

**An Overview of
Denominationalism/Confessionalism on the
Ecumenical Movement in Asia**

亞洲基督徒合一運動的宗派主義概述

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[ABSTRACT] Most of the church organizations in Asia were initiated and founded by missionary societies that came from western world. Many of those missionary societies emerged from denominational-confessional churches (Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, Evangelical, Pentecostal-Charismatic, etc.) although not necessarily institutionally-based. From the time of International Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 (followed by Jerusalem 1928, Tambaram 1938, etc.) those missionary societies tried to cooperate and to build common understanding on mission (including evangelism and church planting).

The founding of World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948 and East Asia Christian Conference (EACC) in 1957 (in 1973 renamed Christian Conference of Asia, CCA) were also intended to build cooperation and basic concept of the task and calling of the

various churches. However, there are many denominational-confessional churches in Asia do not join WCC and CCA. They would prefer to found their own communion or fellowship, like World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) and to strengthen their confessional characteristics.

WCC as well as CCA does not intend to underestimate or neglect denominational-confessional characteristics of the churches. They even build cooperation with some confessional council like Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and World Council of Reformed Churches (WCRC), since they acknowledge the contribution of those confessional streams on the ecumenical movement.

This article will inquire the positive and negative impact of Denominationalism or Confessionalism on the Ecumenical Movement in Asia, rooted in the concept of some reformers (especially Martin Luther and John Calvin) on church unity and referring to several countries in Asia.

[摘要] 亞洲大多數的教會組織都是西方世界的傳教團體發起和創立的。許多傳教士團體來自不同教派（羅馬天主教、英國聖公會、路德教會、改革宗、浸信會、福音派、五旬節派——靈恩運動等），儘管不一定以制度為基礎。從 1910 年在愛丁堡舉行的國際傳教會議（隨後是 1928 年在耶路撒冷，1938 年在塔姆巴拉姆等）開始，這些傳教團體試圖合作並就使命（包括傳福音和建立教會）建立共識。

1948 年普世教會協會（WCC）和 1957 年東亞基督教議會（EACC）的成立（1973 年更名為亞洲基督教議會，CCA），旨在建立合作和呼籲各教堂的基本概念。然而，亞洲有許多教派並沒有加入 WCC 和 CCA，他們更願意建立自己的團體，如世界福音聯盟（WEF），並加強他們宗派的特徵。

WCC 和 CCA 並不打算低估或忽視教會的教派特徵。他們與世界信義宗聯會 (LWF) 和世界改革宗 (WCRC) 等建立合作關係，因為他們承認這些團體對基督教合一運動的貢獻。

本文參考了亞洲一些國家的情況，就一些改革者（特別是馬丁·路德和約翰·卡爾文）關於教會團結的概念，探討宗派主義對亞洲基督徒合一運動的影響。

Preliminary Remarks

Although we are aware that most of the church organizations in Asia were initiated and founded by missionary societies that came from western world and many of those missionary societies emerged from denominational-confessional-churches (Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, Evangelical, Pentecostal-Charismatic, etc.), there were only very few literature that elaborate this issue.¹ This may raise an impression as if it is taken for granted that it is by nature that missionary works and churches established in Asia consist of various denominations or confessional groups and nothing to discuss on this matter. But this article would like to show that there are many things and ongoing matters to discuss.

This article does not use the term “sect/-arian/-ism” although certain literature used it.² I’d prefer to use a neutral term, “stream”, or denominational/confessional group, because the term “sect” tends

¹ In the quite extended bibliography of Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, vol. II (HCA II)* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 655-723, we only find two writings that explicitly refer to this issue, i.e. William Dean, *The China Mission. Being a History of the Various Missions of All Denominations among the Chinese* (New York: Sheldon, & London: Trübner, 1895), and Robert Hunt et al. (eds.), *Christianity in Malaysia: A Denominational History* (Selangor, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 1992). Hunt et al. describes the history of some denominations, among others: Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal/Assemblies of God, Mar Thoma, and Evangelical Free Church.

² For example Douglas J. Elwood, *Churches and Sects in the Philippines* (Dumaguete City, Philippines: Silliman University, 1968).

to identify or judge the referred religious group or church as a kind of schismatic group that split from the "mainstream" or "mainline" and does not have a complete system of doctrine and praxis. I am also aware that the term "mainstream" and "mainline" is artificial and debatable, depends on context, and also temporary.³

The attention of this article is limited to several main Protestant denominations in South, Southeast and East Asia; therefore it does not include the denominations originated and still exist in Central and West Asia. This article will only mention in passing the Roman Catholic Church and some other denominations or churches like the Nestorian and Orthodox Church (incl. Mar Thoma or Syrian Orthodox Church) as well as some independent churches. Not because they are not significant in Asia, but because there are more experts on them. This article will also not take internal schism in certain churches or denominations into its account.

Among many issues concerning this topic, this article will pay more attention and put more emphasis on main doctrine, method of work, connection with colonialism, evaluation and attitude to the cultural and religious realities, social ministry, and institutionalizing process of respective denominations. Since elaboration of these issues needs rigorous inquiry, and many writings had done it, this article will only provide a general picture or observation.

³ For example, Baptist and Pentecostal were in some places, including in Asia, valued as 'peripheral', not to say 'sectarian', but in many other places are [more and more] mainstream or mainline.

