

Some Impressions of the Libraries in Protestant Theological Educational Institutions in Southeast Asia and their Implications for the Christian Church

(An Address given to the American Theological Library Association at Toronto Canada, by the Librarian of Yale University Divinity School)

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There is a danger in making a report, such as I have been asked to do, lest opinions and judgments go beyond supporting evidence. A four-months' trip through the Orient does not establish one as an authority or insure good judgment and "a little learning is a dangerous thing." The Arabs have a saying that he who would write a book about a land must do so in the first three weeks or live there thirty years.

In my visit to the Orient, I saw much and I hope that I learned much. But such comments as I feel free to make must be weighed as necessarily tentative in nature. Southeast Asia is a complex situation. It is not a cultural or a political or an economic unity and few generalizations can be made about it without qualification. I do not know what to make of much of Protestant theological education in this area, nor can I so much as isolate the problems relating to it, let alone suggest an answer for the problems which I see.

My assignment was carried out primarily under the auspices of the Board of Founders of Nanking Theological Seminary, and secondarily with the Theological Education Fund of the International Missionary Council. I also did some work for the World Council of Churches, for the ATLA Board of Microtext, and I never forget that I am an employee of Yale. I was asked to assist in the development of the libraries of Protestant theological institutions in this area of the world. A request for such assistance had come from the field. As a part of the assignment, it was planned that a Workshop or Seminar be held at Silliman University in the Philippines, to which those charged with the responsibility for the libraries of the various institutions were invited. Almost without exception, the theological seminaries or colleges in that part of the world do

not have a trained librarian in charge. Usually this responsibility is assumed by the instructional staff serving on a rotating basis. In all, we had representatives present from eight countries and sixteen theological institutions for a course lasting three weeks. In this course we attempted to define the place of the library in theological education for this area, something about library procedures and methods, and more about subject matter and book desiderata. We discussed how library service is related to educational methodology, the nature and methodology of theological education, and the place of intellectual effort and discipline in the life of the Christian community. It was for me a very stimulating group, interested in their problems, eager, alert, intelligent, and exceedingly kind and gracious in every way. I am greatly indebted to them and I feel strongly committed to help them in any way that I can.

First, perhaps, a word about Protestant theological libraries in this part of the world. Physically speaking, what kind of libraries are they? By and large, these are modest libraries, some of them very modest libraries indeed. In size of book stock, they run from a few hundred to as many as four or five thousand volumes, with an annual book budget, if one may describe it as a budget, of perhaps five hundred dollars or less. The quality of the book stock, however, is more descriptive of the strength than is the size of these collections. There are a few, a very few, collections of books of good quality. The libraries at Siantar and Djakarta in Indonesia contain well-selected books, quite on the scholarly side, even though the collections are modest in size. Most of the collections, however, leave much to be desired. Many of these libraries suffered severe losses or were destroyed in the war. Their current book stock represents material brought together in recent years, much by way of gifts from America. In this we have not shown too much imagination and certainly very little understanding of their real needs. Too many of the books are, after a manner, good enough books. The important point is that they are not books which have been selected for the job in hand. They do not bear directly on the task of theological education as reflected by the curricular demands of the schools. The receivers of these gifts have been embarrassed by this misguided generosity on our part, and books have been kept which should never have been consigned to them. Almost all of these collections could benefit from drastic weeding. The need for resources for book acquisition is great.

As the book collections vary sharply in quality, the libraries vary in nature relating to equipment, organization, and administration. Most of them are poorly organized and many lack a catalogue or an index as we know it. Usually there is some rudimentary attempt

to class the books by broad subjects; a few have been organized and classed on Western schemes. In this matter of organization East is East and West is West. The East is simply not organized as we are here in the West. This is not intended as an invective comparison or a value judgment. It would perhaps be more correct to say that they have their way of organization and that it differs from ours. By and large, to a Westerner, they do not seem to be so conscious of such matters as efficiency or improvement in efficiency. Human effort is frequently cheaper than equipment though, in the case of some libraries, no one is directly responsible for their administration or supervision. Time seems to be less important and pressures to accomplish objectives as we know them in the West are relatively absent. One is not so inclined to speak in terms of goals or objectives or production or other Western organization clichés. Organization, as we know it, simply is not as important to them as we think it is to us. It is a different mode of life. This attitude or social habit presents no little problem in the library.

