane within him*. Jacob becomes spirit and rises to the stature of co-conditioning relation with God by expressing his *full* and profane self (the wrestling). Abraham did not. Abraham silently acquiesces to God's command without communicating his existing disappointment. But it is only upon encountering Jacob's passion and desire that God stops the presses and immediately announces that upon this kind of faith—in holistic co-condition relation to God's creating activity—will the people of God come forth. God then *completely* (not partially) changes his name and announces that upon this type of faith and holistic interaction, God will bring forth God's people, the nation of Israel—he who wrestles with God—not Moses, Abraham or David. God does not name him, 'he who is chosen by God'.

Even though Jacob wrestles against God, he is fully given to God. This is evident in Jacob's willingness to relinquish his blessing and thus bow in servitude before Esau. Nevertheless, he still expresses his full desire for the blessing with all his heart. God gives it to Jacob because of his passion, his infinite resignation before God, and also because

Christ is able to orchestrate it into the world in syncopation with all the passionate desires of others (other acts of co-conditioning faith).

Similarly, the impetuous nature of Peter (constantly speaking before he thinks), who is preeminently acknowledged by God in the New Testament, reveals that he is closer to what Bonhoeffer would call his fides directa (analogia spiritus or pre-conscious relations) rather than his fides reflexa (conscious contextualized faith). Therefore, it is not a matter of God choosing Jacob over Esau, or choosing to elevate Peter over the other disciples; these two men were simply willing to sacrifice more, and pick up more of their cross than the others. Christ is simply acknowledging this preeminently deeper action of faith that is necessary to enter the full potential of faith and know him as God, as well as genuinely knowing all others—love. God is calling humanity to a co-conditioning relationship within creation that requires *full* engagement—*analogia spiritus.* Such interactions transcend cause-and-effect relations, as all participants act in co-conditioning perichoretic unity of action through the eternal, and emerge altogether separate in time.

The story of Gideon is exemplary (Judg 6–8). God does not completely act for Gideon; God draws him into a co-conditioning relationship with Godself. The text does not reveal God telling Gideon to slay the neighboring allied leaders who were unwilling to help him (those who fearfully remained silently neutral between Gideon and the Midianites). Gideon's actions emerge as a co-conditioning effect within the *analogia spiritus* as he seemingly took it upon himself to slay those leaders who remained silently compliant with the Midianites. This parallels Bonhoeffer's minority action against Hitler versus the majority support of and silent compliance toward the Third Reich while unconsciously ignoring the suffering of others. McLaughlin notes that using Matt 25, Bonhoeffer points to "the idea that God's reward is related to righteous action" (McLaughlin 2020, p. 87), whether or not the actor is conscious that such action is christomorphic.

Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer's selfless participation with Jesus's being-for-others here expands to the greater Other, which includes the fullness of the relationship (the other, God, the world, and the *self*). This returns Jacob to the preeminence given to him by God and calls our *whole* heart—the good and the profane—into relations with God. For Christ is in the world and requires us to acknowledge the light and the darkness, for only in full exposition can the light transform the darkness (Eph 5:13). A genuine encounter with the hungry creates empathy to feed. A full encounter with the oppressed moves us to protect (for Bonhoeffer, in *fides directa*, to kill the oppressor within his pacifism). Full encounter with those in denial (not "believing all things"), move us to help them come alive to fuller truth, for Christ is the truth. To all who seek greater fullness of life, help them to acknowledge the darkness around them and in them and to "bear and endure all things" (1 Cor 13:6–7); but, let the dead bury the dead. We are called to the highest life (Rom 14) and to affirm all level of genuine openness (faith), but not closedness (the faithless), whether in the world or the church.

God calls humanity to radical openness to the Other (spirit) and yet to complete differentiated-unity of personhood into filial relations with a trinitarian God of analogous relationality. For Bonhoeffer faith necessitates, (1) being for others—openness to others and the good, *as well as* (2) reaching complete autonomy of personhood and appropriate closure to the world (McLaughlin 2020, p. 119). This reflects the irreducible nature of the Trinity as the three distinct persons in complete oneness of mutuality and action. When we passionately enter our interactions, we will ultimately act responsibly. Wholly engaging the Other will result in action on behalf of the Other (other marginalized persons, God, self, the good, truth); otherwise, we did not *fully* enter the relationship in love. If we withhold from bearing the cross of total resignation, remaining partial, we will not rise to complete co-conditioning relations with God (as friends—Jacob) but remain only good and 'faithful' servants (Abraham). For *even in Jacob's fighting God, he is fully given to God*. It is simply what committed friends and spouses do. Likewise, Bonhoeffer believes God is calling humanity into complete co-conditioning agency, *fides directa*, which is not wholly separate from *fides reflexa*, as *fides directa* emerges from the eternal *into* the interstices of

time and the contextualizing *fides reflexa*. To the degree we are willing to act ethically, we are willing to enter the full relationship—love. A maturing Christianity that properly assimilates a "world come of age" can express a non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts (McLaughlin 2020, p. 119; Bonhoeffer 2005, p. 134–45). According to McLaughlin, Bonhoeffer thinks the human ability for appropriate autonomy is dependent upon the world's coming of age (McLaughlin 2020, p. 106). The Christian "come of age" finds Christ and the sacred integrated into the interstices of all life. Bonhoeffer thought this was an ongoing process both within the social growth of the world and in theology.

> The transformation into the divine image will become ever more profound, and the image of Christ in us will continue to increase in clarity. This is a progression in us from one level of understanding to another and from one degree of clarity to another, toward an ever-increasing perfection in the form of likeness to the image of the Son of God. "And all of us, who with unveiled faces let the glory of the Lord be reflect in us, are thereby transformed into his image from glory to glory". (Bonhoeffer 2003, p. 286)

8. Conclusions

The inappropriate compulsion toward cultic conversion as the only initiation into the redemptive action of Christ and the Spirit is destructive to the church's relationship with the outside world; as we have seen, it does not fully square with the New Testament. There are many successful Christians and organizations that successfully mentor and disciple people and groups outside the church, and they do so effectively without proselyting those they work with. They do not force the gospel on them, but neither do they shy from boldly acknowledging it as well. Nevertheless, we can only arrest our compulsion to inappropriately convert (control and unify) if and only if we can acknowledge the theological and biblical precedent that Christ and the Spirit are working in and, to some degree, outside the church. How we ultimately identify this redemptive process is not the most important thing; what is paramount is that we acknowledge that the Scriptures are quite clear about it happening. Nevertheless, a growing understanding of how this is happening benefits the mission of the church and improves its witness to a pluralistic world.

If Matthew 12:31,32 indeed suggests that our belief in Christ becomes an idol—failing to know and encounter Jesus Christ as God—because of the bifurcation of our soul, in what Kierkegaard argues is a failure to become spirit, then our openness to the genuine expression of the Other toward affecting the entirety of ourselves signals the initiation of the redemptive process, whether it happens inside and outside the church. If the church increasingly taught this New Testament theme, expressing a more mature understanding of how Christ's redemption is active in the world while maintaining a full-bodied Chalcedonian Christology, the gospel would become quietly irresistible.

This essay offers three distinct contributions to the literature: (1) A meaningful understanding of Matt 12:31 (and Jacob) that is coherent with the rest of the Scriptures, which I have yet to find within the literature. (2) An understanding of *perichoresis* and *analogia spiritus* developed within this essay that theologically grounds a viable Christian pluralistic hypothesis. I have argued here, and elsewhere, that such an understanding leads to a more functional understanding of how a perichoretic theology might support a practical understanding of Christian inclusivism without sacrificing the uniqueness and redemptive efficacy of Christ. (3) A developing understanding of *perichoresis* and *analogia spiritus* that, through interdisciplinary theology and a metaphysical paradigm shift, open new ground for exploring answers to many age-old unresolved theological enigmas, such as divine providence and human freedom, theodicy, human origins, and of course a viable Christian pluralistic hypothesis.

