

EDINBURGH 1910, FULFILLMENT THEORY, AND MISSIONARIES IN CHINA AND KOREA

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There was a notable change of view in the missionary world towards non-Christian religions at the turn of the twentieth century. The early nineteenth-century Protestant missions regarded other religions as diabolical in their origin and antithetical to Christianity. Non-Christian religions were summed up as “heathenism,” “false religions,” or “idolatry.” Evangelical missionaries, citing Romans 1:18 ff, believed that the individual “heathen” was under condemnation with his sin and immorality. As more intimate knowledge of the best in the non-Christian world and their sacred literature was obtained, however, such an attitude of denunciation gradually diminished. Mainline Protestantism accepted that God had not left himself without a witness and a point of influence upon the life of all peoples in all times, and that the traces of this contact with God and his revelation could be found in non-Christian religions. Missionaries and scholars quoted Matt. 5:17 (“I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.”), Acts 10:34 (“God is no respecter of persons.”), St. Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-31), and the first passages of Hebrews, together with John 3:16. Christianity was presented as a fuller and perfect religion, which did not come to destroy anything good or true in the native faiths but rather to stimulate, strengthen, and fulfill them.¹

This paper is a preliminary review of this missiological shift among the representative missionaries in China and Korea around 1910.² For the mission theory of non-Christian religions of the missionaries in China, it analyzes their replies to the questionnaire of the Commission IV of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, “The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religion.”³ As the commission did not send questionnaires to the missionaries in Korea, the paper examines major writings of two leading missionary scholars in Korea—Horace G. Underwood and G. Heber Jones. It argues that inclusive fulfillment theory was the dominant mission theory of non-Christian religions among the mainstream evangelical missionaries in China and Korea around the time of the Edinburgh WMC in 1910. In other words, unlike the stereotypical image of the first generation of the North America missionaries in Korea, they were not militant fundamentalists towards traditional religions, but moderate evangelicals who were open-minded to the points of contact between Christianity and Korean religions.

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¹ For a review of mission theology of non-Christian religions in the 17th-19th centuries, see Andrew Walls, “Romans One and the Modern Missionary Movement,” *Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 55-65. For its development in the international missionary conferences at Edinburgh (1910), Jerusalem (1928), and Tambaram (1938), see Richard J. Plantinga, “International Missionary Developments Prior to Tambaram 1938,” in Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter eds. *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 161-190.

² This paper does not discuss the missionaries’ replies to the Japanese religions because they were influential in Korea from 1910 when Korea was annexed by Japan.

³ The responses from missionaries were compiled into several volumes, and now preserved in the Missionary Research Library of Union Theological Seminary, New York and the Day Mission Library of Yale Divinity School, New Haven. They were edited into a book, World Missionary Conference, *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910). See Kenneth Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions, 1846-1914* (London: Epworth Press, 1995), 181ff; J. Stanley Friesen, *Missionary Responses to Tribal Religions at Edinburgh* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996).

FULFILLMENT THEORY AND ASIAN RELIGIONS

A new attitude of courtesy and respect toward non-Christian religions or a new apologetic was needed for the educated classes in Asia, whose growing nationalism regarded Christianity as a Western religion. Leading Asian Christians began to consider that Confucian morality, Hinduism, or Buddhism could be an ally to Christianity against modern atheistic secularism and materialism. The communication of the Christian gospel to an educated audience required an intellectual approach to explain the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions. The missionary began to take off his hat at non-Christian shrines and regarded good teaching in other faiths as a preparation for the coming of the fuller revelation in Christ.

The fulfillment hypothesis emerged in England and Scotland in the 1850s in the works of Fredrick D. Maurice, Brooks F. Westcott, Andrew M. Fairbairn, Alexander Allen, Charles C. Hall, and Thomas E. Slater. Monier Williams and Max Müller were influential in the formation of fulfillment theory. They recognized “truths” enshrined in non-Christian religions as fragments of primeval revelation retained in the human heart since the Fall. The Word had already been present in the Indian or Chinese history. The key concept of the Letters to the Hebrews, “Christ the Fulfiller,” as Westcott argued, taught that human destiny was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In the future God would continue to be revealed through Christ the Fulfiller. This evolutionary understanding of the Gospel and the “conception of a growth of humanity” appreciated that other faiths had unique characteristics essential for the interpretation of the Gospel. At the same time, the encounter with other religious systems helped to detect the errors into which Christianity as a religious system was prone to fall, and offered correctives to Christian theological formulations—in spirituality, courtesy, and community beyond individualism. Christians began to distinguish between gospel and culture, and between Christianity and Christ. Contact with other faiths would make a new Christianity, which would be the “fulfillment of Western Christianity.” Christianity learned to proceed in its relations with other religions by dialogue and not by polemic.⁴

Fulfillment theory recognized the positive values of non-Christian religions. It affirmed that there was “revelation,” “good teachings,” a true sense of God, and some “truths” in them, although they were incomplete and unsatisfying. God had already been working among non-Christian lands for a long time, and God’s workings been inscribed in hieroglyphs of their native culture, moral systems, and religions, which demanded careful deciphering. Therefore, it was the duty of the missionary to seek “the points of contact” of other religions with Christianity as *preparatio evangelica*⁵, and to use these “gifts of God” in the presentation of the Christian message. Christ was presented as the fulfillment of the best truths in non-Christian religions, or as the completion of their defects.