The East has seen the West, and some things they admire and some things they do not admire. But one of those things which they do admire and would have, is the equipment of the Western library for the East. Here American influence is great. They admire our libraries over most of the areas I visited. They admire American educational methods less. The dominant educational traditions in this part of the world are the Dutch in Indonesia; the British in India, Burma, Hong Kong and Singapore—in the latter two with an underlying Chinese educational pattern; and German in Japan. American influence is seen in the Philippines. In higher education and certainly in theological education our American contribution has not come off well, and our competence in these areas does not enjoy the confidence of Southeast Asia, for ample reasons. As far as American churches or mission boards are concerned, in general they have not understood the meaning or the place of the academy, the college, or university education of a high order. Much of our educational effort in the East has employed progressive methodology. These efforts seem to be more successful on the levels of elementary or secondary education. I would venture to suggest that the Protestant missionary movement has been not anti-intellectual but rather non-intellectual in character. Thus we have the inconsistency of Eastern admiration for our American libraries as the tool of education, but a widespread distrust of America in matters cultural or educational on the part of mission leadership trained on the Continent and in Britain. But, important to us, much of his distrust is well earned.

This area of the world is prone to look more seriously on American library methods than on our educational efforts. We find widespread American influence here, not all of which is for the good. American

methods have not worked out well for the reason that, in too many respects, these methods represent the imposition of a Western institution upon an alien situation. It is understandable that in taking over our library methods, the East should do so without sufficient adaptation, criticism, or modification. For instance, many of these libraries use the Dewey Decimal classification without significant modification. The Dewey schedule in the two hundreds (Religion) is in the minds of some of us, not only faulty for us, but it is much more limited for them. The Union Theological Seminary schedule which we use at Yale and, as I have said publicly, is perhaps our most satisfactory theological classification of books for Protestant situations (though I concede it has grave limitations inherent in it) works well enough for us for the large collection. But when used in a library of a few hundred or a thousand volumes, it becomes a wilderness that is hopelessly complex. When it is applied, as it often is, by one who is untrained in library science, it becomes like the Biblical account of the world before creation, without form and void. It presupposes *religionsgeschichtliche* methodology, late nineteenth century or early twentieth century theological interest, and is thoroughly Western in context.

Our book classification schedules presuppose collections of size. They do not work well in the small collection. But more important, our schedules are oriented to the West. I recall discussing the Dewey Decimal schedule at the Workshop Seminar, where we were exploring where various classes of books should be placed and we came to the question on the Far East. Someone quipped, "Far from what?" We Westerners must see ourselves in the perspective of the Oriental. To the Oriental, the West, especially America, is new and, in terms of civilization, without great depth. We have nothing that compares with the venerable antiquity of the Chinese culture which reaches back into the dim, distant past, and was rich in cultural achievement while the West was yet barbarian. This is a part of them. This is what Western provincialism does not understand.

To return to this matter of the classification of books. We have no universal scheme for a classification reflecting world civilization. Our schemes, Dewey, Union Theological Seminary, Library of Congress, and others, are oriented Westward as they should be. The East must develop a classification scheme of its own to reflect life as it appears to them. This may be a new scheme or it may be a modification of an existing scheme. These people are entirely capable of doing this. We can be of help to them and they can learn from us. But let us not assume the role of omniscience that implies that our way is *the* way and they are wrong if they do not follow it. We can be most helpful if we help them in their own terms.

In addition to classification schedules adaptable to their needs there are other tools and requirements which these libraries should have. They need a simple manual on how to organize and develop a library. It must be kept simple and yet anticipate growing complexity at which time more advanced manuals can be appropriated. In time they will need to develop a list of subject headings adapted to their needs. A manual on how to use the library and how to use a book is a desideratum which should be placed high. These tools will be forthcoming; they must be developed in terms of the needs of the psychology, and the situations existing in this area of the growing Church.

It is important to note that in important respects the libraries in the theological seminaries of Southeast Asia serve a different purpose from the libraries of the institutions in our Association. When we speak of the libraries in our Association, we think not only of the instructional staff and service to them, but we think to a great extent in terms of the student. The library of Southeast Asia, however, is essentially a tool for the instructional staff. The students, by and large, do not use books; or perhaps it is more accurately said they use books in a different way than we do in the West. The basis for this lies partly in the matter of communication. While English is the most universal language in this area, proficiency in the use of English on the part of the average student leaves much to be desired. It is their second language and their seeming ability to speak or read English does not necessarily mean ability to "think" or to "theologize" in English. It is furthermore important to note that proficiency in the use of English is and can be expected to continue to decline in the foreseeable future. In general, we must observe that proficiency in English in South East Asian situations does not admit the use of a mature book in theology on the part of most of the students. Such theological books as exist in English of simple linguistic construction are unsuitable in substance, and especially in cultural implication and context. Consequently the student is unable to use books as we use them. As a result the methodology of instruction necessarily becomes essentially that of lecture and examination procedures. This is abetted by Oriental educational traditions. Students take notes on lectures which they diligently master to hand back in the examination. The result is a tremendous difference in the kind of product achieved and this has wide bearing on the use of books in education. The book is not used in dialogue with the author or for comparison in matters of substance or interpretation. The methodology places a high premium upon rote memory. The knowledge that is garnered assumes a static quality. Books become known through the medium of the instructor and not at first hand. There is no work habit involved in the process

of theological education which the student carries out from the school to his task in the Church. This means that the Christian community, even when it is led by the trained pastor, is a community that proceeds apart from the discipline of the printed page—the discipline of intellectual effort. Experience warns that this can lead to theological impoverishment, to instability, to isolation and withdrawal from life and movements which shape the destiny of men. There is much more to Christianity than impulsive humanitarianism or subjective mysticism.