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Notes

1 The closest Bonhoeffer gets to expressing the co-conditioning dynamic within the *analogia spiritus* (and *perichoresis*) is found in (Bonhoeffer 2005, p. 330), "For just as hearing cannot be independent of [doing], so doing must not make itself independent of hearing. . . . The closest Bonhoeffer gets to expressing the co-conditioning dynamic within the *analogia spiritus* (and *perichoresis*) is found in (Bonhoeffer 2005, p. 330), "For just as hearing cannot be independent of [doing], so doing must not make itself independent of hearing. . . . Only one thing is needed—not hearing or doing as two separate things".Only one thing is needed—not hearing or doing as two separate things".

2 For a critical study of the dynamic of *perichoresis* with Bonhoeffer's paralleling theological dynamics, see (Gorsuch 2024). For a shorter presentation of a perichoretic ontology, see (Gorsuch 2022).

3 As Kierkegaard states in one of his titles, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*. By this, he means (1) a person "must in truth will the good, . . . be willing to do all for it [and] . . . willing to suffer all for it," *as well as* (2) "live as an 'individual.' . . . For he who is not himself a unity is never really anything wholly and decisively" (Kierkegaard 1938, pp. 122, 184).

4 D Hagner tells us Christ's insistence that "anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him", is a difficult passage that does not exactly encourage optimism in the exegete (Hagner 1993, p. 347). Furthermore, W Davies and D Allison say, 'Matt 12.32 has no obvious meaning. . . . We remained stumped' (Davies and Allison 1991, p. 348), and U. Luz (2001) finds no explanation satisfactory. When Professor Hagner encountered this author's exegete of this passage in (Hagner 1993 during an exegesis class, he conceded that it indeed brought coherent meaning to the passage within the greater context of the New Testament).

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A Home for the 'Wandering Aramean'—In Germany?

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Abstract: Migration to Germany has been a fact of life for the average German since the 1960s. Immigrants started arriving from countries like Turkey, Spain, Greece, or Italy as a post-war labor force was invited to Germany to address workforce shortages. Many of these immigrants ultimately brought their families to live in Germany. One group of these newcomers was Aramean families of Syriac Orthodox faith, forced to flee the Tur Abdin region in southeast Turkey via Syria, Lebanon, and Northern Iraq. This paper will discuss the background and impetus for moving to the West for this immigrant group in detail. It will review the impacts on the life of devout Syriac Orthodox families while living in Germany, a secular country. It will also take an initial look at whether evangelical communities in Germany can come alongside this group, still suffering from a different kind of persecution: the "otherness" of living in Germany.

Keywords: Aramean; Sayfo; Aramaic; Germany; immigrant; Syriac Orthodox; secularization; Missiology

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1. Introduction

Most of us who have studied Scripture probably have caught the 'Wandering Aramean' in Deuteronomy 26:5—hidden in the 613 *mitzvot* (Eisenberg 2004, p. 515) or commandments—when God instructs the Israelites: "You shall answer and say before the Lord your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation".[1] Who are the Arameans referred to here? And what do they have to do with Germany?

Beginning with a look at the history, background, language, and religion of the Aramean immigrants who began to arrive in Germany in the 1960s, this paper will provide an initial view into the origin and history of the Aramean people of Syriac Orthodox faith living in Germany. Migration patterns and religio-cultural adaptation processes in the context of the Aramean diaspora in Germany will also be reviewed (the study is still ongoing). The assumption at the beginning of the study was that Aramean youths and young adults' attendance is declining in Syriac-Orthodox churches. Patterns become noticeable when reviewing how Aramean parents and grandparents pass their faith to the next generations. The paper will also show how German churches can help them in this effort. This study focused on Evangelical churches due to an assertive youth outreach in most Evangelical Christian communities. The study uses a general hermeneutic approach as the underlying methodology— applied to several historical and secondary sources— and provides a narrative of this ethnoreligious group over time with special attention to the migration process and diaspora situation in Germany. Additional information was gathered during interviews with and surveys of Aramean men, women, and youths in Germany.

As with every research in the academic realm, some key terms require definition. There will be three terms in everyday use for immigrants from the part of the world known as ancient Mesopotamia. Aramean immigrant groups originate from this area, mainly modern-day southeastern Turkey, northern Iraq, and northern Syria. Many people somewhat interchangeably use the terms *Aramean*, *Assyrian*, and *Chaldean* (Aramean Democratic Organization n.d.). Each of these titles describes people that originated in the ancient Mesopotamian world. Much more will be said later, but briefly, religious immigrants

choose to be called *Aramean*, whereas the more politically or future homeland-focused immigrants prefer *Assyrian*. *Chaldean* is mainly used for members of the Chaldean Catholic Church, an Eastern Rite church with immigrants from northern Iraq, northwestern Iran, and southeastern Turkey. It is mentioned here because of the confusion with the plethora of terms describing immigrants from ancient Mesopotamian lands.

Arameans discussed here are of the *Syriac Orthodox* faith. The *Syriac Orthodox Church* is named after the Syriac language, the church's liturgical language. This also differentiates it from the term *Syrian*, primarily used today to describe things or concepts aligned with the Syrian Federation.

Suryoye or *Suryaye* are the New-Aramaic terms to describe Arameans. These terms are used in the Aramean community today.

Syriac is a Semitic language, which originates in the ancient city of Edessa (modern-day Urfa in south-east Turkey) (Butts 2011). It is written in an alphabet derived from the Aramaic language seen in parts of the Old Testament books of Daniel and Ezra. It is the liturgical language of the Syriac Orthodox church.

Sayfo (lit. 'sword') is used for the genocide and deportation of Syriac Orthodox Christians from their homelands (Brock 2011). It is also known as the *Assyrian Genocide.* Beginning in 1914 but culminating in a genocide in 1915, Ottoman troops attacked Christian villages and killed their inhabitants. These massacres coincided with the more well-known Armenian genocide and ultimately led to today's diaspora communities.

National identity, considered in conjunction with a biblical theology of migration, has been defined as "a means by which culture is defined through these bounded, essentialized notions of 'being' (Tolia-Kelly 2009, p. 260). It is important to note that there is a significant difference in the meaning of the related term *nationality*.

2. Immigration to Germany

Watching the news, an observer might conclude that the topic of immigrants is relatively new and limited to our lifetime. Of course, those who know the Scriptures realize that migration is a theme that runs throughout its pages. From Adam and Eve having to leave the Garden after the fall[2] to Priscilla and Aquila fleeing Rome after being forced to leave by a decree of Emperor Claudius,[3] the biblical narrative is replete with migration examples. Studying history, even with minimal effort, one can see that migration has happened throughout human history. People are on the move—at times for economic reasons, but often because they are forced to leave their homeland, frequently due to war or famine.

Newcomers to western Europe come from cultural backgrounds very different from their new neighbors. Many have a divergent religious upbringing than the predominantly Christian European receiving countries (Statista 2022). Even if an immigrant holds to the Christian faith, their faith background and expression may differ from their new home.

Focusing on the Christian new arrivals' example, how does an immigrant who shares the same faith denominator of "Christian"—but not the same denomination—experience life in a new environment? How do they settle in a Western European country, specifically Germany, that has become primarily secularized? How do their descendants live out (or not live out) their faith?[4] How might Germany be different from their country of origin?

Germany is an economically and politically prosperous European country that has risen from literal ashes after World War II to become a European and global powerhouse. It has evolved into an economic model for other nations (White 2010), despite an almost immeasurable impact on its society, infrastructure, and industry from wartime destruction and Nazism, including the genocide of Jews under Hitler.

Germany has had an influx of various nationalities over the decades for several reasons after the initial rebuilding after the war ended. Much of this early recovery was kindled by the Marshall Plan (Hein 2017), which intended to revive and vitalize the industry destroyed in Germany during the war. A significant labor force was needed to put together living

spaces and support the industrial recovery quickly after so much destruction, as many German workers had been displaced. Tamás Vonyó Bocconi explains that

> [r]ecent historiography accepted that industrial equipment and plant had survived the war with remarkably little damage and argued instead that economic recovery was hindered by a combination of factors that disrupted the chains of production . . . [T]he economy remained dislocated after 1950 due to labour misallocation that resulted from the wartime destruction of urban housing (Bocconi 2014, pp. 129–30).

