

The Role of Ideology in Asian Liberation Ethics¹

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Introduction

An ideology reflects a particular situation from which it emerges. A theology also cannot be an exception from reflecting a particular situation. The role of theology has a function which not only exposes the truth from the Bible but also brings our concrete reality to the Bible. That is, theology emerges from a particular social reality. It can never be understood in isolation. In this aspect, Asian liberation theology emerged from an oppressed political, economic, and cultural-religious situation different from the situation from which the Post-Reformation traditional Western faith-based theology emerged.

Asian liberation theology is a declaration of the self-awakening of the oppressed in societal structures. Asian liberation theology has refused, unconditionally, to accept European theology in relation to its political and economic power and has begun to express its own diverse voices and theology through its particular experience. This refusal is due to differences of the respective situations politically, economically and religio-culturally.

When theology is understood as a critical reflection on the praxis of liberation,² theology becomes a new praxis. “This is the methodological postulate which produces the necessary link between theology and liberation, the transformation of the world. This is what is meant by saying that the theology of liberation pays more heed to orthopraxis than to orthodoxy, that theology cannot be relegated to the limbo of theoretical reflection and that every theological postulate must have an ethical component.”³

According to Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, praxis is critical, reflective action based on and dealing with

¹ This article is revised partly in my Ph. D. dissertation that was written in 2009 at Drew Univ. The title of the dissertation is an ethics of Korean Reunification.

² Gustavo Gutierrez sees liberation operating in an interdependent way at three levels: social liberation, human liberation and religious liberation. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988) 24-25.

³ Francisco Moreno Rejon, “Seeking the Kingdom and its Justice: The Development of the Ethic of Liberation.” eds. Dietmar Mieth Jacques Pohier *Concilium The Ethics of Liberation--The Liberation of Ethics* (Edinburgh:T.&T. Clark Ltd, 1984) 37.

questions of ultimate meaning.⁴ Thus, praxis becomes the starting point of Asian liberation ethics. In order to understand Asian liberation ethics as a new praxis, the role of ideology is very important in the Asian context which is characterized by the many poor, by the rich cultures and the developed religions.

The primary task of this study is to examine the role of ideology in Asian liberation ethics. To accomplish this task, the notion of liberation and ideology is discussed in relation to the Asian context and Asian theology. Regarding the notion of liberation in this study, the term is examined by focusing on the materials of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT)⁵ and on several books of the postcolonialism.

In the 1980s, as a Korean college student, I lived in the middle of a conflict of ideologies. As a Christian, when I become involved in the student movement, my faith was influenced by different ideologies. What do I mean by ideology? How do I understand ideology? Though I learned about Marxism during the student movement, I did not put aside my religious faith and embraced Marxism. I continued to turn to the Bible as the source of my ideas, as the foundation for what I thought and did in the student movement. It was not until I came to do graduate studies that I understood the relationship between faith and ideology, that is, not ideology in the Marxian sense, but ideology as proposed by different liberation theologians in Latin America and Asia. I focus particularly on the meaning of ideology in the work of Aloysius Pieris, a Jesuit priest in Sri Lanka, who describes himself as a Christian-Buddhist and who is totally preoccupied with and committed to the poor.

Karl Marx's Understanding of Ideology

Historically, the term, "ideology" was first employed in the eighteenth century by the French philosopher, Destutt de Tracy, to mean "a science of ideas."⁶ Yet, the most common use of ideology even today follows the Marxian understanding. A century after Destutt de Tracy introduced the term, Marx used ideology to refer to a system of ideas which justifies the status quo and legitimates oppressive social relationships. For Marx, religion as well as culture and philosophy, at least dominant philosophy, is

⁴ Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Yolanda Tarango, *Hispanic Women Prophetic Voice in the Church--Toward a Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology* (San Francisco: Harper&Row, 1988) 1.

⁵ Virginia Fabella, and R.S. Sugirtharajah eds., *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000) 70-72

⁶ Aloysius Pieris, S. J., *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992) 25-26.

largely ideological in character.⁷ It is a subtle defense of the oppressive status quo.

For Marx, ideology does not refer to “the symbolic framework of the mind as a neutral, value-free concept.”⁸ That is, Marx does not use ideology in a neutral sense. In this respect, Gregory Baum, a Catholic theologian, asserts that “in the Marxian terminology, ideology is always something false, a distortion of the truth for the sake of social interest, a symbolic framework of the mind that legitimates the power and privileges of the dominant groups and sanctions the social evils inflicted on the people without access to power.”⁹ For Marx, ideology is false consciousness,¹⁰ that is, “the unconscious rationalization by which both parties accept a particular social order as necessary because it is allegedly ordained by God, or destined by nature, or sanctified by tradition, or sanctioned by religion.”¹¹ There is no good ideology for Marx. He uses ideology in a negative sense to mean “a rational justification of the status quo, or the unexamined theory behind immoral praxis.”¹²

Also important for me as a Christian is Marx’s contention that religion, philosophy, and values are echoes of material processes of production.¹³ Because the arrangement of these processes is oppressive for the masses and is beneficial for the elites, the systems of thought dominating such arrangements are ideological justifications of the status quo and consolation for the oppressed. In this sense, Marx saw religion as an element of ideology or as an ideology in itself. That is, for Marx, religion plays a role in the justification of the status quo and of immoral praxis. It plays roles that perpetuate status quo privilege and power, and the oppressed people’s oppression.