Historical Background

As described and stated by Ninan Koshy,⁴ and some other historians and writers, Asia is the place of origin of Church or Christianity. It has been existing there since the first centuries of the Common Era, expanded to many countries of Asia (besides some other continents), and some of the old Asian churches still exist up to now (Mar Thoma, Armenian, Jacobite, etc.). Although Philip Jenkins⁵ and some other observers talked about “Christianity is moving to South” (including to some countries of Asia), it doesn’t necessarily deny the origin of Christianity. We will not discuss further these churches and issue here.

Since the sixteenth century, and even before,⁶ up to the twentieth century many churches from various denominations came together with the imperialist-colonialist western power (Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, British, etc.); later some church denominations were gradually present and established in Asia. Started with the Roman Catholic brought by Portuguese and Spanish, it was followed by the Reformed (Calvinist) brought by the Dutch; Lutheran by the Danish, Dutch, German and later also American; Anglican and Salvation Army by the British; Mennonite by the Dutch; Baptist by the British and American; Methodist, Adventist, and Pentecostal-Charismatic by the American; etc.

Some of the missionary societies or missionaries that worked in Asia did not strictly maintained and promoted their denominational or confessional characteristic, especially those who were not officially commissioned by their respective churches. But many of

⁴ Ninan Koshy, *A History of Ecumenical Movement in Asia, vol. 1 (HEMA I)*, (Hong Kong: WSCF, YMCA, and CCA, 2004).

⁵ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6-23.

⁶ For example, some Roman Catholic missionaries (John of Montecorvino, John of Plano Carpini, etc.) already worked in China/Mongolia in the thirteenth and fourteenth century.

the missionary societies were established by the churches that held strongly those confessional identities, and many of the missionaries are sent by their respective churches. Because mission was pursued by the churches separately, denominational and national churches were consequently transplanted into the mission fields, the churches they planted were also characterized by these denominational and confessional identities.

These identities are also maintained and expressed in the supporting and ministering institutions they established, like in education or schools, including theological education. We may assume and acknowledge that each denomination has its own strength and contribution to the expansion of Christianity and to the role of Christianity in the respective country where they ministered. But in many cases there are also competition, or even conflict and rivalry among them. Each denomination and national church put forward its own claims and emphasized its own distinctiveness. Therefore, the church divisions of the West were not only exported to Asia, but were even multiplied.⁷ This in turn on the one hand brought negative impact on the presence and profile of the church and Christianity, although on the other hand there were also a number of efforts to cooperate and to unite and to bring positive impact. We will see some examples in the following section.

Some Examples

1. Lutheran

Lutheran denomination traced its identity to Martin Luther's teaching and some praxis, among others centrality of the word of

⁷ Scott W. Sunquist et al. (eds.), *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity (DAC)* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 258-9.

God, two sacraments, infant baptism, priesthood of all believers, and the importance of sacred music and hymn in its liturgy.⁸

These were shown by some Lutheran churches that can be found in many Asian countries. Like most of the other ‘mainline’ churches, they, too, trace their roots to early European and North American mission work. Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Plutschau that arrived in India in 1706 and ministered in Tranquebar, a Danish colony, sent by Danish Lutheran Church and Danish-Halle Mission, marked the beginning of Lutheranism in Asia.⁹ Around one century later some Lutheran missionaries in India helped by some Anglican mission organizations (SPCK, SPG, CMS) and church to do their ministry; for example they used the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* in their church service.¹⁰

In the nineteenth century there are a number of Lutheran missionaries commissioned by some missionary societies to Asia; for example Karl Gützlaf to China by the Dutch Missionary Society. He was followed by a number of missionaries who worked in many countries of Asia, like Indonesia, Japan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Philippines, and Malaysia. They planted and established a number of churches with Lutheran identity. Some of the missionary societies that promoted Lutheran tradition did not explicitly mentioned themselves as Lutheran, for example the Rhenish Missionary Society from Germany, either because they were not purely Lutheran or by other considerations and reasons. In turn, the churches they planted and established do not all explicitly used Lutheran in their name. Related to this, in certain country, like in China, during the 1950s the Lutheran church disappeared as Chinese Lutheran Church; they entered the so-called post-denominational era. Yet Lutheranism did not vanished from Chinese people. New Lutheran churches were

⁸ Aritonang, *Berbagai Aliran*, 51-9.

⁹ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 501; Moffett, *HCA II*, 238-41.

¹⁰ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 25; Moffett, *HCA II*, 245.

established in Chinese communities outside Mainland China (Hong Kong, Taiwan, etc.).¹¹

Since the Lutheran tradition has also variety within itself, the churches established by the Lutheran missionary societies were also varied. Some of them affiliated to the Lutheran [State] Church in Scandinavian countries, some to Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LC-MS) in USA, and not all of them become member of Lutheran World Federation (LWF).¹²

2. Reformed (=Presbyterian)

Sunquist et al.¹³ describes Presbyterian and Reformed churches as the Protestant churches whose origins are related to the mission work of churches in this tradition or who have come to regard the Calvinist tradition as an important part of their identity. Some of John Calvin's teaching and Calvinist tradition are the sovereignty and glory of God, predestination, sanctification (implemented among others in church discipline), church order and polity (a relatively democratic structure of presbyterial-synodal system with four-fold office: minister, presbyter, teacher, and deacon), Psalm in liturgy and hymn, and church-state relationship.¹⁴

The Reformed church was brought to Asia since the beginning of the seventeenth century by the Dutch United East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) that was formed in 1602. This company worked among others in Indonesia (Dutch East India), Sri Lanka, Malay Peninsula, and Formosa (Taiwan). Most of the

¹¹ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 502.