Despite all these hindrances, by the early 1950s, as Kees van Paridon describes, Germany moved into

> a period of unprecedented economic growth starting right at a time when any possibility for economic growth seems utterly impossible. At the end of World War II, Germany was regarded to be in that situation. The country was greatly weakened by an enormous physical devastation, loss of life, the division of the country into two parts, and the allied occupation. That such a country could experience a dramatic postwar economic revival seemed out of the question. It seems therefore quite understandable that the very strong economic recovery of the Federal Republic of Germany in the fifties and the sixties was seen as an economic miracle. (van Paridon 1998, p. 651)

To augment the German labor force, Turkish, Greek, Spanish, Yugoslavian, and Italian guest workers came to Germany in the 1960s to support this booming economic development. Many of the workers eventually brought their families and stayed in Germany. A majority of migrants to Germany came because of the moneymaking opportunities offered. Some, however, had lived through persecution in their countries of origin and sought safety and the chance to provide for their dependents. These immigrants brought with them various faith traditions, e.g., Islam. To cite one example, Afghan refugees came in several waves, starting in 1979 with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and continuing in an ebb and flow based on political events in the country (Fischer 2019). After the fall of the Berlin Wall, other nationalities joined the German potpourri of humankind: Russian, Polish, Germans from former East Germany, and Albanians, among others. Over the past decade, one million Syrian refugees have enriched the German cultural landscape. Now with the Taliban ruling Afghanistan, there is a significant rise in the number again of Afghan refugees. Many Germans struggle with the ever-expanding diverse landscape.

3. Who Are the Arameans?

Arameans are by religious and cultural background Christians of Syriac Orthodox faith. They originate from primarily south-eastern Turkey, specifically a region called Tur Abdin (or "Mountain of the Servants [of God]"). Adam Becker describes the area from where the families came as

> " . . . an elevated plateau with a microclimate reminiscent of the Mediterranean, although it is hundreds of kilometers from the sea. Today the Tur 'Abdin, part of contemporary Mardin province, is considered the spiritual homeland of the Syrian Orthodox (West Syrians, Süryani), the East Syrians' centuries-long rivals, most of whom now live in Istanbul or scattered across northern Europe and elsewhere. From the enchanting heights of Mardin, the city on the southwest corner of the Tur 'Abdin, one looks south into the flat plains of Syria". (Becker 2015, p. 44)

Regarding ethnicity, many/most Arameans do not perceive themselves as Turkish but as a distinct ethnic group. Instead, they see themselves as the descendants of those who inhabited that portion of ancient Mesopotamia. They speak a Central Neo-Aramaic dialect of Aramaic, Surayt, also called Turoyo (Talay 2002). On the other hand, their church's liturgical language is classical Syriac, another Aramaic dialect (Syriac Orthodox Resources 2001). The Aramaic language will be given a closer look later.

In the 1960s, the first Aramaean immigrants—primarily men—arrived in Germany. The legislation in Germany had shifted to allow so-called "guest workers" to come to Germany with full work permits (Oltmer et al. 2012, p. 10). After immigration initially was limited mainly to *Aussiedler*, or ethnic Germans that were often forced to flee eastern lands and internal refugees fleeing the socialist German Democratic Republic, this changed, as Eule writes, "from the mid 1950s, when imminent labour shortages spurred the West German government to recruit temporary 'guest' workers. As a result, bilateral agreements were made with Italy (1955), Spain (1960), Greece (1960), Turkey (1961), Portugal (1964), and Yugoslavia (1968) through which some 2.6 million mainly male low- and un-skilled workers arrived in the FRG"[5] (Eule 2014, p. 10). And so, in 1961, Turkey joined the other nations that were allowing workers to apply for positions and travel to Germany, filling jobs that had gone unfilled, many in, e.g., agriculture or mining.

Unlike some other—but not all—immigrants during that time who may have primarily arrived due to excellent economic prospects compared to their countries of origin, Sofia Mutlu-Numansen and Ringo Ossewaarde write about the immigrants from south-east Turkey:

> Without a state or intellectual elite of their own, and being deprived of their means of expression in post-Ottoman Turkey, these forgotten peoples, had no means for recognition. After another wave of persecution in the 1970s, many of them managed to obtain political asylum in Western Europe, particularly in Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands. (Mutlu-Numansen and Ossewaarde 2015, p. 430)

Arameans arrived in Germany due to the after-effects of a more somber reason: a genocide their ancestors had survived and continued persecution in their ancient Mesopotamian homeland.

4. The Sayfo

Thanks in part to the success of the 2017 Hollywood movie "The Promise," starring Christian Bale (George 2016), more people, in particular in the United States and Europe, have heard of the Armenian genocide—the systematic destruction of Armenian people by the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Many descendants of Armenian survivors live in the United States of America as well as other diaspora locations. One cannot speak of the Aramean people at discussion here (and be careful with the similarity in the sound of the name when quickly listening) without considering what drove them to leave their homeland—much like the Armenian people. As Mutlu-Numansen and Ossewaarde note,

> [g]enerally, there have been few publications on the Syriac Sayfo, as contrasted with research on the Armenian genocide. With some notable exceptions (Gaunt 2006; Khosoreva 2007; Omtzigt et al. 2012; Travis 2011), the Sayfo genocide is typically mentioned within the context of the Armenian genocide, lumped together with the mass killings of Armenians, Yezidis and Kurds in what Levene (1998) calls the 'zone of genocide'. (Mutlu-Numansen and Ossewaarde 2015, p. 430)

To give the historical review of the genocide some depth, in two phases, once in 1895 and then again in 1914/15, the political rulers of the countries intended to gather Muslim peoples and strengthen their national identity. In 1912, the Christian peoples gained their independence, but the turmoil of the First World War and the losses meant that the Ottoman Turks resolved to expel the Christian peoples to strengthen their territory. How do you get rid of non-Muslims? In this case, a Holy War—*Jihad*—was declared in 1914, claiming the Christian peoples to be enemies and traitors.

Mustafa Afsakal writes about this time,

> By the nineteenth century, however, the challenges presented by Ottoman subjects linked to foreign powers became all-pervasive. As a result, religion became intensely politicized at the state level. Muslim-Christian relations lay at the very

> heart of Ottoman state policy. How could the state maintain the empire's regions with large Christian populations in the Balkans and parts of Anatolia under the Ottoman umbrella? . . . The Young Turks who came to power in 1908 and more firmly in 1913 also understood the power of this ideology, and they went on to capitalize on it in 1914, when they entered World War I on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary and—despite the apparent contradictions that alliance with the Christian powers entailed—declared jihad on 14 November 1914. By this time, they had embraced the belief that the empire could not be salvaged by reforms, diplomacy, or "those old books of international law, but only by war". (Afsakal 2012, pp. 287–88)

Initially, a plan was worked out to get rid of Christians: they should pay gold to avoid being drafted into the war. All Christian males, Arameans, Armenians, Catholics, Chaldeans, and Protestants aged 20–45 should pay fifty dinars of gold. Such a coin was minted from 4.25 grams of 22-carat gold. To give a comparison, today's value (in 2022) would be roughly $110,000—in other words, a price impossible to pay for the villagers.

Shortly after that, however, the actual plan came to light. Beginning in 1914 but culminating in a genocide in 1915, Ottoman troops attacked Christian villages and killed their inhabitants. Ottoman forces persecuted those they deemed 'other.' This meant that discrimination was also exerted against the Christian citizens of the Tur Abdin region, among them the Syriac Orthodox Arameans. In particular, the bishops, priests, and monks, but also people who had been given a good education, were rounded up, tortured, and then killed. One of the methods used was starvation. The Ottomans demanded from the villagers that wheat, sheep, coal, and other items be given to feed their troops. The situation continued to escalate, despite all efforts to return to peace. These massacres are still only partially recognized and were a driver of immigration to Western Europe, leading to today's diaspora communities. Between 1.6 and 2.7 million Christian Armenians, Arameans/Assyrians/Chaldeans, and Pontic Greeks died during this terrible time in the region.[6]

Boutros Touma Issa, in a collection of readings collected from family members who originated in Mesopotamia and are members of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, leaves no doubt about the horrors of the genocide:

> The atrocities of those deceivers and fraudsters went further where several of the bishops, priests, community leaders, and other children of the community were either suffocated with smoke, or burnt alive, or cut in pieces, or buried in sand while still alive, or dropped in moving sand, rivers, or lakes to face their death without any mercy. In addition, there were those who joined the martyrs either dying from hunger or cold, with their bodies left to feed the birds and the beasts. (Touma Issa 2017, p. 126)

In some districts, Mutlu-Numansen and Ossewaarde write, "more than 90 percent of the Christian population was killed" (Mutlu-Numansen and Ossewaarde 2019, p. 413). More than 500,000 people of Aramean, Assyrian, and Chaldean backgrounds were killed in south-east Turkey. This genocide of Syriacs is often lumped together with the Armenian genocide, yet it deserves its own recognition. The term *Sayfo* (lit. 'sword') continues to be actively used within the Aramean community for the genocide and deportation of their Syriac Orthodox Christian ancestors and other Christian groups from their homelands (Brock 2011).