There are further complicating factors. The salary of the native ministry is low. These salaries do not permit the native pastor to buy books, that is, Western books, at our highly inflated prices. Christian literature in translation into Mandarin or Indonesian or other languages is most limited and inadequate to do the task which is required. There is no program under way in Protestantism which by the greatest stretch of imagination may be expected to meet this need. The problem with its implications does not seem even to be widely recognized.

The theological seminary or college graduate, then, moves into his life work with no hope that what he has begun in his formal education can be continued or nurtured in the Church. The society in which he works is frequently one devoid of a book tradition or having a quite different book tradition than ours—*viz.*, that of the Muslim and his holy book, in a holy language, read by the holy man; or that of the scholar as one who has mastered the book, *i.e.*, committed it to memory, etc.—or it may be his society is one that is emerging from a semi-literate culture. Consequently many of the intellectual and spiritual forces which are brought to bear upon the Western pastor—for instance: the radio, television, the daily newspaper (especially the better newspaper), periodicals, books, and human discourse reflecting these stimuli—these various means of communication and stimulation are absent. The pastor is, further, a Christian and therefore a member of a minority group. All of these factors combine to make tremendous differences in this matter of intellectual and spiritual stimulation.

It is to me a cause of alarm that few whom I met seemed to have thought extensively or deeply about this problem. It would be almost unbelievable to think that others had not confronted this problem. I should exempt the names of men like Kraemer, Freytag, Hoekendijk, Bishop Neill, and a few—but only a few—others. Altogether too few Christian leaders see what this problem is. Here, then, is an area of crucial importance which needs to be carefully examined and thought through. We need experimental effort to determine what can be done in such a situation and what its bearing upon theological education may be.

This brings me to the observation that by and large, theological education in Southeast Asia is suffering because it has been a too-direct transplanting of Western institutions and methodology without a sufficient adaptation to indigenous factors. The theological schools are replicas of what was remembered in 'the old country' in the Netherlands, in Britain, or in America, as the case might be. More frequently, they are not replicas but caricatures or exaggeration of features of the old tradition. The structure, the philosophy of education, is Western, and it doesn't work well. It presupposes frequently a different kind of cultural context, a different kind of pre-theological training, or it presupposes a proficiency in communication which does not exist. It presupposes a place of the book in its methodology without sufficient consideration as to the kind of society that its product, the theologically trained pastor, will serve. The context of thinking in the Report of the Bangkok Conference on Theological Education in Southeast Asia is Western. I do not believe that Western theological education and its methodology will work in the East apart from drastic modification. What is required here, then, is educational leadership, imagination, and experimentation, including a greater willingness to trust the genius of Asian leadership.

This suggests other problems in theological education in Southeast Asia. Theological education in this area needs instructors and teachers, men trained to do this very specialized piece of work. Our churches and our mission boards have failed to anticipate the dynamic nature of the Asian revolution (who did?) and its influence on mission work, and the hour is now late—later perhaps than we think. They have failed to appreciate the place of the trained educator, the place of the intellectual discipline and the place of the contemplative life in the Community of Christ. Their strategy seems to have been, and this, perhaps, was a calculated risk, to broaden the base of the Church through evangelism, but this has been done to the neglect of the development of leadership, especially native educational leadership. Now that forces and movements of the new day require the withdrawal of the missionary, the Christian community suffers.

There is a widespread need for the development of a corpus of Christian literature which in terms of communication is simple in linguistic construction, suitable in substance and content and culturally oriented to those who are to use it. We have made some modest beginnings such as the World Christian Books—the most successful venture to date—and the Christian Students' Library. There has been a beginning of the translation of Christian literature into Indonesian. There has been some translation of Christian classics into Mandarin. But most of the efforts of the Christian literature societies have been devoted to literature addressed to the Christian layman in the form of translation of Scripture—a factor of utmost

importance,—and manuals and helps dealing with the spiritual life, etc. All of this is required and it is not to be belittled. But the literature of which we speak is for a different purpose. It is for use in theological education for the theologically trained pastor to be used in training and at work, and for the educated layman. By the very nature of the case, much of this will need to be produced by the Asian community itself. Western scholarship cannot do all of this, and indeed should not attempt to do some of it at all. We can be helpful in many ways. It is not hopeless if we can understand the nature of the problem and its implications. We are not going to move beyond this situation in theological training until we understand its implications and provide the tools to change the educational methodology and effect new and improved social habits in learning and education.