¹² Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 503-4.

¹³ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 672.

¹⁴ Aritonang, *Berbagai Aliran*, 75-95; cf. Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 672.

formerly Roman Catholic members were ‘protestantized’, while the new converts were very limited.¹⁵

In the nineteenth century there were a number of missionary societies from Calvinist or Reformed and Presbyterian tradition from Europe and America worked in many countries in Asia (besides in those four countries, also in India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Thailand, Korea, Japan, Philippines, and Singapore) and planted a lot of churches there. Since the Reformed and Presbyterian denomination has also variety in doctrine, praxis and affiliation, this variety is also expressed in the life of the churches. Although the two big ecumenical institutions (World Alliance of Reformed Churches [WARC] and Reformed Ecumenical Council [REC]) already merged to be World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in 2010, not all Reformed churches join this communion.¹⁶

Presbyterian missions were often associated with a commitment to higher education, besides evangelism and medicine/health ministry. That is why in many Asian countries they founded a lot of colleges and universities with Western education system (we remember among others Alexander Duff from Church of Scotland in India, and Daniel McGilvary from Presbyterian Church of USA in Thailand). Like some other missions, the Presbyterian missions also emphasized the Three-Self principles, as John L. Nevius attempted in China and Korea. The effort in higher education is also perceived as supporting the Three-Self ideas to produce autonomous and responsible national church.¹⁷

¹⁵ Moffett, *HCA II*, 213-28.

¹⁶ For example in Indonesia there is a Reformed church that also claims itself as evangelical, i.e. Gereja Reformed Injili Indonesia (Indonesian Evangelical Reformed Church) led by Stephen Tong; this church does not join WCRC as well as Communion of Churches in Indonesia (*Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia*).

¹⁷ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 672.

3. Anglican/Episcopal

As a product of Reformation in England, the Anglican church/denomination (in England is officially called the Church of England, while in the USA and many other countries also called the Episcopal Church) is identified by some teaching and praxis such as three-fold authority in the church (the Scriptures, tradition, and reason), incarnation, the two sacraments (Baptism and Holy Supper), Penance and Absolution, priest ordination, and the Five Points of Mission.¹⁸

The Anglican started to work in Asia in the beginning of the eighteenth century, among others in cooperation with the Danish and Lutheran mission in Tranquebar, India (see above). It worked through its mission agencies, such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), and the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Since the Church of England is a state-church, in the area colonized by England and its agencies (like East Indian Company) this church provided Anglican chaplains; but their activities were severely limited by the terms of company's charter. Nevertheless, gradually the chaplains and the missionaries sent by CMS etc. began to reach the Hindus and Muslims among whom they were living.¹⁹ Since the beginning of the twentieth century the mission of Anglican Church of Canada also worked in many countries of Asia (esp. China), followed by the Anglican Church missions in Australia and New Zealand.

In 1930 the Church of India, Burma, and Sri Lanka (joined by Pakistan in 1947) became an independent province of the Anglican

¹⁸ This document was just declared in the conference of bishops at Canterbury some years ago; consists of (1) proclaim the Gospel; (2) make disciples of all nations; (3) serve and love the poor; (4) combat against injustice; and (5) respect and perpetuate the planet of Earth. Quoted in Aritonang, *Berbagai Aliran*, 123.

¹⁹ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 25; Moffett, *HCA II*, 242-5.

communion and was set free to develop a form of Christianity that would be Asian. The most important decision taken by the Indian [Anglican] Church made possible in 1947 the formation of the Church of South India (CSI) through the union of the four South Indian Anglican dioceses along with the Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian bodies in South India. When the Church of North India (CNI) was formed in 1970 with seven participating denominations, the Anglican was one of them.²⁰

Besides in India and the surrounding countries already mentioned, the Anglican or Episcopal Church and its missions also worked in Malaysia, China (incl. Hong Kong and Taiwan), Japan, Korea, Thailand, Indo-China (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), Indonesia, and Philippines. Adding to evangelism and converting many people to Christianity (more than four million in the whole Asia) and attempt to express and contextualize Christianity in Asian culture and tradition (including in indigenous leadership), the Anglican established and maintained educational, medical, and pastoral work (in India mostly) among underprivileged villagers. This church is also active in ecumenical movement; besides in forming the CSI and CNI, also in theological education such as in Trinity Theological College in Singapore.²¹

In the epilogue concerning the Anglican in Asia, Sunquist et al. said: The Anglican Church in Asia has moved far since the days of British chaplains and colonial bishops. The form it takes varies subtly from country to country, but the distinguishing marks of the Lambeth Quadrilateral are still there: the Scriptures, the historic creeds, the Gospel sacraments, and the episcopate. It struggles to understand its own identity and distinctiveness amid a plethora of Christian church forms and a background of other faiths.²²

²⁰ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 25; Moffett, *HCA II*, 242-5.