The almost complete decimation of the Aramaic educated and clerical elites left behind a small number of families in Tur Abdin. They did not have the educational background or financial means to significantly impact their lives in this region of southeast Turkey. Anecdotally and to provide real-life stories as collected in interviews, as one man shared, his small village did not even have a school until 1965.[7] Another man in the Syriac Orthodox community in Germany shared that he attended school for grades 1 through 5, plus parochial school to learn the Syriac language, prayers, melodies, and history. Only families who had sufficient money could send their children to higher grades. He left the Tur Abdin

region when he was 14, traveling to his new home via Istanbul to join his two older siblings who were staying with relatives already in Germany. His family arrived in Germany in 1980 in a staggered manner. His parents sent the older children first, having learned of more significant economic opportunity and a lack of persecution there. They then followed with the two youngest children. It was becoming increasingly complex for Christian families to live in Turkey due to continued attacks by Kurdish and Turkish assailants and the lack of opportunity to earn a living. There was "no future, no higher education, no universities, no employment".[8] Upon arrival in Germany, his education did not continue except for two German courses. Through sheer diligence, he was able to self-educate and is now the respected and sought-after author of currently 22 published books being used in the global Syriac Orthodox community. He is a deacon in his church and a Syriac Orthodox religion teacher in the German school system.[9]

The collective memory of *Sayfo* has been carried forward through the generations and is an important cultural aspect of the *Suryoye* self-understanding. Every 15 June, *Sayfo* commemorations are held throughout Aramean communities in Germany. Memorials proposed or built in cities around Germany still receive Turkish government pushback today[10]. The trauma experienced is something that is carried forward in each following generation. Ciano Aydin writes about collective trauma:

> Several studies confirm long-term effects of trauma caused by genocide. Descendants of the 1994 Tutsi genocide survivors in Rwanda were at high risk of developing mental health problems, had a high trauma load, and missed family integration and support even 16 years after the genocide (Rieder and Elbert 2013). In other studies, descendants of Armenian and Syriac Christian genocide survivors expressed feeling burdened by having to carry emotional memories of previous generations. They indicated that they have more difficulties living a normal emotional life, which is expressed in deep sadness, distrust of outsiders, and a damaged sense of their identity and reality (Cetrez 2017; Kalayjian et al. 1996). Recently, Yehuda et al. (2015) indicated that children of genocide survivors can even inherit trauma in their DNA. This study revealed that Holocaust offspring had 7.7% lower methylation than control offspring, and had low cortisol levels associated with depression, emotional hypersensitivity, and social anxiety. If a traumatic event shared by an ethnic or religious group is not dealt with or paid proper attention, it not only can cause shifts, disruptions, and disturbances in the group's cultural identity and hinder its ability to flourish in the future, but it ultimately can also lead to its obliteration. (Kalayjian and Weisberg 2002; Aydin 2017, p. 128)

5. How Is the Aramean Faith Different?

The Syriac Orthodox faith of Aramean families is unfamiliar to most Western Christians. Often lumped together under the "Orthodox" title, upon inspection, one finds that there are fundamental differences. For most people of the Christian faith in the West, "Orthodox" comes mainly from Eastern Orthodox expressions: primarily Greek Orthodox or Russian Orthodox. The Syriac Orthodox Church points its identity back to Acts 11:26 when Saul (Paul) and Barnabas met in Antioch with the believers and taught the church. There the believers in Antioch were first called Christians. As Heidi Armbruster notes, "[s]cholars generally locate the historical origins of Syriac Christianity in both a Jewish Christian heritage and the gentile Christian milieu of Antioch, one of the major centres of early Christianity" (Armbruster 2013, p. 6).

Any student of church history will point to the year A.D. 1054 when the East and the West churches split, better known as the Great Schism (Galli 1997). A lesser-known fact is that an earlier schism occurred in the 5th century that split the Orthodox world into the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Oriental Orthodox churches (Penn et al. 2022, pp. 11–13). One of these Oriental Orthodox churches is the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch. The others are the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, the Armenian Apostolic Church,

the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, and the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church. The starting point of the ultimate schism was the differing Christological understanding of two men: Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius of Antioch, explicitly concerning their respective interpretations of the two natures of Christ. Already in AD 431 at the Council of Ephesus, Nestorius's position to refuse to call Mary *Theotokos,* the God-bearer, but rather only allow her to be called *Christotokos*, the Christ-bearer, brought the Antiochian position to an extreme. This position emphasized the "distinctiveness and integrity of humanity and divinity in Christ to such a degree that they could not easily affirm a true unity of the two in the single person of Christ (FitzGerald and Gratsias 2007, p. 11). Language issues also burdened the discussion between Cyril and Nestorius. Nestorius was ultimately declared a heretic, which several modern historians and theologians now see as primarily a political decision.[11]

The Oriental churches supported Cyril's position and felt that the Chalcedonian definition was too Nestorian. As Father V.C. Samuel writes,

> At the same time, the Alexandrine tradition and particularly Cyril had a great hold in the east, and the synodal committee which drew up the definition had men who would stand by it. These men succeeded in putting in a few emphases coming from their tradition in the council's definition, which enabled sixth century Chalcedonian theologians in the east to develop a doctrinal position which was as anti-Nestorian as, if not more anti-Nestorian than, that of the council's opponents. (Samuel 2001, p. 110)

The authors of the excellent *Syriac Orthodox Resources* website, among them the well-known researcher and publisher George Kiraz, further clarify,

> The Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451 resulted in the schism of Christendom into two groups. The Catholic (Rome) and Greek (Byzantine) Churches accepted the Council, while the Syrian (Antioch) and Coptic (Alexandria) Churches rejected it. The former group adopted the doctrine that Christ is *in* two natures, human and divine, while the latter adopted the doctrine that Christ has one incarnate nature *from* two natures. It is worth noting that the drafts of the Council were according to the position of the Syrian and Coptic Churches. The final resolution, however, was according to the doctrine of the Western Churches. The difference lies in one preposition as explained. (Syriac Orthodox Resources 2004)

Meanwhile, another political conflict was brewing between Constantinople and the Oriental churches. Deacon Hanna Aydin of the Syriac Orthodox Church writes:

> The Council of Chalcedon was dealing with a new paragraph (can. 28) in which the power of the Patriarch of Constantinople over the Orient was to be expressed. Since the Byzantine Emperor exercised power over the Orient, the Patriarch of Constantinople was also to exercise sole power over the Oriental Churches. When the Oriental Churches (Syrian, Egyptian, Armenian and Ethiopian) legitimized themselves as older and rejected the Constantinopolitan jurisdiction, they were accused with the word 'Monophysitism' in order to be able to persecute them; in reality, it was all about political interests. (Aydin 1990, p. 45)[12]

While Christological considerations were still prominent, this point weighed heavily on the decision of the Oriental Orthodox churches to ultimately not affirm the declarations at the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451. Despite efforts by Emperor Zeno in AD 482, who issued a conciliatory document known as the *Henotikon,* which affirmed the creed of Nicea, the rift was irreparable. Opposing voices arose primarily out of Egypt and ultimately caused this effort to fail (Samuel 2001, pp. 143–50). This triggered the final schism of the miaphysite—a term suggested by Dr. Sebastian Brock of Oxford University to accurately describe the Syriac Orthodox position (Syriac Orthodox Resources 2000)—or non-Chalcedonian churches, as they are sometimes referred to, from the dyophysite churches or Chalcedon-affirming churches.[13]

Moving forward in time, Herman Teule studied the *Suryoye* concept of self-identity in the Middle Ages by examining three authors—Dionysius bar Salibi, Jacob bar Shakko, and Gregory Barhebraeus—who wrote during the 12th and 13th centuries, a period known in this part of the world as the Syriac Renaissance (Teule 2009, p. 179). In particular, Teule wants to demonstrate the impact of Arabic on the Syriac community and the attempt to keep Syriac alive. He does so by studying the writings of these different but contemporary authors. Teule puts this in the context of identity formation within the Syriac community. As he highlights, all three writers are "considered by present-day Suryoye as bearers of their identity" (Teule 2009, p. 180).