⁴ See Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love*, 35-119, 132-143. J. P. Jones was highly critical of western forms of Christianity. He expected a new and better form of Christianity to arise in India. He did not assert exclusiveness of western Christianity. (Ibid., 148.)

⁵ Early Christians held to a doctrine known as *preparatio evangelica* (preparation for the gospel). According to this belief, other ancient religions and philosophies like paganism and Platonism could be seen as containing various truths from God because God had sown the seeds of truth which would grow over time. Thus they were a preparation for the true Christian gospel.

At the same time, many evangelical missionaries emphasized the gulf between Christianity and other religious systems. “While elements of good remained, the *system* stood condemned.”⁶ They warned against undue adulation of other faiths and compromise with them. St. Paul was the model missionary for them. He was not only open-minded and tactful as in the sermon on Mars Hill, but also was candid in saying that there was no hope without one God. Christ was both inclusive and exclusive. Evangelical missionaries believed in the finality of the Christian gospel.

The idea of “fulfillment,” therefore, integrated the concepts of “displacement” and “evolution.” Fulfillment alone validated abolishment, for the fulfiller alone could render the fulfilled superfluous. The prophets of other religions would be forgotten in Christ. As John the Baptist confessed, he should decrease and Christ increase. Christ raised Judaism into a new significance never known before. Native religions should outgrow their old things into Christianity and die into Christ. Christians should let them leave old things reverently, but not kick out them scornfully.

Many “liberal evangelical” or “progressive conservative” missionaries accepted fulfillment theory around 1910. Commission IV of the World Missionary Conference, “The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religion,” sent a questionnaire throughout the missionary world and asked the following questions in 1909⁷:

5. What attitude should the Christian preacher take toward the religion of the people among whom he labors?

6. What are the elements in the said religion or religions that present points of contact with Christianity and may be regarded as a preparation for it?

7. What elements in the Christian Gospel and the Christian life have you found to possess the greatest power of appeal and which have awakened the greatest opposition?

8. Have the people among whom you work a practical belief in a personal immortality and in the existence of a Supreme God? ...

10. Has your experience in missionary labour altered in either form or substance your impression as to what constitute the most important and vital elements in the Christian Gospel?

These questions revealed that the Commission officially adopted fulfillment theory as its mission theology of religions. The WMC at Edinburgh in 1910 was the moment of the apotheosis of the idea of fulfillment. At the discussion of the Conference, inaugurated by David Crains, the commission arrived at general conclusions on 1) the Christian attitude towards other religions, 2) training for a different approach, 3) the renewal of the churches’ theology, 4) the urgent need for the study of religions in theological education, and 5) an incipient theology of dialogue. The commission published its report, *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian religions*, in 1910. It expanded the horizons of Christianity by recognizing hidden riches of non-Christian religions.⁸

John N. Farquhar’s *The Crown of Hinduism* (1914) was the fruition of fulfillment theory. He was convinced that Hinduism was in process of decay. The forces of the new time,

⁶ Walls, *Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 65.

⁷ The Commission was divided into five subcommittees: Animistic Religions, Chinese Religions, Japanese Religions, Hinduism, and Islam. Probably as the Commission included Korean religions into the unit of Chinese religions, it did not send questionnaires to the missionaries in Korea. The Commission edited the responses of the missionaries and published *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910).

⁸ Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love*, 253-260.

Western education, and Christianity created an atmosphere in which the traditional beliefs could not live. In this situation neither retreating into Hindu obscurity nor ignoring the religious basis of society was a feasible alternative to the Indian patriots. He argued that Christianity provided the necessary religious foundation for a new society characterized by equality, freedom, and justice. In his evolutionary scheme, “fulfillment” meant “replacement.” The higher religion should be chosen and a lower one should be abandoned for the betterment of the practical lives of individuals and society. He said that “Hinduism must die in order to live. It must die into Christianity.” First, Hinduism was fulfilled by being replaced by Christianity. Secondly, the “truths” in Hinduism were fulfilled by reappearing in a “higher” form in Christianity. Thirdly, Christ fulfilled the “quests” of Hinduism by providing an answer to its questions, a resolution of its problems, and a goal for its religious strivings.⁹ Farquhar did not forsake his orthodox upbringing. He remained to the end of his life a missionary from the evangelical and revivalist tradition. How could the great qualities of Hinduism be harmonized with the unchanging nature of the redemption in Christ? His answer was that all things were evolving upwards. The good was becoming progressively better. There was much good in Hinduism and it would evolve into Christianity, for Christianity was the highest point on the evolutionary scale of religion. For Farquhar evolution was everything. A seed or “germ” in Hinduism could grow into the full blown “flower” of Christ.¹⁰

FULFILLMENT THEORY IN CHINA

At the third general conference of the missionaries in China, held in Shanghai in 1907, many missionaries felt the need to study Chinese religions for the evangelization of the vast nation. D. Z. Sheffield (ABCFM) said, “The truths of Confucianism if rightly presented will be made stepping-stones to the higher truths of Christianity, but if ignored or treated with disregard, they will be changed into barriers against the progress of Christianity among this people.”¹¹ Among the thirteen resolutions regarding Chinese ministry, adopted by the Conference, the sixth emphasized that theological training “should be broad and comprehensive in its scope, should include the study of other religions, of other forms of ethical thought, and should open up to students new avenues of study as to human relationships and responsibilities.”¹² The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit and its transforming power among the Chinese ministers was the vital element in “the study of other religions,” for they should decide the right relationship between Christianity and Chinese religions. The Conference recognized that the key issue to the whole missionary problem in China hinged on the proper understanding of Chinese religions.