²¹ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 26-33 and 263.

²² Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 33.

4. Baptist

The Baptist movement began in England in 1612 (the leading figure is John Smyth). Baptist denomination and churches – as a descent of Anabaptist movement, part of Radical Reformation in the sixteenth century – are distinguished by their insistence that the church is made up of autonomous congregations of believers, and their consequent rejection of infant baptism in favour of the baptism of believers. They also emphasized separation of church and state.²³

Most of the Baptist churches in Asia trace their roots to missionary endeavour from British (i.e. Baptist Missionary Society, founded in 1792 as the first modern missionary society, led by William Carey) and later from North America (incl. Canada), Australia, and New Zealand. Their first mission field in Asia is India where the very well-known Serampore Trio (William Carey, Joshua Marshman, and William Ward) served for tens of years.²⁴ In India, like in many other countries, the Baptist churches would prefer to establish their own union or communion rather than joining ecumenical institutions where they served. There are some limited examples, like the Baptist community in North India. Some of the Baptist churches there have joined the CNI in 1970, where they retain their distinctive principle of baptism.²⁵

²³ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 58; Aritonang, *Berbagai Aliran*, 171-7. Stanley Grenz, in *The Baptist Congregation – A Guide to Baptist Belief and Practice* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1985), 82 (quoted in Aritonang, *Berbagai Aliran*, 171-2), said that *BAPTIST* may stand for and express seven subjects that very much emphasized and becomes the identity of this denomination: **B**eliever's baptism; **A**utonomy of the local congregation within the associational framework; **P**rimacy of the Scripture; **T**rueness of believers only in the Church; **I**ndividual competency and believer priesthood; **S**eparation of church and state; and **T**wo ordinances.

²⁴ Moffett, *HCA II*, 253-8.

²⁵ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 58.

Next to India, the Baptists worked in Burma (Myanmar), Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Among those countries, the relatively most successful result is in Myanmar, thanks to Adoniram Judson and his wife Ann; more than half of the Christians in this country are the Baptist, especially among the tribes in Upper Myanmar (Karen/Kiyin, Kachin, Chin, Shan, Zomi, etc.).

Besides sharing in some mass movements toward Christianity (in India, Myanmar, Indonesia, etc.), mostly among the villagers that resulted thousands of local churches, the Baptists also contributed significantly in Bible translation, Christian literature, education (mainly in elementary level, but also in theological education), and medical/health ministry (hospitals, leprosy, etc.).

To overview the Baptists in Asia, Sunquist et al. among others said: Today there are at least three million Baptists in Asia, affiliated with different national Baptist conventions and fellowships. Besides this overview, we need also to note that a number of Baptist churches join the CCA (see below), while in some countries of Asia there are a number of Independent Baptist Church that do not join any convention or communion.²⁶

5. Mennonite

This older sibling of Baptist – as descent of the Anabaptist movement – originated in the Netherlands and worked in Asia since mid of the nineteenth century. Started in Indonesia in 1851 by *Doopsgezinde Zendings-Vereeniging* (the Dutch Mennonite Missionary Society), this mission society was supported among others by the Mennonite missions from Russia (Mennonite Brethren)

²⁶ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 65. In Indonesia, for example, besides six Baptist churches or conventions that join the Communion of the Baptists in Indonesia (described in Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 63-4, and Aritonang, *Berbagai Aliran*, 167-70), there is also the Independent Baptist Church in Indonesia, led by Suheno Liauw.

and USA (Mennonite Central Committee etc.), and since 1890s they expanded their mission field to India, Nepal, China (incl. Hong Kong and Taiwan), Vietnam, Philippines, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

In addition to evangelism and church planting, the Mennonite missions and churches, for example in Indonesia and India, are also active in social, relief, and medical service (assisting the war-devastated, war refugees, famine, etc.), in education and training, and in development projects. In some countries (like in India) they cooperated with the Baptists.²⁷

6. Methodist

Methodism is a Protestant denomination, initiated by John and Charles Wesley, separated from the Church of England (Anglican) in the eighteenth century. Some of its basic teachings and practices that reflects its Revival characteristics can be found in the Twenty Five Articles of Religion (modification of the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion of the Anglican) are: Rebirth (born anew), Holy Spirit testimony, universal redemption and salvation, holiness and perfection of Christian life, evangelism and evangelical spirit, and – contrary to the Anabaptist – permit to take an oath.²⁸

Methodism in Asia had a complex beginning. Methodist missionaries came to Asia from USA and UK, and thus brought varying traditions of Methodist polity, theology, and liturgy. They started to send their missionaries in mid of the nineteenth century, first to China, and later to India, Myanmar, Malaysia & Singapore, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, and Philippines.²⁹

²⁷ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 533-4; Moffett *HCA II*, 369.

²⁸ Aritonang, *Berbagai Aliran*, 197-202.

²⁹ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 535-46; Moffett, *HCA II*, *passim*.