Teule looks deeper into three areas of the writings of bar Salibi, bar Shakko, and Barhebraeus: their engagement with the Islamic cultural world, the religion of Islam, and the topic of divisions between Christian groups. Teule highlights that the three men were still proposing a distinct Christology vis à vis their neighboring Christian denominations. Bar Salibi refuted a West Syrian monk named Rabban Yeshu'. This monk had reflected on these inter-Christian struggles: "Is it right to consider only ourselves as orthodox and the others as heretics? Is it right to constitute ourselves the judge of other Christians" (Teule 2009, p. 187)? Bar Salibi contended that Chalcedonians and Nestorians were to be refuted because their Christology differed, and their liturgical practices set them apart. Bar Salibi even described his vehement opposition to Armenian Christians, although also miaphysite, as their practices again were different. He strongly wanted to protect his community. Both bar Shakko and Barhebraeus were likewise interested in preserving the Christological formula of the Syriac Christian community and demanded that the search for truth was only to be completed in their community (Teule 2009, pp. 186–87).

Today, the miaphysite churches are considered the Oriental Orthodox Church—non-Chalcedonian, whereas the others are dyophysite in nature—or Chalcedon-affirming.. They are the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Western churches. The Syriac Orthodox church is also called the 'Syrian Orthodox' church; however, recent political developments in Syria have made the use of 'Syriac Orthodox' clearer (Syriac Orthodox Resources 2004). Sometimes, the term 'Jacobite Church' is also used. However, this is considered derogatory by the Syriac Orthodox faithful, who point to Christ as the church's founder. This misnomer is based on the work of a dedicated monk, Jacob Baradaeus. In the 6th century, through the support of Empress Theodora, he became the general metropolitan, rebuilt the decimated Syriac Orthodox clergy, and was tasked with restoring the persecuted churches of Antioch and Alexandria (Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches 2022).

Bringing the two Orthodox worlds back together seems to be a Herculean task. Theologians and church leaders have made many ecumenical efforts to reunite the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches. Yet, a significant amount of pushback has come to agreements made in the past, particularly from the Holy Monastery of Saint Gregory on Mount Athos (Orthodox Christian Information Center n.d.).

6. The Aramaic Language and Its Dialects

A walk down the Semitic language tree of Aramaic, an ancient language, shows it has numerous dialects and has been in continuous use since the 11th century BC. George Kiraz writes that it "became the lingua franca of the Near East by the 6th century BC. It was the native tongue of the ancient Chaldeans, a second language to the Assyro-Babylonians, an official language of the Persian Achaemensians, and a common language of the Jews, replacing Hebrew. Jesus and the Apostles spoke and preached in Aramaic" (Kiraz 2013, p. xxi). Its spread was mainly due to Christianity's spread in the Semitic-speaking world and the Silk Road (Kiraz 2013, p. xxi).

Syriac is another dialect of Aramaic that began in the Edessa area, present-day Urfa in Turkey. It is prominent as the liturgical language of the Syriac Orthodox church. Many ancient documents are written in Syriac, including theological writings. While Syriac declined in prominence between the 14th and 19th centuries, Syriac has retained importance as the liturgical language of Syriac Orthodoxy (Kiraz 2013, p. xxi). Because of this history,

the Arameans, by their language and many other achievements as theologians, thinkers, and poets, have a long and proud part in the history of humankind.

Jehu Hanciles' 2021 book *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity* describes the shaping of Christianity from its early days through the end of the medieval period. He discusses the contentious space between the Roman Empire and the Persian Empire and the Christians caught in the middle. Hanciles describes the critical importance of the Syriac language and confirms that it served as a "lingua franca, only being replaced by Arabic after 637" (Hanciles 2021, p. 216). Hanciles showcases the importance of the language, not just in ecclesiastical terms for the Syriac Orthodox Church, but also as the language that served the entirety of Syrian and Mesopotamian lands, thereby making it "a lubricating ingredient that facilitated trade and made communication and countless transactions between vastly diverse populations possible" (Hanciles 2021, p. 216).

In everyday life, the earlier generations of Aramean immigrants speak Surayt, or Turoyo, another dialect of Central Neo-Aramaic (Oez 2018, p. 340). This language was orally handed down and therefore lacked a written system. It originates in Tur Abdin and is considered severely endangered on UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (Moseley and Nicolas 2010). Most Turoyo speakers have immigrated from the Tur Abdin region to Western Europe. While about 20,000 people lived in the Tur Abdin in the 1960s, today, there are only about 2000 (Talay 2002, p. 69). As Shabo Talay notes, the children of these first-generation Arameans learn the local language (in this case, German) as soon as they enter Kindergarten at the age of three or four. This means they begin mixing languages in their speech, known as *code-switching* (Talay 2002, p. 70). The churches presented elements, e.g., Scripture readings, during the Holy Liturgy to the people in Turoyo, which led to the conviction that teaching Turoyo was the church's role. However, the *madrashyote* (also called *madrasse*), or church schools, only teach Syriac for liturgical purposes. Some efforts have taken place to add a written system for Turoyo. Since many children and youths do not know the Syriac letters, a concept was discussed to use Latin letters potentially. However, this would lead to a further decline in the use of Syriac as the liturgical, written language (Talay 2002, p. 75). Thus the Turoyo language continues to decline with the younger generations (Talay 2002, pp. 71–72).

An anonymous, written survey of 34 school children 13–15 years old provided by a proxy—in this case, a religion teacher in local schools—showed that almost all respondents stated that their parents had taught them Turoyo, and they spoke it themselves. Yet, the mention of a *Madrasse* (school) for children who need to learn outside the home shows that this sample may not be representative. More research is required to assess this independently outside a religious instruction setting.[14]

7. Aramean or Assyrian?

One might hear of this people group referred to as Assyrians as well. Both terms are used to describe the people group that calls themselves *Suryoye.* Both may very well originate from the same area and speak the same language, yet each group has differing motivations and goals. An ancient people is being used to highlight the quest for national identity, as Adam Becker asserts:

> The name Assyrian as used for the contemporary ethnoreligious community of Assyrians is an "invented tradition," a retrieval of an ancient appellation that had fallen into disuse for over two thousand years. Invented traditions "are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition". The use of Assyrian derives from Western sources, not from a continuity of identity between the ancient Assyrians and the modern ones. (Becker 2015, p. 299)

It was only in the 1970s—already in Western Europe—that differentiation was desired. Mutlu-Numansen confirms the application of a different term:

> Though the Arameans and Assyrians are technically two different peoples, their Sayfo victims in Turkey regarded themselves, and were regarded by others, as one people: Syriacs (from the Syriac-Orthodox religion so intertwined with their identity). It was only after migration from Turkey in the 1970s that these Syriacs started to identify as *either* Arameans or Assyrians. (Even within one family, people can disagree on their identity). (Mutlu-Numansen and Ossewaarde 2019, p. 413)

In *Soccer & Society* journal, Carl Rommel writes on performative spaces in the football (soccer, here) world of *Suryoye* migrants in the Swedish town of Södertälje with a large *Suryoye* population (Rommel 2011). In *Playing with Difference: Football as a Performative Space for Division Among Suryoye Migrants in Sweden*, Rommel interviewed male soccer fans who are fans of one of two *Suryoye* soccer clubs. The two clubs demonstrate the internal conflict within this immigrant group from the southeastern part of Turkey. In Tur Abdin, these families were solely defined by their Christian religion. They were suddenly called 'Assyrians' (Assyrier in Sweden) in Sweden.