The 1907 Shanghai Conference also adopted “Memorials to the Chinese Government.” Its first memorial was “A Declaration to the Government Respecting the Spiritual and Philanthropic Object of Christian Missions.” It insisted that Christianity would fulfill the best

⁹ Eric J. Sharpe, *Not to Destroy but to Fulfil* (Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 1965), 259, 336ff.

¹⁰ Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love*, 169-170.

¹¹ D. Z. Sheffield, “The Chinese Ministry,” *China Centenary Missionary Conference Records* (New York: American Tract Society, 1907), 43.

¹² *Ibid.*, 474-475.

of Confucianism and bring in national prosperity based not on military power, but on justice, mercy and truth.¹³ The next memorial, therefore, petitioned the government for complete religious liberty in the best interests of China. The theological tone of the Conference of 1907 was more progressive and open-minded than that of 1877 and 1890.

In the milieu of this missiological change, 35 missionaries in China responded to the questionnaire of the Edinburgh Commission IV.¹⁴ Let us see the twelve replies made by Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries.¹⁵ Scottish Presbyterian missionaries in Manchuria, who had some relationships with Korea, had a progressive view on Chinese religions. G. Douglas of Yaoyang wrote in answer to question 5:

Conciliatory always. Any other attitude is useless. In our preaching we never treat Confucius as hostile to Christ. We preach Christianity as the “fulfilling” of the law, Confucian as well as Mosaic. We find the points of contact and show where Christ supplies the deficiencies. In our street chapels we start from such Confucian texts as “he who offends against Heaven has none to whom he can pray.” ... Such sayings of their ancient sage, now deified, lead easily to the higher teaching of Jesus Christ. ... An iconoclastic spirit always leads to trouble as I have sometimes experienced in the case of recent converts whose zeal at times outruns their discretion.”¹⁶

Douglas regarded Confucianism as equal to the Torah. He pointed out that Christ should be exhibited to the people not as one of many sacred saints but as the Savior. In answer to question 6, he mentioned the followings as the points of contact with Christianity—the term *Shangdi*, filial piety, and the law of reciprocity in Confucianism; the doctrine of retribution of sin and the term “eternal life” in Buddhism; and the superiority of mind to matter in Daoism. He stressed the Christian teaching of the Kingdom of God in relation to the Confucian teaching of *xinmin* (renovation of the people). When he came to the mission field, he had not entered into “any adequate conception of Christ’s enunciation of the idea of the Kingdom of God.” Experience in China taught him that there was “a radical misconception” of the term “missionary enterprise.” He realized that mission should be more than an enterprise, for “it is woven into the very texture of Christianity.” He insisted that the old individualistic motive should give place to the idea of the Kingdom. The Confucian idea of *xinmin* and its social vision of *datong* (great unity) influenced Douglas’s idea of the Kingdom of God.

James Inglis, another Scottish missionary, was familiar with the Chinese sacred books. He contrasted popular religions with the higher values of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. He mentioned six “remarkable coincidences” of Mahayana Buddhism with Christianity: the doctrine of Nirvana and the Pure Land, Amitta Buddha of Western Paradise, sin, Guanyin Bodhisattva as Savior, Bodhisattva, and faith. He also contended Confucian classics were helpful to Christian apologists when they could point out that “the early Chinese knew only one Ruler on high, and that polytheism is a degeneration not countenanced by the ancient sages, and that image worship has only prevailed since the first

¹³ “A Declaration to the Government Respecting the Spiritual and Philanthropic Object of Christian Missions,” *China Centenary Missionary Conference Records*, 400.

¹⁴ The Mission Research Library of Union Theological Seminary, New York, has 108 responses in several volumes. Volume II has thirty-five responses from missionaries in China and three from the Chinese. The responses from China occupied about 35% of the total responses. (Commission IV, *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions*, Vol. 2, typescript.)

¹⁵ Cracknell insisted that Murdoch Mackenzie of the Canadian Presbyterian Church was a forerunner of contemporary theories of inter-religious dialogue. (Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love*, 120-132, 206-207.)

¹⁶ Douglas, “Response,” 6.

century of our era.” Inglis argued that “the history of the Chinese religion points everywhere to degeneration.”¹⁷ He opposed the theory of evolution. To sit back and to assume the quiet evolution of Buddhism into Christianity was a delusion for him.

Bishop James Bashford of Peking (MEC), former President of Ohio Wesleyan University, wrote that the old missionary attitudes of denunciation had to be repudiated because they were harmful. He expressed the conviction that “missionaries could have done far better work” if they had been “more familiar with the results of modern science, and had their minds been more open to scientific teaching.” He answered: “5. A thoroughly friendly and appreciative attitude. 6. Confucianism lays much stress upon good works. Indeed, it has seemed to me often to furnish a divine preparation of the Chinese for Christianity, as the Decalogue furnished a divine preparation of the Jews.”¹⁸ He used the concept of *praeparatio evangelica* in the process of fulfillment.