Methodism was deeply committed to evangelism. For that task, the founding of schools, hospitals, and publishing houses constituted the backbone of Methodist mission strategy, esp. in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The legacy of the institutional mission strategy is, however, ambivalent. Most institutions were self-supporting, and in the case of schools and publishing houses generated considerable revenue for missionary salaries. These characteristics, however, link them with the colonial establishment and its economic order, thus affecting their social witness, such as the case of opium in China and some other countries.³⁰

Related to this is the consciousness and respect of the Methodist to local culture and social life. Many of the missionaries preferred the expatriate culture (incl. using English in their schools that produced high level society rather than enhancing the life of the poor). Fortunately this is not the whole picture. In some countries (like India and Malaysia) many of the Methodist pastors are critical of their inherited role as teacher/pastor and are working out contextually relevant models. While many of the Methodist missionaries focused on the spiritual task of evangelism, some of them showed an equal or greater concern to protect the rights of the workers and create means of social advancement.

In some countries the Methodist built cooperation with some other denomination, and even joins union with some of them to form new church (like CSI and CNI in India). This is not surprising, because one of the main figures in ecumenical movement is a Methodist, i.e. John Raleigh Mott, the chair of the International Missionary Conference (IMC) in Edinburgh 1910 and later of the International Missionary Council.³¹

³⁰ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 535-8.

³¹ Koshy, *HEMA I*, *passim*.

It must also be noted that the development of the Methodist movement cannot be separated from the religious, economic, and political movement and situation which shaped the different Asian societies. Communist rule in China, for example, has led to the kind of ecumenism which made the Chinese Methodist movement, now part of the China Christian Church/Council post-denominational. Therefore, a challenging task is to identify the different factors which shaped Methodism in the different Asian countries: social, cultural, economic, political, ideological, historical, and individuals.³²

7. Adventist

The biggest church among this denomination is the Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) that was officially founded in 1860 in USA. As summarized in Sunquist et al., the name SDA denotes that the church accepts the Second Advent (Coming) of Jesus Christ as the Blessed Hope and the grand climax of the Gospel. Also, the name "Seventh-Day" denotes that the church accepts that the great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purpose concerning human conduct and relationship to God and humankind. The Sabbath is God's perpetual sign of the eternal covenant between God and God's people. The church formulates and accepts 27 (later 28; jsa) fundamental doctrines as taught in the Bible.³³

The workers (colporteur, missionary, etc.) of this church started to work in Asia since 1880s (one of the first is Abram La Rue, who went to Hong Kong in 1888 as an independent colporteur), and since the first decade of the twentieth century the SDA churches in Asia

³² Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 536.

³³ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 746.

are organized in three divisions, covering many countries: China (incl. Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau); Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei; India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Bangladesh; Indochina and Thailand; Indonesia, Japan, Korea, and Philippines.³⁴

Along with evangelism or proclaiming the Gospel according to its teaching and planting the church, the SDA also develops its ministry in education, health (incl. hospital or medical care and literature on health care), publishing, and social service (relief etc.). Among so many schools, colleges and universities, one of the top and famous higher education institutions is Adventist International Institute for Advanced Studies (AIAS) in Silang, Cavite-Philippines.

8. Evangelical (esp. Salvation Army and Christian & Missionary Alliance)

Actually the term “Evangelical” cannot be strictly identified as a denomination, because so many and various meaning, interpretation, implementation, and usage of this term. However, we may refer to some churches or missionary societies that call themselves Evangelical.³⁵ Here we only take two examples, the Salvation Army (SA) and the Christian & Missionary Alliance (C&MA).

SA was founded by [General] William Booth and his wife Catherine in the UK in 1865. Formerly Booth ministered in the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society or Methodist New Connection. This Methodist tradition and concern encouraged Booth to combine evangelism and social service (esp. to the poor, sick, and hungry people).

³⁴ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 747-52; Moffett *HCA II*, 519, 543 and 561-3.

³⁵ In this article the Evangelicals are those who accept and retain the “five fundamentals of faith”.

Sunquist et al. said that the Salvation Army (SA) is more of an international charity organization than a Protestant denomination.³⁶ But the SA also establishes and calls itself as a church, an evangelical church, complete with its statement of faith, i.e. the eleven points of teaching.³⁷ This teaching and statement of faith is quite similar to that of the Protestant churches; however, the SA ruled out all sacraments normally performed by other churches. The SA serves mainly people from the lower classes of society by providing necessities and doing evangelism. Because of the SA's involvement in providing needy service, among others in World War I, the SA was finally accepted with other world Christian organizations. Since then the SA expands its ministry all over the world, in more various fields, including the rehabilitation of alcohol and narcotic addiction.

The SA started to work in Asia since 1880s, among others in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Malaysia - Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Japan, Korea, and China (incl. Hong Kong and Taiwan). The officers adopted the food, dress and custom of the people, and by doing so it gave its mission ready access to the people, especially in the villages. In addition to evangelistic work, the SA provided educational facilities, mostly in elementary and secondary level and vocational training.³⁸ It also runs a higher level, including to the officer candidates. It also runs hospitals and clinics, children homes and orphanages, and a lot of social service and rehabilitation institutions. One of the methods to raise fund and simultaneously help the poor is opening shops and

³⁶ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 727.

³⁷ See "The Doctrine of the Salvation Army", in *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine* (London: Salvation Books, 2010), xv-xvi. Indonesian translation (¹1981) is quoted in Aritonang, *Berbagai Aliran*, 346-8.

³⁸ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 727-9; Moffett, *HCA II*, 519 and 543.

workshops where anyone may donate the used goods and later the SA sells them with low price or even gives for free of charge.