This difference in understanding resulted in two very prominent soccer clubs, one ascribing the Assyrian and the other the Syriac descriptor to their name and identity. Rommel reviews this experience in light of identity formation. He shows that while Assyrians assign a political aspect of originating from the Assyrian Empire of biblical days to their identity, the Syriacs focus on the Aramaic language and the history of the Syriac Orthodox church. While they both use *Suryoye* to describe themselves, these deeper-reaching identity aspects write a story where "history . . . divides rather than unites" (Rommel 2011, p. 854).

Suryoye identity envelops both the Assyrian and the Aramean characters. Regardless, there are still disagreements as to what is relevant. As an example, from a conversation with the leader of an Aramean group in Germany, roughly one-third of the Syriac Orthodox church members supported the Assyrian New Year on April 1st enthusiastically and saw it as an identity-relevant celebration, while about two-thirds still thought that this celebration was not a part of the Aramean culture.[15] In this paper, Aramean is the preferred term as the Syriac Orthodox men, women, and youth interviewed chose this as their self-descriptor.

8. Aramean Family Structures

While there is a small amount of intermarriage in the Aramean community, most marriages are conducted within it. Interviews with Aramean men and women in the context of Syriac Orthodox Church communities showed a powerful religious influence within the family, starting in early childhood when the babies are baptized into the faith. Aramean girls are raised with rigorous moral understandings. While some Aramean men and women are no longer part of the Syriac Orthodox Church, interviews suggested continued adherence to traditional values in raising children.[16]

Divorce is rare since marriage is one of the seven sacraments of the Syriac Orthodox Church, but it is acknowledged in the writings of the Syriac Orthodox dioceses. An example from the Archdiocese of the Eastern United States states, "In our present and modem time, divorce is rampant and on the rise. It is creating havoc and tremendous problems for Christian couples and children. The family values and ties are breaking loose and they are impacting the Christian society in very negative ways" (Ghattas 2010).

Church attendance is also considered a normal part of Aramean life in Germany. The social life in the church communities is very active, as shown through mentioning various events throughout the year by teenagers surveyed. Events such as weddings, baptisms, patronage feasts, and Mother's and Father's Day celebrations allow the community to bond.[17] Equally vital are the mourning expressions in the form of defined mourning period activities in the church for members who have passed away. The church community is always invited.[18]

Several schoolchildren surveyed were also active within the church through altar service (for the boys) and being part of the choir (for the girls).[19] These roles are very

structured within the liturgical setting of the Syriac Orthodox Church (Pircek, Fehime, and Elisabeth Karabas n.d.).

9. The Impact of Living in a Secular Society Such as Germany

Often in decades past, Aramean neighbors of Germans were considered just a form of Turkish immigrants. This image is slowly changing, which can be seen in a greater awareness of the Syriac Orthodox Church in public spaces/public life. Yet, some considerations remain pertinent to what living in Germany means to Syriac Orthodox men and women, e.g., the invisibility of this community. Heidi Armbruster describes this vividly in a chapter entitled "Trajectories of invisibility" from her book *Keeping the Faith: Syriac Christian Diasporas.* She highlights the historical plight of the Syriac Orthodox, which led to their present experience in Germany, where they are "largely disappearing in the community of so-called 'Turks'" (Armbruster 2013, p. 118). Armbruster discusses the legal status changes of immigrants to Germany in 2000 that eliminated the longstanding *jus sanguinis* ("right of blood" or birthright citizenship) requirements for German citizenship, making naturalization—at least legally—more accessible (Armbruster 2013, p. 120). Before this legal change, an immigrant's child was not automatically a German citizen, as they would have been in the US based on *jus soli* (right of birthplace).

Her chapter on "Change and generation in Berlin" (Armbruster 2013, pp. 161–82) is particularly interesting. It addresses the second-or third generations and their experience in their now no longer deemed 'new' environment, as it was for their parents and grandparents, but rather—what is now—their native German home. This is where the research interest focuses: what does it mean to raise children in a secular Western European culture when your culture of origin is profoundly religious? The issue is real, as the following statement from the Orthodox Bishops' Conference in 2012 shows: "We are concerned to see how many younger members of the church grow up without the necessary religious instruction to help them maintain the faith of their fathers and mothers and later pass it on to their children"[20] (Gemeinsame Kommission der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz und der Orthodoxen Bischofskonferenz in Deuschland 2012). Understanding how Syriac Orthodox churches are established in Germany is imperative for their interaction with other denominational groups.

10. The Syriac Orthodox Church in Germany

Reinhard Thöle writes in the article "Orthodox Churches in Germany: From Migrant Groups to Permanent Homeland" about the interplay between various arms of Orthodoxy in Germany and how Orthodox churches interact with German Catholic or Protestant churches. Understanding the Orthodox landscape in Germany is fundamental, particularly the Christological differences between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches. Thöle states, "Newcomers are looking for churches not merely because they are Orthodox, but sometimes even more with the expectation of finding a national home in a foreign environment" (Thöle 2014, p. 93). Immigrants to Germany started all Orthodox parishes in Germany. They would invite priests from their home nations to join them in Germany and serve these parishes (Thöle 2014, p. 91). This is true across all Orthodox denominations. In Germany, the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch has about 100,000 members across more than 60 churches of their own (Erzdiözese der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche in Deutschland n.d.). In the city of Gießen, 45 min north of Frankfurt, and its surroundings alone, there are four Syriac Orthodox churches, three of them in a smaller suburb community of just over 18,000 people. There are a few cities and towns in Germany where larger groups of Aramean families have settled. The Syriac Orthodox Church supplies them well with church buildings and clergy. All of this is funded through the tithes and offerings of the congregants. Unlike the German Catholic and Protestant state churches, Orthodox churches in Germany are self-funded (Praetor Verlagsgesellschaft mbH n.d.).

11. National Identity in Light of Scripture and in Historical and Modern Thought

The conversations with interviewees during this study to understand their own self-understanding and/or description almost exclusively ended up in a statement of "I am Aramean". National identity may be difficult to define for a people without a country. Many researchers have attempted to define what "national identity" means, i.e., what makes up a person's self-perspective of whom they are against the backdrop of national distinctiveness and character as applied to themselves.

In his 2020 dissertation, *A Biblical-Theological Study of Geography for Developing Missions Strategy to the Nations*, Matthew Hirt delivers an exhaustive review of what it means to develop a missions strategy for the nations. Hirt begins by reviewing the biblical theology behind the concept of national identity related to land. Across several Old and New Testament passages, he proposes that the authors of Scripture deploy a metonymy in using either the land or the nation to represent the nation's people (Hirt 2020, p. 36). Hirt shows that the loss of land through war meant the loss of national identity. He concludes that "[t]he geographical aspect is the most obvious component of national identity" (Hirt 2020, p. 78).

Andrew H. Kim, in his 2020 book *The Multinational Kingdom of God in Isaiah,* lets the reader look at the anthropological definition of a nation by investigating this concept in the reading of Genesis 10–12. Chapter 4 focuses on Old Testament passages that discuss the idea of "nation" from several angles, e.g., eschatological and consummate. An important takeaway is what Kim writes on what makes a nation: "[T]here is a characteristic that all anthropologists agree that a nation must possess, namely a historic homeland" (Kim 2020, p. 3). When considering immigrants such as the Arameans in Germany, who now have second and sometimes third generations born in Germany, it is critical to view how such a displaced person group can be a nation without such a homeland or how they can function better within their current context of being immigrants to another country.

Dorothea Weltecke's contribution to *Church History and Religious Culture* is an article that focuses on Michael the Syrian, the 12th-century patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church, and how his writing—notably his *Chronicles*—and his influence shaped Syriac Orthodox identity. This identity had been under polemical attack during his time as patriarch. Michael advocated primarily for the Syriac-speaking regions of the Syriac Orthodox world. Weltecke highlights how this Syriac Orthodox identity was crystallized by the term mhaymne, the believers. The term points to the Syriac Orthodox community's self-understanding that a believer is very worthy-of-trust and honorable. It also focuses on the person's religious identity addressed by this term: "Someone who apostatized to Islam or to Greek Orthodoxy stopped being *mhaymno.* At the same time, he also stopped being *Suryoyo*, as Michael did not see them as a member of his group any more" (Weltecke 2009, pp. 117–18).