Isaac T. Headland (MEC) of Peking University said that a missionary should take “the attitude of a friend.” He insisted that “the Chinese religions are full of points of contact” with Christianity. Yet he was convinced that “the only hope of the world either in government, in science, in progress, in invention, as well as in religion is in the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” He affirmed the superiority of western science and technology.¹⁹

Franklin Ohlinger (MEC), who had worked in Korea for some time,²⁰ was convinced that missionaries might accomplish good work by “a more pronounced attitude” and taking “reasonable risks” against idol worship, superstition and witchcraft. He denounced popular Daoist and Buddhist rituals for the afflicted as having no religious consolation. Yet he indicated some points of contact of Chinese religions with Christianity. “The filial piety taught by Confucianism, the humanness practiced by Buddhism, and the immortality of the souls as inculcated by the stated sacrifices to the dead are the points of contact with Christianity to which appeal can be most effectively made. These have been chiefly instrumental in preserving Chinese society from the grossest materialism, and to this day hold it in a state of preparedness for the Gospel.”²¹ Ohlinger thought “Christian civilization” as well as these points of contact possessed the greatest power of appeal to the Chinese. He asserted “the Chinese will not fail to discover how Christianity takes hold of a civilization, or of age, and purges it, while it in turn is purged, broadened and enriched by that civilization without losing its essential ethical or doctrinal character. They will observe that their own systems lack adaptability and deeply assimilating vitality.” This “fundamental difference between Christianity and the ethnic systems” was his immovable conviction. On the other hand, he acknowledged that missionaries had not yet understood fully the Chinese mind, history, and literature, as revealed by the long discussion of the vexed term question.

Paul D. Bergen, a professor of Shantung Union College (PCUSA), following the example of the great Apostle in Athens, said: “The preacher should frankly and gladly acknowledge whatever he finds in native faiths that is good and true. He should become deeply acquainted with them, and use them illustratively in his presentations of the Gospel.

¹⁷ J. W. Inglis, “Response” (No. 66), 9.

¹⁸ J. W. Bashford, “Response,” 1.

¹⁹ I. T. Headland, “Response,” 2-3.

²⁰ About his mission work and theology in Korea in 1888-1893, see Sung-Deuk Oak, “Franklin Ohlinger and the Mission Theology of the Methodist Church in Korea, 1884-1893” *Christianity and History in Korea* 11 (Seoul: Institute for Korean Church History, September, 1999): 7-40.

²¹ F. Ohlinger, “Response,” 4.

Christianity ought not to be presented as a sword that must sever the people from their historic past, but as the flower and fulfillment of it.”²²

C. H. Fenn, professor of North China Union Theological College, Peking (PCUSA), enumerated various points of contact of three Chinese religions with Christianity, many of which were not mentioned by others. Confucianism had ten points of contact²³; Buddhism had three: the idea of God, though pantheistic; the idea of incarnation; and the idea of heaven and hell; and Daoism six points.²⁴ But he argued that these points of contact were with the ancient, not the modern Daoism.”²⁵ He was negative towards contemporary popular Daoism and Buddhism.

John Wherry of Peking (PCUSA) maintained that a missionary should have “the quiet, irenic, compassionate attitude of seeking to dispel the serious religious and philosophical errors that hinder the acceptance of Christianity by quietly imparting the truth.” He insisted that moral teachings, the concepts of *Shangdi*, filial piety, and immorality of Confucianism and the Buddhist concept of reward after death were the points of contact with Christianity.²⁶

Henry M. Woods of Hwaiianfu, Kiangsu (PCUS) had a more traditional conservative view. He thought that the composite of three Chinese religions led to “a loss of the logical and spiritual faculties and the loss of conviction, or the power to believe something intensely and intelligently.” In other words, a jumble of contradicting religions resulted in “a vague, indifferent assent, without inquiring into the truth or falsity of any particular tenet.” He also said that “Confucianism, strictly speaking, is not a religion, but an agnostic theory of morals.” In answer to question 5, he insisted that the Christian preacher “should be as gentle and kind and conciliatory as possible, and yet bold and candid in declaring the whole truth of God. He should give warning of the awful sin of idolatry, as rebellion against God; a sacrificing to devils (I Cor. 10:20), a sin which will surely shut one out of heaven (I Cor. 6:9; Rev. 21:6).”²⁷ Woods acknowledged that there were many noble thoughts in Confucianism and Buddhism, yet he was convinced that “We need no revision of creed, we need no change. What we need is a fuller baptism of the Almighty Spirit vitalizing our beliefs.”

Although there were still traditional conservatives like Henry M. Woods, the majority of North American Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries in China accepted the fulfillment model in the relationship of Chinese religions to Christianity. Both the Shanghai Conference of 1907 and the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 confirmed their liberal and inclusive attitudes toward Chinese religions.

²² Paul D. Bergen, “Response,” 3-4.

²³ 1. Its recognition of a Supreme Being, 2. Its emphasis on the duty of reverence for the divine, those in authority, ancestors, those of age and experience, and teachers, 3. Obedience to constituted authority, 4. Chastity in sexual relations, 5. Forbearance and benevolence, 6. The duties of parents toward children, 7. The duties of rulers toward subjects, 8. The importance of truth between man and man, 9. The ideas of contentment, harmony, industry, self-control, and 10. Its emphasis on character.