The C&MA was founded by A.B. Simpson in New York in 1897. It regards mission as the responsibility of the whole church. It retains characteristics of the Holiness movement (that we find strongly in the Methodist tradition) of which it was part. It believes in the creation of indigenous churches, including the “three-self” formulation. Local Bible schools are basic to its mission strategy. The C&MA has sought to transfer its missionary passion to other cultures and to future generations through the education of the children of missionaries.

Simpson and C&MA sent their first missionaries to Asia since 1887; to India, China, Japan, Philippines, Tibet, Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia), Indonesia, and Thailand. One of its missionaries who is very famous and influential in Asia is Robert Alexander Jaffray. He worked and visited most of the mentioned countries. Meanwhile, because Pentecostal gifts were a contentious issue since 1906, some of C&MA missionaries transferred to the Pentecostal missions. Adding to its evangelism, church planting, and Bible school, C&MA – in cooperation with other evangelical mission organizations (among others Overseas Missionary Fellowship, formerly China Inland Mission) – is also active in Bible translation.³⁹

In certain country, like in Indonesia, the churches established by C&MA use “Gospel Tent” (*Kemah Injil*) in their names to emphasize their evangelical identity. Some of them join the ecumenical communion founded by the mainline Protestant churches, while some others join the particular evangelical communion.

³⁹ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 160.

9. Pentecostal-Charismatic

Sunquist et al. describes Pentecostalism as an evangelical restorationist movement that emphasizes the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit for the life and mission of the church and indigenous forms of worship and church structure. This dictionary also specifies the landscape of modern Pentecostalism that includes (1) "Classical Pentecostals", those believers attending denominational or independent churches that highlight classical Pentecostal doctrines – divine healing through the atonement of Christ, pre-millennial eschatology, and especially the function of speaking in tongues as a vital evidence of Spirit baptism; (2) "Neo Pentecostals" or "Charismatic" from the mainline Protestant churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Orthodox churches who have experienced or promote the spiritual and charismatic gifts, including claims of supernatural miracles, signs and wonders; (3) Neo Charismatic and indigenous group, often called the "Third Wave", which includes the "New Apostolic Reformation churches" that have underscored the importance of "sign and wonders" in ministry, and, notably in the latter, the return of the apostolic and prophetic offices.⁴⁰

The Pentecostal missionaries from USA started to work in Asia since 1904-7, although Pentecostal-like movements and expressions had appeared in Asia for almost half a century in various places. Notwithstanding those Western categories, classical Pentecostal churches in Asia reflect more diversity in beliefs and practices than their Euro-American counterparts by focusing more attention on the broader range of Pentecostal phenomena. Due to the belief that the Holy Spirit confers gifts and calling directly upon the believers apart from ecclesiastical institutions, Pentecostalism is easily been

⁴⁰ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 132 and 646.

contextualized. In many places of Asia, Pentecostal spirituality formerly has appealed to marginalized and low class of populations. However, in recent decades it has also attracted the middle classes and the wealthy people, as for example obvious in the membership of the large Yoido Full Gospel Church in Korea, Trinity Christian Centre and City Harvest Church in Korea, and Bethany Successful Family Church in Indonesia.⁴¹

The Pentecostal missionaries from the earlier period onwards made long-term contributions to Asian Christianity through their activities in evangelism, church planting, education, and charitable enterprises. Their legacies are easily found in the Pentecostal-Charismatic denominations that emerged from their ministries. Almost from the inauguration of Pentecostal missions, however, indigenous Pentecostal congregations and organizations began to take shape for various reasons. That is why in many countries of Asia, like in America, the biggest amount of church organization is from the Pentecostal denominations.⁴²

Whatever we say or complain regarding the three waves of Renewal done by the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements and denominations, including what they did in Asia⁴³, as a matter of fact they are the most successful in terms of number of members. Among the Christians in Asia – like all over the world – their number is the largest and they still grow. If many of the members of the mainline

⁴¹ Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 646-8; cf. Aritonang, *Berbagai Aliran*, chp. 8 & 9.

⁴² Sunquist et al. (eds.), *DAC*, 648. In Indonesia, for example, among around 400 church organizations, around 150 are Pentecostal-Charismatic churches. Some of them also call themselves evangelical, but certain evangelical theologians and figures express sharp criticism on the Pentecostal-Charismatic and do not agree to identify them as evangelical.

⁴³ A very frequent complain and accusation thrown toward the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches is “sheep stealing”. But they argue that the traditional churches did not feed their sheeps with green grass and good spiritual nutrition. The “sheep stealing” has actually already happened before the Pentecostal existed. This is part of competition and rivalry among the missionary societies from different denomination. See, for example, Kaj Baago, “‘Sheepstealing’ in the 19th Century”. *Bulletin of the Church History Association of India* (November 1966): 31-6.

or 'traditional' churches moved and joined them, we may assume that they find spiritual needs and answers in those denominations.