Orthodoxy and what it meant to be *Suryoyo* were topics where Michael sought understanding, gave defense, and pleaded his ethnic case. Michael argues that the original language spoken by humankind in general before the Tower of Babel was Aramaic, in one example of his writing. Michael wanted to identify with the ancient Near East. It was essential since this identity was not threatened so much by Islam but "by the quarrel between the churches, more precisely, the quarrel with the Greek Orthodox and their attack on Syriac Orthodox identity" (Weltecke 2009, p. 120). Attacks on Syriac Orthodox identity often combined and collapsed religious and historical episodes. Weltecke writes, "The most important factors are similar to the present-day situation—polemical questions and attacks from outside" (Weltecke 2009, p. 122), something she elsewhere puts into a modern-day context: "One important challenge is the under-representation of Syrians in the narratives of the history taught at school and covered in the media in Germany" (Weltecke 2009, p. 116).

While Weltecke's article focuses on Michael the Syrian, a historical person from the 12th century, much of what she writes applies to the discussions in the Syriac Orthodox community today. Whether it is belittling remarks from those from Turkey but outside

the Suryoye community or other exclusion from German society, Syriac Orthodox migrant families experience much the same in the early 21st century in Germany.

A contemporary look at the meeting of religion and an understanding of national self-understanding comes in the 2022 article by Stephanie N. Shady, "Territory and the divine: the intersection of religion and national identity". Shady takes a look at the impact of religious behavior on national identity. She compares devout faith, expressed through religious adherence, to a more Christmas/Easter type of faith expression and, finally, to the complete repudiation of any religious affiliation in Europe. Shady discusses various studies linking political leanings to religious expression, producing ethnocentrism and prejudice (Shady 2022, p. 746). She shows that social standing and voting behavior are closely tied to current or even former religious belonging despite secularization. Setting this in context to immigrant religions, Shady observes that religious affiliation of any level from the majority group drove a higher national identity. This can result in religious minority groups becoming "antithetical to membership in the country" (Shady 2022, p. 750). Shady briefly discusses secularization in children but does not tie this to a particular group, i.e., German-born or immigrant. In concluding her research, Shady suggests that "secularisation does not erase the influence of religion in politics" (Shady 2022, p. 761).

For the Aramean people in Germany, language also appears to be a key element of what makes up their perceived identity. This seems to run counter to today's culture of leveraging certain key languages, e.g., English, as a modern *lingua franca*. Anthony D. Smith, in his classic *National Identity*, discusses the role of a *lingua franca* in days gone by vs. today:

> In the high middle ages, Latin and Arabic achieved a genuinely trans-territorial and trans-cultural sway. But, in those cases, there was a corporate identity—the medieval clergy and ulema—with a transterritorial function that a lingua franca could serve. . . . Today, with many 'low' cultures turned into literal 'high' cultures for mass, standardized public education, national languages have replaced the earlier lingua franca. But not entirely—the extension of certain prestige languages to facilitate communication and exchange over wide areas has promoted a sense of loose cultural kinship within culture areas and sometimes even beyond them. (Smith 1991, pp. 172–3)

The Syriac liturgical language and the Turoyo colloquial spoken in the homes was never used for public education, rather only in ecclesiastical settings, in their Turkish villages. It served as a vehicle to set themselves apart in a hostile society and preserve their ethnic and national identity understanding. Even today in the diaspora, it serves as a buffer to this modern concept of leveraging the perceived *lingua franca* to become part of the broader cultural context of Europe. However, as language skills slip in the younger generations, this standalone aspect will impact the understanding of national identity in the younger generations without doubt. This will also cause disruption between first- and often even second-generation Arameans and their offspring in the Aramean community as the decline of the Syriac and Turoyo languages impacts both the Syriac Orthodox Church and the remaining hope for a future Aramean homeland.

12. Evangelical Communities in Germany in Relation to the Aramean Community

The question of how evangelical communities in Germany might come alongside Arameans, especially their children, teenagers, and young adults, motivates much of this research. Having seen how little impact faith has overall on German society at large in the 21st century, it is an imperative missiological consideration to find ways to re-introduce a younger generation to the Christian faith. Many Evangelical German churches seek to do this within their target groups, either their offspring or immigrants who have come to Germany.

The Free Evangelical Community (Freie Evangelische Gemeinde, or FEG) church in Gießen offers simultaneous translations into six languages: English, French, Russian, Turkish, Farsi, and Arabic, and an English-speaking small group on Sunday nights.[21]

However, these are targeted at immigrants from other people groups without a Christian background, such as those from Iraq or Afghanistan. An interview with the pastor showed that the church is very active in missions and outreach, yet it does not engage with the Syriac Orthodox community. It has refugee programs, which seek to address more recent migrants, most still in the Gießen refugee center. In its youth programs, the pastor had an excellent insight: their youth programs worked when youths from outside the church community attended together with the children of the families in the church.[22] This may be a helpful consideration in the Aramaean community. Their juveniles are straddling the two worlds of church and school/friends outside the church. An approach that brings youth from outside the church to youth activities may generate interest but may also spark fear in the parents as they might see their children in danger of meeting and ultimately marrying someone outside the community. This pastor also desired to understand the self-perceived role of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Germany.

One other interesting aspect raised by the Evangelical pastor was the diversity he seeks for his church community. When experimenting with English-language worship songs to begin to demonstrate the cultural heterogeneity already existing in the church, the leadership team quickly realized that neither the targeted immigrants nor their older German worshippers could understand the lyrics of the songs. Instead, he is setting out to attempt a new experiment: having a church council that is entirely made up of a mix of Germans and the various immigrant groups represented at his church. He expects communication difficulties that may slow down the work as many of the more recent immigrants do not yet speak German well. He is willing to work slowly and deliberately to truly bring diverse perspectives into church planning. Also here, an interesting concept is being proposed that may be important for the Syriac Orthodox Church in the future, should they seek to reach out to their German, Turkish, Kurdish, Russian, and Afghan (and from other nationalities) neighbors. Right now, this willingness does not exist in the Syriac Orthodox Church, which in part is due to the strong language and ethnic entrance blocks to outsiders joining the church.

Another Evangelical pastor and a youth leader in another FEG church voiced interest but showed a lack of understanding for the community. However, upon further investigation, the interest seemed to be more verbal agreement with the research interest at hand than a genuine desire to understand or engage the Aramean community. An effort was made at some point years ago, but it did not seem to provide a true benefit. Much of this was the difference in Evangelical vs. Orthodox understanding and apparent cultural differences. Additional conversations are planned with these Evangelical communities and others in Germany to understand whether youth activities might be cross-denominational at some point.[23] A closer look is needed at how the deployment of monitors to display lyric texts in Evangelical churches may be leveraged in Syriac Orthodox churches to help younger members follow the liturgy if they are lacking language skills. A Syriac Orthodox church in Santee, CA, uses this very successfully for their Arabic-speaking parish where their youth is facing very similar issues of losing the language skills. The liturgy in Syriac is transliterated, while two other lines on the screen show the Arabic and English translations.[24] This may be a very workable model to bring technology into German Syriac Orthodox churches for the benefit of both younger and older attendees who lack the language skills.