²⁴ 1. Exaltation of passive virtues. 2. Definition of virtue as a thing of the heart, with fruit in speech and behavior. 3. Emphasis on the fact that government exists for the sake of the governed. 4. The Tao which Laozi proclaims corresponds very nearly with the wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures. 5. Laozi’s “three precious virtues,”—compassion, economy and humility. 6. His Tao, though probably not regarded as a personal deity, yet possesses personal attributes.

²⁵ C. H. Fenn, “Response,” 6.

²⁶ J. Wherry, “Response,” 4-5.

²⁷ H. M. Woods, “Reponses,” 5. Woods was a prominent Bible Union man.

FULFILLMENT THEORY IN KOREA

North American missionaries in Korea accepted fulfillment theory in their approach to Korean religions around 1910. With the above circumstantial evidence that most Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries in China accepted the theory, the analysis of the attitudes of two representative missionaries—a Presbyterian H. G. Underwood and a Methodist G. H. Jones—towards Korean religions will show that Protestant missionaries in Korea applied fulfillment theory to their understanding of Korean religions.

HORACE GRANT UNDERWOOD

Underwood (1859-1916) arrived in Korea in April of 1885 as the first Presbyterian clerical missionary. He was the only opponent to the term *Hananim* around 1900 among the Protestant missionaries in Korea. He argued that as it was a “name” of the supreme sky god of Korean pantheon, it was inappropriate for the “term” for the biblical God. His conservative attitude was changed after the controversy of the term question with other missionaries like James S. Gale and Homer B. Hulbert, who insisted that the ancient Koreans were the worshippers of the monotheistic god *Hananim*. Underwood accepted *Hananim* as the Christian term for God around 1904 after his own researches on the ancient Korean mythology and religious history.²⁸

Since the controversy, Underwood shared an irenic policy with other Seoul missionaries in his attitude towards Korean religions. He wrote in 1908: “What religions are chiefly attacked by the missionaries? In reply I would state that I think no attack upon any religion is usually made. The missionary who goes to a foreign field has not the time to spend in attacking its old faiths. His work is simply to hold up Christ and Him crucified.”²⁹ In the same year when “the eyes of all Christendom are riveted on the little despised land” of Korea for the progress of Christian work, Underwood confessed that “the Koreans seemed to have been prepared almost miraculously for the reception of the gospel.”³⁰ He clarified that the earlier success of the Christian mission did not come from the missionary factors but from the “miraculous” preparations of the gospel in the Korean society and Korean mind.

His concern for the possibility of monotheism in ancient Eastern Asia developed into a set of lectures during his third furlough in US in 1907-08. In 1908, Underwood delivered the Deems Foundation Lecture on East Asian religions at New York University, and the Stone Foundation Missionary Lecture on the same subject at Princeton Theological Seminary. These lectures were published in 1910 under the title *The Religions of Eastern Asia*, as the fruit of his missiological study. The book integrated many studies of famous Sinologists and Japanologists such as James Legge, R. K. Douglas, E. Faber, H. A. Giles, W. A. P. Martin, S. Beal, G. W. Aston, W. E. Griffis, G. W. Knox, and S. Gulick.³¹ It investigated five East Asian religions—Daoism of China, Shintoism of Japan, Shamanism of Korea, and Confucianism and Buddhism. Its main theme was “what conceptions of God they hold.”

²⁸ See Sung-Deuk Oak, “Shamanistic *Tan’gun* and Christian *Hananim*: Protestant Missionaries’ Interpretation of the Korean Founding Myth,” *Studies in World Christianity* 7-1 (2001): 42-57.

²⁹ Horace G. Underwood, *Call of Korea* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1908), 90-91.

³⁰ Idem, “Korea’s Crisis Hour,” *Korea Mission Field* 4 (September 1908): 130.

³¹ H. G. Underwood, *Religions of Eastern Asia* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), x.

The first thesis of the book was the theory of degradation. Underwood maintained that the theory of evolution in regard to theism had not been proven. Natural worship, fetish worship, and ancestor worship, from their polytheism, had never developed into monotheism “without the aid of a revelation.” The ancient peoples had had purer and higher ideals of God, yet “the so-called evolution has been downward.” Although there was temporary uplift through the teachings of Confucius and Buddha, the constant tendency was downward rather than upward. Thus Underwood concluded that “religion is not a creature of civilization, nor of evolution worked out by a gradually developing animal, but a matter of inspiration, ... the gift of God.”³² In the late nineteenth century, many missionaries insisted that the ancient religion of “Patriarchism” of Noah and his descendents separated from the protecting restraints of Revelation, degenerated into heathenism; while under the fostering care of Revelation, it developed into Judaism and Judaism found its perfection in Christianity. These two lines emerged from the same root. The one ended in heathenism, and the other in Christianity. Therefore, the theory of degradation was a combination of the idea of degeneration and evolution.³³ Underwood was convinced that “the highest development of evolution leads to monotheism,” and that it was Christian monotheism.³⁴

The second thesis was the existence of primitive monotheism in ancient China and Korea, a common ground on which Christianity and Confucianism and Shamanism could meet. Underwood agreed with James Legge who identified the ancient Chinese *Shangdi* with the Jewish Jehovah. Underwood also agreed with H. B. Hulbert and J. S. Gale who insisted that the Koreans have held stoutly to the monotheistic *Hananim* despite their polytheistic tendencies. Thus Underwood argued that the most ancient peoples had the purer and higher ideals of God; the Chinese *Tian* or *Shangdi*, or the Korean *Hananim* was the “One Supreme Ruler”; the ancient Chinese and Koreans worshipped this God; and that the idea of this God came from the divine revelation.

