

Post-liberal Theology: Another Approach to Constructing Asian Theology?

(An abstract)

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Asian theology involves a certain way of doing theology. It emphasizes the importance of utilizing indigenous religious resources and cultural heritage in the construction of theology in an Asian context. By relating biblical texts with religiocultural values and various sacred textual traditions, its goal is to rearticulate the Christian faith in a set of universal language on the ground of those commonalities found in human experiences. Its basic contention is that different religions are in fact diverse expressions of a common core experience. Such are the assertions that characterize the so-called experiential-expressive model of liberal theology, an approach opposed by the cultural-linguistic model of postliberal theology.

George A. Lindbeck, a representative of postliberal theology, endeavors to explore the relation between religion and human experience. In his book entitled *The Nature of Doctrine*, Lindbeck makes an extended comparison of the experiential-expressive approach to the cultural-linguistic approach. His conclusion is that religious experience is preceded by religious language, not vice versa as advocated by the experiential-expressive model. The cultural-linguistic approach is empirically and conceptually feasible.

Is a cultural-linguistic approach indeed preferable to an experiential-expressive one? If yes, can we consider postliberal theology an alternative in the construction of Asian theology? This is the issue this paper is going to explore.

This paper begins with an analysis of the methodology of Asian theology. The author detects a built-in “West-Asia,” “we-they” dichotomy, ranging from anti-Westerncentrism to anti-Thirdworldcentrism, in its way of doing theology. This tendency to dichotomize is the underlying reason of the frequent appeal to Asia’s multi-faceted religiosity in the formulation of Asian theology, since religious pluralism is regarded as a distinctive characteristic of “Asianness.” The roots of such a dichotomy can be traced back to the fight against colonialism and the struggles in reclaiming one’s national identity.

Right from the beginning, Asian theology considers the West and its theology a theological “other” and coupled this with anti-West sentiment in the process of decolonization. Owing to such a conscious separation from the West, Asian theologians have subsequently developed a homogeneous identity, maintaining that true Asian theology must be marked by certain features. In this respect, as is pointed out by Alan Torrance, “a theology which is defined by reaction over and against the West is still ultimately defined by the West and with recourse to the West.” What’s more, an identity so rigid and narrow may end up eliminating the diversities and particularities which Asian theology has been desperately advocating.

Is there a way to overcome the current crisis facing Asian Christians in their search of identity? This paper concludes that postliberal theology may provide a clue to the issue. The proposed cultural-linguistic approach can be an alternative in the construction of Asian theology.