A conversation with an Aramean man who had become an Evangelical showed the many tensions between the two communities of Evangelical and Syriac Orthodox. He spoke of physical threats to him when teenage children of Aramean families came to visit his church or, worse yet, were baptized by him.[25] In return, conversations with the Syriac Orthodox faithful show that to them, this is a betrayal of their deepest-held beliefs. There seem to be animosities, especially toward Free Evangelical Churches in Germany, often accused of what American Evangelicals might call "sheep stealing". Syriac Orthodox believe Evangelicalism to be heterodox and lacking. One quoted 2 Thessalonians 3:6 when asked about this issue of former Syriac Orthodox Church members converting to Evangelicalism: "Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us".[26] It is a betrayal of their faith, for which their ancestors gave their lives.[27]

In addition, the Syriac Orthodox already have an active youth group within the German diocese, the SOKAD Jugend (Syriac-Orthodox Church Youth in Germany), which operates within the boundaries of their denomination (Erzdiözese der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche in Deutschland n.d.). The sponsor and founder of this group is the archbishop of Germany, representing the largest diocese in Europe. His Eminence Mor Philoxenus Mattias Nayis (Erzdiözese der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche in Deutschland n.d.), who resides at the monastery in Warburg in northern Germany, is conscious of the need to train the youth. He has voiced some of the efforts as well as some of the hindrances in an interview with the researcher in October 2022. At the monastery, a weekly class is held for anyone interested in learning the Syriac language and the melodies used in the liturgy. Men, women, and school-age children can participate. He admitted that much of the monastery's work is geared toward educating young men to become altar servers, subdeacons, deacons, and, ultimately, priests. Since the Syriac Orthodox Church does not permit women to serve at the altar, this naturally excludes girls. The SOKAD Youth, targeted at older teenagers and young men and women into early adulthood, seeks to address some of this gender disparity within its programs but cannot offer the richness of programs the monastery can offer to males interested in church service. Mor Philoxenus Matthias Nayis shared one fundamental difficulty for the Syriac Orthodox Church: all other Orthodox faiths have a country where the language is spoken; e.g., Greek Orthodox have Greece, where Greek is still spoken. The Syriac Orthodox faith comprises believers from countries as diverse as Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Israel. The languages represented make it impossible to use a language other than Syriac for the liturgy. However, when churches have large percentages of a particular immigrant group, elements such as Scripture reading or the sermon may be in Turoyo, Arabic, or German. These portions are small compared to the overall liturgy. The services are approximately 2 1/2 h long, with many families dropping in quite some time past the start time. This is accepted as the morning prayers lead into the liturgy. Children are in the church from a young age and take communion as soon as they are baptized and sealed with Myron oil as infants.[28]

During a conversation with some of the attendees of a luncheon given in honor of a member who had passed away a year prior, a woman shared that she did not understand the liturgy. One young woman, whose family was originally from Syria and spoke Arabic at home, told me that the attendance at this Turoyo-speaking church community was simply a "family outing" to her, as she could not understand. She loves her Aramean community and is very proud of it. Her German is fluent, and she completed studies to be a teacher at a German university, but she cannot follow the liturgy.[29] While preserving the Syriac language in its liturgy is undoubtedly critical, creative ways may be found to help those attending understand their faith tenets. Outside of this, most only learn while in school in Syriac Orthodox *madrasse* or at home if their parents are devout and exercise spiritual disciplines there.

From the Aramean side, there is a lot of interest in having Germans gain a better understanding of their community. The men and women of the Syriac Orthodox Church interviewed were disappointed when German neighbors thought they were Muslims or did not accept invitations to their feast days and ensuing celebrations at the church. Enthusiastic and lengthy replies strongly encourage the liberal sharing of learning about the Aramean community in Germany. When asked what audiences should know about the Aramean people, one woman said, "Tell them the Aramean people live". Conversations and interviews show a lot of pride and hope in the Aramean community. They view their early Christendom faith traditions as beautiful and highlight to the listener that their devotion to God runs deep in their prayer and worship life.[30]

There is, however, a reason for optimism that mutual understanding can be achieved, which will ultimately aid in educating young Arameans in Germany about their faith:

the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative was established after the Third Lausanne Congress in 2010. It serves as a community of Orthodox and Evangelical Christians. They "wish to respect each other's beliefs, learn from each other, and support one another as we each obey the call to share in God's mission" (Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative n.d.). It will require a getting-to-know each other's belief systems as a first step and eradicating misconceptions on both sides. Participation in the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative's work can aid in formulating a plan to move forward and bring about an appreciation of the different theological understandings and religious practices. This, in turn, will forge a path toward a collective future while retaining tradition and language in Germany with German neighbors for the now no longer wandering Aramean—and their offspring.

13. Conclusions

While much information remains to be gathered for this study, first findings allow some initial assessment of how living in a secular and pluralistic German society has affected the religious development of second and third generations of Aramean families. While children of church-attending families retain close ties to their church community, hindrances are starting to appear in language retention as life for these children centers in the German school systems most days. As more ethnic barriers are broken down through school friendships, German will become the premier language choice for the Aramean youth. Communication between the different parts of church communities will continue to be problematic as Syriac refugees who are Syriac Orthodox are Arabic speakers and do not understand Turoyo for the most part.

The Syriac Orthodox Church in Germany at this point in time is a very homogeneous entity, i.e., the members are of the same ethnic and cultural background, despite some of the recent refugees arriving from primarily Syria. The ancestors of the refugees from Syria were forced to leave the Tur Abdin region and chose at that time to settle their families in Syria. Evangelical communities in Germany have begun to address diversity issues in practical manners to account for the diversity encountered in their churches. Because of the work done in these churches, a number of the issues encountered with the Syriac Orthodox youth could be addressed if a similar approach is applied before these topics potentially turn into insurmountable problems in the future. Having events that target both Syriac Orthodox youth and their friends of other cultural or religious backgrounds may provide a more stable level of interest in the longer term.

At the same time, the Evangelical church in Germany can learn much from the way the Syriac Orthodox parishes build community. Shared engagements, such as celebrations of certain holidays with the church body, would build a stronger cohesion in these Evangelical communities. The encouragement to spiritual disciplines found in the Syriac Orthodox community is another take-away that Evangelical churches might benefit from within their own church settings.

Ultimately, any benefit to be derived will only materialize through consistent and intentional engagement between the communities. This is the catalyst that is still missing.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] Deut. 26:5 (NASB).

2 Gen. 3 (NASB 1995).
3 Acts 18:2 (NASB 1995).
4 An interesting study on religiosity of young refugees by the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg under the leadership of Professor Manfred L. Pirner. A brief report on the pre-study of this research project can be found here: Pirner (2021).
5 FRG = Federal Republic of Germany.
6 The information in the previous two paragraphs was captured from a Sayfo recognition flier produced by the Aramean community in Germany for the 100th anniversary of the 1915 massacres in 2015.
7 From a conversation with an Aramean man in Germany, May 2022.
8 From a phone conversation with an Aramean man living in Germany since 1980.
9 Ibid.
10 Some of this can be seen in this blog post from Syriac Press: Beth Shao (2022).
11 See, e.g., Richard G. Kyle, "Nestorius: The Partial Rehabilitation of a Heretic" and Mark Dickens, "Nestorius Did Not Intend to Argue That Christ Had a Dual Nature, but That View Became Labeled Nestorianism".
12 Translated by the author, who is bi-lingual.
13 The schism did not happen overnight. It happened over a period of about 80 years but culminated with the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451.
14 The survey based on established questions was conducted on 12–13 May 2022 as a written, anonymous homework assignment in two German Syriac Orthodox religion classes.
15 From a phone conversation with the head of the Suryoye Kultur- und Sportverein Augsburg e.V., 28 March 2022.
16 From a series of interviews conducted in May and September 2022 in Germany.
17 From the survey of 13–15 year olds already mentioned.
18 Information via input from interviewees in Germany and personal observation.
19 From the survey of 13–15 year olds.
20 Translated by the author.
21 Information from church website at https://www.feg-giessen.de/gottesdienst/simultanuebersetzung/. Accessed on 26 March 2022.
22 Interview with Pastor Torsten Pfrommer on 30 Septermber 2022.
23 From a conversation with Pastor Hauge Burgardt and Kerstin Thielmann at Freie Evangelische Gemeinde in Pohlheim-Watzenborn-Steinberg, Germany, on 15 May 2022.
24 Observed at St. Paul the Apostle Syriac Orthodox Church in Santee, CA, on 20 November 2022 by the author during a visit to the parish.
25 Interview with Aramean Evangelical believer in May 2022.
26 2 These. 3:6 (ESV).
27 Gathered from interviews with Syriac Orthodox lower-level clergy and church members in May 2022.
28 Interview with Mor Philoxenus Mattias Nayis on 3 October 2022.
29 Group observation during a church event in Hanau, Germany, 2 October 2022.
30 From interviews with the Aramean community in May and September 2022.

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