While we have suggested that in the most primitive times the peoples of Korea and China were monotheists, we have not claimed that they gained this without some form of revelation, but rather lean to the belief that this was a remnant of the still more ancient times when God Himself made personal direct revelation to the fathers of the race, walked with Enoch and talked as friend with Abraham, and these early beliefs, let us suggest, are possibly planks cast upon the high land of the ages from the Flood.³⁵

He accepted the theory that when the descendents of Noah’s three sons moved to China and Korea, they brought the original monotheism. He maintained that the Chinese and Koreans possessed remnants of the original monotheism. He regarded this concept of monotheism as the first point of contact of East Asian religions with Christianity.

Underwood’s third thesis was the finality and fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ, as articulated in Hebrews 1:1-2. He did not totally reject natural revelation, yet his emphasis was on special revelation—Jesus Christ and the written Word of God. Underwood sharply contrasted the Bible with other religions’ scriptures. The latter had “never claimed to carry such authority as does the Word of God.”³⁶

³² Ibid., 232-236.

³³ See “A Discourse on Rom. I. 18-25,” *Chinese Record* 11 (March-April 1880): 83.

³⁴ Underwood, *Religions of Eastern Asia*, 246.

³⁵ Ibid., 245-246.

³⁶ Ibid., 247-248.

Underwood's final thesis was the superiority of the Christian concept of God over that of East Asian religions: the Christian God was a holy and just Spirit and "a living father." He emphasized the fatherhood of God and his sacrificial love for human beings. He wrote, "Of course in the worship of Guanyin, we find the idea of compassion and of mercy when appealed to, but there is scarcely the faintest suggestion of real love exercised toward man." At the same time, people could not "love" their god. One could honor him and revere him, but it was impossible to *love* him. "Their supreme god was so distant, so immensely above mankind, that such an idea as a mere mortal *loving* him was inconceivable."³⁷ However, Underwood acknowledged the value of other religions.

In a way, however, these mistaken religions have helped to pave the highway in the desert for our God. When the Chinaman whose filial devotion has been trained through long ages sees in Him the Great Father, his ancestral worship finds its highest fulfillment in adoring Him. When he learns that this greater "Ti" does not hold aloof from the needs of His people, ... his heart responds with an "Abba, Father."³⁸

The Confucian ideals of filial piety and ancestor worship were fulfilled in the worship of God. Likewise, the Korean devotion to *Hananim* and ancestors prepared for that.

When the Korean with his worship of the Heavens and his strong filial devotion, combined nevertheless with his hourly dread of the powers of the air, learns that the "Great One," whom he has never ceased to revere, is not only supreme, but alone, and that these lower lesser evil powers, the objects of his life-long dread, are the mere creatures of his imagination, that the only God who exists is one of love, wisdom, justice, and truth, he is ready to give undivided allegiance to Him.³⁹

He explained that the Koreans' fear of evil spirits was overcome by the belief in the almighty God. In other words, Korean Shamanistic belief in spirits was a *praeparatio evangelica*. At the same time, the Koreans found that the God of their ancestors was the biblical God. The original Korean monotheism was fulfilled by Christian monotheism. This fact was the greatest point of contact of Korean religions with Christianity.

Underwood's theology of religions was based on two theories—the theory of degradation and fulfillment theory. As a lifelong student of East Asian religions, he demonstrated "the inability of their existing systems to give the highest ideals of deity as well as "the absolute insufficiency of their religious and philosophies either to solve the problems of life, or to provide for the crying needs of man's nature." He was convinced that all religious systems would accomplish the completion in Christianity.⁴⁰

GEORGE HEBER JONES

Jones (1867-1919) began his missionary work as a fourth founding member of the Korea Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1887. He co-edited *The Korean Repository* from 1895 with Henry G. Appenzeller. Jones founded and edited a monthly theological journal, *Sinhak Wölbo*, for the training of the Korean evangelists in 1900-04 and 1907-09. He participated in the publication of *The Korea Review*, edited by H. B. Hulbert, as one of its

³⁷ Ibid., 253.

³⁸ Ibid., 259.

³⁹ Ibid., 261.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 262.

major contributors in 1901-06. Jones was active in the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society from its organization in 1900. In May of 1903, he returned to the U. S. for his health and served the Mission Board as one of the secretaries for a period of three years. In 1907, he published *Korea, the Land, People and Custom*. When he came back to Korea in 1907, he was the senior among the Methodist missionaries, for F. Ohlinger left Korea in 1893, Appenzeller died in 1902, and Scranton left the field in 1906. Jones was appointed president of the Bible Institute of Korea and the Theological Seminary of the Methodist Church. He returned permanently to America in 1909 and worked as editorial secretary of the Mission Board. He devoted himself to the campaign for the quarter-centennial anniversary of the Korea Methodist Mission. Its result was *The Korea Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, published in 1910. Jones taught missions at De Pauw University in 1911 and at the Boston University School of Theology in 1915-18. In 1915 he delivered topical lectures on "The Rise of the Church in Korea" at Boston University. The substance of these lectures was published under the title "Presbyterian and Methodist Missions in Korea," in the first volume of *The International Review of Missions* in 1912.⁴¹

His work in the Board of the Foreign Missions in New York in 1904-07 enabled him to see the changing missiological trends. Therefore when he returned to Korea in 1907 and reissued the monthly *Sinhak wŏlbo*, Jones emphasized the importance of apologetics on the proper relationship between Christianity and other faiths. For this purpose, he helped Ch'oe Pyŏng-Hŏn write "Syŏngsan yuramgŭi" [Travel to the Holy Mount], an allegorical and apologetic novel regarding dialogues among Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and Christianity. Jones also translated W. A. P. Martin's *Tiandao suyuan* (Evidences of Christianity) into Korean. Choi and Jones attempted to establish a new apologetic with fulfillment theory in 1907-09.