10. CCA and ATESEA

CCA (formerly East Asia Christian Conference, EACC) was officially founded in 1957 after some preceding and preparatory meetings, consultations, and conferences (in Bangkok 1949 and 1956, etc.). The change of name from EACC to CCA took place in 1973. Its founding was sponsored by IMC and WCC; therefore the first members of EACC/CCA are churches and national council members of IMC and WCC in Asia. When the assembly of the EACC was held in Prapat, North Sumatra, Indonesia, from 17 to 26 March 1957, there were 107 official participants from 15 Asian countries and from eight Western nations. Among them were the 44 delegates from the 21 Asian member churches of the WCC and 10 Asian member councils of the IMC.⁴⁴

There is no detailed information or list of those 21 churches. But when we see the list of member churches of the CCA in Yap Kim Hao's book there is a list of 96 member churches from 16 countries (including Australia and New Zealand). Among those 96, we find Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Reformed/Presbyterian, Orthodox Syrian, Mar Thoma Syrian, Salvation Army, Lutheran, Mennonite, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Quaker (Society of Friends), and some independent churches and united/uniting churches.⁴⁵ In other words, we find almost all denominations as example above, except the Adventist.

⁴⁴ Yap Kim Hao, *From Prapat to Colombo. History of the Christian Conference of Asia (1957-1995)* (Hong Kong: CCA, 1995), 6-22; Koshy, *HEMA I*, 123-33.

⁴⁵ Yap Kim Hao, *From Prapat*, 192-3. Most of the 96 members of CCA are the so-called 'mainline' denominations or churches: Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed/Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, and their union or merger (like CSI and CNI in India, UCCP in the Philippines, and Uniting Church in Australia).

We may assume that, from the beginning of the existence of this ecumenical body, each denomination retains its identity and distinctiveness. But we can also assume that each of them also contributed and played important role to implement the dream, plan and program of CCA that put emphasis on the life and struggle of Asian countries and nations. The findings of the Bangkok conference of 1949 on “The Asian Church in Social and Political Life”, for example, provide an insightful analysis of the political situation in Asia, and even in the whole world, and Christian response to it.⁴⁶

During around sixty years of its existence CCA had produced quite a lot of documents and literature that inform and express its concern in various issues: social, politics/ideology, economic, cultural, religious, health, human rights, environment and ecology, migration and refugee, disability, HIV/AIDS, etc. All of these issues are elaborated and implemented in its program. Still to be observed and analysed whether and how far its members with variety of denominations participate in all of these programs up to the moment, while the activity and potentiality of CCA tends to decrease during the last years.

We may call the Association for Theological Education (formerly Schools) in South East Asia (ATESEA, formerly ATSSEA) that was founded in Singapore in 1957 as the sibling of EACC/CCA. Some of the sixteen founding members are union, i.e. founded, owned, or supported by more than one church (among others Trinity Theological College – Singapore, Sekolah Tinggi Theologia Jakarta – Indonesia, Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, Myanmar Institute of Theology, and Union Theological Seminary – Philippines).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Yap Kim Hao, *From Prapat*, 7; Koshy, *HEMA I*, 99.

⁴⁷ Yeow Choo Lak, *ATESEA Celebrates Its Golden Jubilee – A Story of ATESEA in 50 Years [1957-2007]* (Quezon City – Manila: ATESEA, 2007), 11ff.

After 50 years, in 2007 ATESEA has 104 members in 14 countries. More and more of its members belong or affiliated to certain denominations or churches (Lutheran, Baptist, Reformed/Presbyterian, Methodist, Adventist, Evangelical/Alliance, and Pentecostal), and many of them are members of CCA.⁴⁸ Like their respective founding churches, these schools or theological education institutions retain their identity and characteristics. But through this association they learn to build cooperation, to respect each other, and to construct Asian ecumenical and contextual theology.

In a document entitled "Covenant with the Churches in Asia", presented at the ATESEA General Assembly 2005, it was stated that "the Asian world has changed rapidly in all aspects of economic, political and social development. Christian Churches in Asia continue to struggle and to witness the message of the Gospel and the promise of the reign of God to be actualized among the people of Asia." For that aim, ATESEA identified and listed eleven propositions that colour the changed context and show paradigm shift of today's Asia: Religious Fundamentalism; Gender Justice Issues; Ecological Problems, Disease and Disasters; Globalization and Global Empire Building; Colonization; Spirituality; Identity and Power Struggle; People's Movement and Ecumenism; Information and Technological Change and Challenges; Social Challenges; and Reclaiming Indigenous Identity and Minority Rights.⁴⁹

To respond that change and shift, and in order to be more ecumenical and contextual, in 2007 ATESEA formulated eight points of "Guidelines for Doing Theologies in Asia", or "Guidelines for Theologizing and Theological Education in Asia"; among others: (1)

⁴⁸ See the list in Huang Po Ho et al. (eds.). *Handbook of ATESEA & SEAGST 2007-2008*. Quezon City – Manila: ATESEA, 2007), 5-49.

⁴⁹ Huang Po Ho et al. (eds.), *Handbook of ATESEA & SEAGST*, 87-90.

responsive engagement with the diverse Asian contexts; (2) Critical engagement with indigenous cultures and wisdom for the preservation and sustenance of life; (3) Reflective engagement with the sufferings of the Asian people in order to provide hope for the marginalized, women, indigenous people, children, differently-abled people and migrant workers; and (4) Interfaith dialogue as well as intra-faith communion and communication for the fullness of life and the well-being of the society.⁵⁰ These guidelines are expected to be reflected and implemented in the curriculum as well as the program of the schools and theological education institutions members of ATESEA.