The problem, however, is stupendous in its implication. When one thinks of the multitude of languages and dialects involved and, because of growing nationalism, that we must expect the use of these to increase and not decrease; or when one considers the rigorous requirements for editorial competence, the cost of publication, translation, distribution, etc., this aspect of the problem of theological education appears to be most formidable. It is not helped because we Christians have not learned to work together. One of the distressing impressions that one gains of much of Protestant mission work in Southeast Asia is that, while it is a situation requiring a grand strategy, in many respects we seem to be unable to work together in terms of such strategy. America's contribution to this has not been favorable, especially our recent sectarian efforts. The retribution of the Almighty on this scandal of the Church is grave in its implication.

Without becoming unduly pessimistic, one cannot fail to gain an initial impression that the whole matter of educational leadership of Protestant Christian missions in Southeast Asia may be in serious jeopardy. This is not to overlook existing leadership which, while limited in numbers, has been truly amazing in the use of the gifts and grace God has granted. For these stalwarts we are grateful and give praise to God. But the hour calls for greatness in numbers we do not possess. We are not to assume that here is a mustard seed which is destined to grow like unto a tree. It could very well be in many areas that Christian effort will become diluted or inhibited, or that it will be stamped out. The deficiencies in outlook of the missionary movement are not going to be corrected by expressions of pious sentimentality, by promotional programs of breadth without depth. Practice without insight becomes shallow. Many things are needed to support the Church in its culture, and among these is a strong, vigorous, and well-trained ministry and leadership. The Scriptural injunction is that "You shall love the Lord your God with

all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." It would not be too much to say that the vigor of the Church tomorrow will be seen in the quality of the ministry it recruits and trains today. The Christian communities in this area are to be commended on the vigor of Christian life which they exhibit. They are to be commended for the kind of leadership which they have recruited and have led into places of importance. But the odds are nigh overwhelming. There is much that we in the West can do to help if our approach is in terms of selfless love and disinterestedness. The day of missions in this sense is not over. The days of missions in terms of cultural transplantation are limited or, in the Providence of God, should be limited. But to learn in the school of Christ to love men because they are men, to love mankind because it is mankind and we are children of one Creator—the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to live the works of love as becomes this love, is in itself timeless and eternal, for our hour is but a watch in the night.

Sumatra to Burma

An experiment in theological teacher exchange.

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Rain, rain and more rain. This was Burma for me when I arrived at Mingadalon airport for a teaching engagement at Burma Divinity School, Insein. But the reception on Seminary Hill was warm and friendly, such as to make me feel happy and at home. How had I come there?

The Singapore Theological Institute was to be held in August. Since a number of theological seminaries were in session at this time, arrangements had to be made to enable such schools to send delegates to the Singapore institute without disrupting the schedule of teaching in the respective seminaries. Such was the case with B.D.S., which sent Dr. Paul Clasper, professor of Biblical Theology, to Singapore. Since Nommensen Theological Seminary was on vacation during the months June through August, I was able to go to Insein to take over Dr. Clasper's classes. It was a real privilege to me to accept the invitation of the B.D.S. This venture of teacher exchange was made possible through the generosity of the Nanking Board of Founders.

Before I went on my way I had some correspondence with B.D.S. about classes, subjects, campus activities and other particulars useful to know beforehand. A course in Systematics had to be continued for the third year class and a course in Biblical Studies for the fourth year class. We considered, whether I should carry on precisely from where Dr. Clasper would have to break off, or if I should rather choose a subject of my own in line with the general course set down in the B.D.S. curriculum. Connecting our lectures would have looked something like this: one class had come as far as discussing the task of theology and the human-divine character of the Bible. In their turn, general and special revelation as well as the arguments for the existence of God would have to be taken up. After careful consideration it seemed more practicable to give a unit of my own. I decided to give a verse by verse exposition of selected passages of St. Mark's Gospel, for Biblical Studies, and an introduction to the Churches of S.E. Asia, their confessional position and background, for Systematics (Symbolics), each course to be held 3 hours a week. I made sure beforehand that neither of these topics had been included in the curriculum in order to avoid overlapping or repetition. So much for the planning. What about the execution?

[Editor: Raymond Morris has shown himself to be a good friend of our theological schools in S. E. Asia, and we have already benefitted greatly from his professional advice and criticisms. We have printed this address with his permission because it seems to us to raise a number of vital issues. Some will find it too devastating perhaps, but we hope it will evoke some discussion, and certainly some self-examination.]