When Jones was appointed editorial secretary of the mission board in 1909, he fully accepted fulfillment theory affirmed by the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference. His lectures on "The Rise of Church in Korea" at Boston University School of Theology in 1915 interpreted the early history of Christianity in Korea with a hermeneutical framework of fulfillment theory. He presupposed that only the minority of the missionaries "denied the existence of any point of contact or preparation for Christianity in the native religious faiths." After reviewing the changed missiological attitude toward non-Christian religions, Jones mentioned that there were five "points of contact" of Korean religions with Christianity—the Korean ideas of God, the moral responsibility of man, worship, prayer, and immortality.

The idea of *Hananim* proved one of the first points of contact between Christianity and Korean religions, and was utilized by the missionaries with practical results.

The native religions of Korea though degraded by polytheism and idolatry and saturated with superstition yet they have inculcated in the people a universal belief in supernatural being. The Korean finds no difficulty in assenting to the existence of deity. He is not an atheist, for over his polytheistic world he believes that there reigns a supreme God. This being he designates as *Hananim*, who is a spirit personality unconnected with Confucianism or Buddhism and standing aloof even from the Animistic nature worship of the masses. The word *Hananim* means literally "Master of Heaven." Back of this etymology, however, is a more ancient one, which makes the word *Hananim* mean literally "The One

⁴¹ G. H. Jones, "Presbyterian and Methodist Missions in Korea," *International Review of Mission* 1 (1912): 412-434.

Great One” and which seems to be an unconscious echo of the idea of the unity of God, as against the polytheism of nature worship.⁴²

Jones thought that this supreme Korean conception of the deity was “quite dissociated from idolatry, for the Koreans had never made an image or picture of *Hananim*, and the rites by which he worshipped from time immemorial cannot be called idolatrous.” He accepted *Hananim* as the original monotheistic god, not as one of the degraded polytheistic gods. He was negative to the Buddhist conception of nothingness and to Confucian agnosticism.

With the ancient Korean word *Hananim* as its vehicle, Christianity has expanded and enriched Korean thought life with a wealth of meaning revealed in Christ and recorded in the Bible. It corrected the polytheism of Animistic nature worship, by proclaiming His unity, delivering Korean worship from the fear and mental torture of its polytheistic absurdity. Against the idolatry fostered and cultured by Buddhism, it proclaimed the spirituality of God. It overthrew the strange mental perversion which reduced God to nothingness, by revealing his personality, defining him in terms which the simplest soul could understand. It brought to the Korean a knowledge of a reasonable God, superior to the mightiest fetish or most impressive image. It cured the agnosticism of Confucianism by revealing God as the Father of men, intimately and tenderly interested in them, with whom they might hold communion, and who had bridged the infinite space that separated the human from the divine by coming and tabernacling among them in the flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ.⁴³

He concluded, “the Korean had been led to a point where he recognized the fact of a divine being; but he was left there, knowing the existence of the deity but ignorant of the truth about God.” Christianity transformed the imperfect Korean conception of God by correcting and adding—by “amplifying it with the measureless meaning of redemption,” by “showing him as all-wise, all-present and beneficent creator and governor of the universe,” and by adding it with “one other immeasurable element, God our Savior.”⁴⁴

The second point of contact was “the moral responsibility of man” that both Buddhism and Confucianism had taught to the Koreans with their doctrines of self-cultivation or transmigration. Christianity claimed the power to produce a new person. Christianity also transformed the nature and meaning of sin from a matter of law and formal offence to “a matter of the heart.” Shamanism required sacrifices and ceremonial cleanness in the fear of spirits; Buddhism devotion; and Confucianism propriety for moral perfection. Nevertheless, the Koreans were conscious of moral defect. Confucianism’s axiom was “Control thyself.” Buddhism’s was “Forget thyself.” Yet, Christianity said, “Lose thyself,” which taught perfection of unselfishness. It came to the Koreans as “one of the most startling revelations” over their moral horizon.⁴⁵

Traditional worship or honoring the sacred things was the third sure point of contact. Jones found that Koreans were a ritual people. “The soul of the Korean is thoroughly imbued with the idea of worship” and “the spirit of reverence” for religious things. Worship began in the home in the form of ancestor worship. A sense of fear predominated in Shamanistic worship of gods. Christianity emphasized the idea of worship, but presented it with an entirely new viewpoint. “It denudes the act of reverence of those fearsome and terror

⁴² G. H. Jones, “The Rise of Church in Korea,” typescript, The Mission Research Library, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 68.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 73-79.

inspiring features which prevailed under the old order; it eliminates the grotesque, the absurd and the childishness which native superstition imported into it; it removes from the soul of the Korean his terror of the spirits that are symbolized by disservice, and it gives him moral and spiritual health.” Christianity revealed to the Korean a God as Father and himself as God’s child bringing both into personal union and communion. And herein lay “one of the surest guarantees of the success of the Christian message, namely the fact that God has endowed each soul whether born in Christian or non-Christian lands with a native faculty by which Deity can be recognized, and worshiped.”⁴⁶

The universal belief in prayer was the fourth point of contact with Christianity. All Koreans prayed. Some Buddhist monks lived a continual life of prayer. Women dedicated their sons to dragons or rocks with prayer for their long life. In a national calamity such as a drought, famine or pestilence, special prayer was offered to *Hananim*.