Closing Remarks

A series of very basic questions concerning denominationalism or confessionalism are: is it God's plan, purpose, and will? Does Jesus Christ whom we confess as Head and King of the Church want and like His Church divided into so many denominations and organizations?

Referring back to Philip Jenkins observation, i.e. Christianity is moving to the South, we see that the moving churches still maintain their respective denominational and confessional characteristics and identities. As Koshy said, what we need in Asia is not [only] the extension of Western religion but the renaissance of a religion that is Asian in its origin, history, and identity.

Martin Luther, in one of his writings among others asked his followers not to make any reference to his name. "Let them call themselves Christian, not Lutheran. What is Luther? Eventually the teaching is not mine."⁵¹ But still during his life and the years soon afterwards his followers were in conflict and divided. The Formula

⁵⁰ Huang Po Ho et al. (eds.), *Handbook of ATESEA & SEAGST*, 90.

⁵¹ *Luther's Works* 45, 70-1; quoted in Aritonang, *Berbagai Aliran*, 26.

of Concord of 1570 could not fully restore and strengthen their unity. As we have seen, when the Lutherans came to Asia, they were divided and in turn produced various version of Lutheranism. The LWF is one of the ecumenical institutions that tried to gather and unite all Lutherans, and even built cooperation and in 1999 formulated a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith with the Roman Catholic Church. However, there are some Lutherans still outside this ecumenical federation.

John Calvin in some of his writings emphasized the importance and essence of church unity.⁵² But, as we have also noted, there are various version of Reformed and Presbyterian teaching, tradition, and practise (including in the method and strategy to produce three-self churches, formulated and trained by John L. Nevius). Some of them combined the Reformed and the Evangelical, that just raise debate and conflict among Calvin's followers.

From brief observation on some denominations and confessional churches we see that each of them owns and maintains strength and distinctiveness, either in doctrine, confession, concept, and method, or in the practices, programs, and activities to implement those more theoretical things in order to live, work, and serve together, especially in Asia. They may share their own to enrich and strengthen the other churches. On the one hand we need to appreciate, acknowledge, and pay respect to them, although we may express critical notes and assessment on them. On the other hand we see that sometimes some of them claim themselves or theirs as the best, and this claim is used to influence and agitate the members of

⁵² The elaboration of this topic see among others in two of Agustinus Batlajery's works: (1) "The Unity of the Church according to Calvin and Its Meaning to the Churches in Indonesia (dissertation, SEAGST, 2002); and (2) "The Unity of the Church according to Calvin ...". *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, vol. 16, nr. 4, 2016, 259-72.

other churches to move and join them. This negative side of denominationalism is not infrequently bringing conflict and rivalry as well as prevents and hampers cooperation, and solidarity and unity in fulfilling the common calling and task in Asia.

D.T. Niles (1908-70), a Methodist pastor and theologian from Sri Lanka, and the first General Secretary of EACC (1957-68), told in the first assembly of EACC at Parapat 1957 that the determining concept of EACC is “life together” which means that the churches in East Asia accept that they belong to one another and are willing increasingly to live a shared life. In that assembly the churches expressed their readiness to share in the world-wide Christian mission, particularly in the evangelistic task in Asia, to engage in it unitedly, and convinced that “we can do together what we cannot do separately”.⁵³ This beautiful concept and resolution on the one hand has been attempted to be implemented by the churches from all denominations, not only in Asia but also all over the world; not only among the Christians but also among all humankind from all religions and beliefs or faiths. But on the other hand we may ask: do all denominations and churches in Asia reflect and prioritize this concept, or they are busier with “life within ourselves”? Do they really take the “together” task and program more into their account, or more busy with their home and internal business?

In short, we need to be aware of the positive as well as the negative side and impact of denominationalism and confessionalism. We need to acknowledge its strength and richness as well as its weakness and limitation. In line with this, we need to encourage each denomination to be more ecumenical and contextual.

Banawiratma, referring to Matthew Fox’s book⁵⁴ and Heinz Schilling’s article⁵⁵, noted that we are now in post-denominational

⁵³ Yap Kim Hao, *From Prapat*, 18 and 23.

⁵⁴ Matthew Fox et al. *Natural Grace. Dialogue on Creation, Darkness, and the Soul in Spirituality and Science* (New York: Imager Books, Doubleday), 1997.

era. The postmodern generation does not know anymore the difference between various denominations, and probably doesn't care about it. Nevertheless it does not mean that the denominations already passed. Just the reverse, the various denominations should seek for the prosperous treasure inherited from the history and simultaneously release the not functional or disturbing inheritance to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ here and now. The Christians deserve and are entitled to be called as Christ's disciples not because they belong to certain denomination, but through their life style and conduct that follow Jesus. This is what we mean with post-denominational era, the era to dig spirituality.

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⁵⁵ Heinz Schilling, "Reformation, Disagreement between Confessions, Religious and Cultural Differentiation: a Historian's Views on the Contemporary and Future Significance of Early Modern Church History", in *Reformation: a Global Perspective* (ed. Marie-Theres Wacker et al. Norwich: SCM Press, 2017), 13-24 = *Concilium* 2017/2.

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