Christianity, however, revolutionizes and transforms the Korean conception of prayer. It teaches him that prayer is not the matter of the extraordinary times and experience of life, but is one of the highest forms of communion with the Divine, a daily and continual exercise. It teaches him that he may come direct to the great God and Father of us all, and make known his petitions and needs with the same simplicity and confidence that the child in the family comes to the parent in daily conversation and fellowship.⁴⁷

A Korean discovered a new dimension of prayer life in the Lord’s Prayer, which formed a vital point of contact between Christianity and his or her own soul’s best experience.

Korean religions taught immortality, or the belief that personality had the power to continue in existence after the mysterious experience of death. Buddhism taught transmigration; Confucianism practiced ancestor worship; and geomancy preached that the dead person had the power to help or afflict the living. So the old law carried the death penalty to any Korean who destroyed or dishonored ancestor tablets. The obligation to worship one’s ancestors did not extend beyond the fifth generation, after which the Korean consigned his death to the mystery of their own disappearance. At this point Christianity gave the Korean clear conceptions of continued form of existence. It brought to the Korean the blessed truth of human immortality, a resurrection and life everlasting.

Jones concluded that although the gleams of light appeared in the writings of pre-Christian sages, the Christian religion in its purity had real and truthful revelation of God to give, and possesses principles and moral dynamics that other religions did not contain. At the same time, “a fair and just judgment must recognize the existence in the religious thought of the Korean world of the five great concepts to which we have alluded.” Jones believed that “they constitute five great gateways through which Christianity may drive its chariot of truth to the very center of life in the great World Field. These things have prepared the people of Korea to recognize the messengers who come to them in that golden chariot.”⁴⁸ Jones argued that the Koreans received these messages from Heaven and recognized them with the help of the divine Spirit.

Two representative pioneer missionary scholars in Korea—H. G. Underwood and G. H. Jones, built their arguments on earlier foundations and moved forward with the help of a new progressive trend of evangelical mission theology. Their interactions with the Korean people

⁴⁶ Ibid., 79-82.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 83-84.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 89.

and scholarly studies of the history of Korean religions enabled them to accept the points of contact between Christianity and Korean religions. These two examples prove the hypothesis that early North American missionaries in Korea moved from an exclusive attitude to an inclusive fulfillment theory around 1910. Of course, a further study is needed to find more concrete evidence that many other missionaries in Korea accepted these two missionary scholars' breakthrough.

CONCLUSION

Arthur J. Brown's short comment in 1919—"the typical missionary of the first quarter century after the opening of the country" was "a man of the Puritan type"—initiated the widely accepted stereotypical image of the early American missionaries in Korea.⁴⁹ With the simplified portrayal of the founding missionaries as Puritanical moralists, conservative premillennialists, and rigid exclusivists, Brown argued that the first generation of Korean Christians naturally reproduced the missionary type: escapism from the destructive world, manifest evangelistic zeal, strict Sabbath observance, rigid doctrinal conviction, literal acceptance of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and inflexible opposition to anything that did not accord with the accepted type. Brown's caricature has been recited by both Korean and mission historiography for the past five decades.

This paper aimed to revise this mainstream understanding of the first generation missionaries by rediscovering their fulfillment theory. Christianity came to Korea to fulfill the longings and aspirations of Korean religions at the turn of the twentieth century, and a distinctive indigenous Korean Protestantism was flowered. This seemingly simple thesis has been rejected by the scholars of the history of Korean Christianity for a long time. In 1912, however, G. Heber Jones wrote, "Korea has been called the surprise of modern missions. The rapid rise of a church community now approximating 300,000, the early naturalization of Christianity in the Korean environment, and its expression in distinctive and original national forms have challenged the attention of the Christian world."⁵⁰ His witness about the indigenization of Christianity in Korea needs to be rehabilitated in search of the relevant theology of non-Christian religions of the contemporary "evangelical" churches in Korea. The inclusive fulfillment theory compiled at Edinburgh in 1910 has still something to say to the Protestant Korean Churches that has been under the shadow of fundamentalism since the 1920s. The first step for the conservative mainline Korean Protestant Churches to get out of the outdated trap of the irrelevant theology of religions is to recover the legacy of the first generation's theological trajectory from crusade mentality to fulfillment theory which approached towards Korean religions with courtesy and respect.

⁴⁹ Arthur J. Brown, *Mastery of the Far East: The Story of Korea's Transformation and Japan's Rise to Supremacy in the Orient* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), 540.

⁵⁰ G. Heber Jones, "The Growth of the Church in the Mission Field: III. Presbyterian and Methodist Mission in Korea," *International Review of Mission* I-4 (September 1912): 412.

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