Aloysius Pieris’ Understanding of Ideology

From my perspective, in reality, ideology has a different meaning from that given to it by Marx. Following the original meaning of the word, I understand ideology not as false consciousness but as a framework of meaning, as the understandings and values that make human activities possible. Ideology is concerned both with questions of truth and questions of conduct. Thus, ideology is a coherent and holistic

⁷ Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation* (NY: Paulist Press, 1975) 34.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁰ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works in One Volume* (New York: International Publishers, 1970) 700.

¹¹ Pieris, 26.

¹² Ibid.

system related to the meaning of our lives.

For Aloysius Pieris, ideology is a worldview that is essentially programmatic, pertaining to “this-worldly future to be realized, not without a struggle, in the socio-political order.” Pieris proposes that an ideology “can be realized with the aid of certain tools of analysis or a method of discernment based on its own premises.” Finally, for Pieris, an ideology “is required by its own intrinsic nature to be transcended by the truth it seeks to articulate.”¹⁴

Pieris describes ideology as a worldview, that is, a framework used to understand and relate to the world. For him, a worldview is programmatic. It is “exclusively concerned with what it conceives to be a radical amelioration of the socio-political order with concomitant changes in the psycho-spiritual sphere.”¹⁵ For Pieris, the purpose of a worldview or ideology is to change the present disorder in the world.¹⁶ Ideology is not abstract reasoning but it includes a programmatic perspective to transform concrete socio-political structures that are unjust. This is why Pieris sees ideology as entailing a struggle. It seeks not merely to persuade someone about an idea; it demands commitment to programs that will bring about secular progress.¹⁷ Ideology has a goal in mind; it wants to accomplish specific goals; it is not only a vision but also a mission regarding what to do in the present to reach the envisioned future. Therefore, ideology can easily be transformed into a well-framed socio-political program or project.

In addition, for Pieris, ideology as worldview comprises an epistemological framework that enables one to grasp reality and serves as an explanation more or less comprehensive of human experience and the world. In a sense, Pieris’ understanding of ideology is similar to that of religion. Both point to “the horizon of liberation.”¹⁸ However, at the same time, ideology is radically different from religion since there is no transcendental dimension in ideology, as there is in religion.

Pieris explains that a worldview, in order to develop and implement a program for the betterment of the social order, need to use “certain tools of analysis or a method of discernment based on its own (that is, ideological) premises.”¹⁹ He insists that a society is not “simply the sum total of individuals.” The point

¹³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1964) 77.

¹⁴ Pieris, 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

he is trying to make is that personal conversion or change will not lead necessarily to change in the structures of society. He says, “The counter forces that operate in society overpower individuals in their efforts to attain the desired perfection.”²⁰ For Pieris, this understanding of the person as a social being is central to his understanding of ideology.²¹

Understanding Ideology in the Asian Context

The National Security Ideology

In Asian history, ideology is used by the dominant class to justify its privileged status. The dominant ideology is presented as the normal one, the right one, as the only one, instead of as a partial understanding of reality. The most serious use of the dominant ideology is to establish a chorus of values, beliefs, and practices, which are employed to legitimate a political system that oppresses people. This prevalent ideology, which creates a false consciousness, is the ideology of development and national security,²² which promotes the militarization process in the Third World. In fact, the ideology of development and national security serves the rulers in Asia while being an obstacle for those seeking preservation of democratic rights as well as mass action for change.

This ideology is what supports Asia’s politics of economic development today, which depends upon the development of a technocratic power elite committed to economic growth, based upon a systematic application of the fruits of science and technology. “This power elite requires some form of messianic language to justify the process, be it reactionary nationalism, communism or anti-communism.”²³ In this sense, “politics is instrumental to the process of economic development, and this leads to the technocratization of power politics itself. The three manifestations of technocratic power--military, political, and economic--are all intertwined with each other, and this power dominates other social and cultural values and institutions.”²⁴ The domestic ruling powers collaborate with transnational corporations, which require strong security and stability, which means no disturbance from labor unions.

²⁰ Ibid., 28.

²¹ Ibid., 27-28.

²² Changwon Suh, *A Formulation of Minjung Theology: Toward A Socio-Historical of Asia* (Seoul: Nathan Publishing Co., 1990) 223.

²³ Ibid., 224.

²⁴ Ibid.

“The basic argument for economic development has been that it is for the people.”²⁵ However, in the process of economic development, the people are always excluded from the development of plans and from all decision-making including, of course, decisions that have to do with wages and distribution of profits. As a result, the rich get richer, the government spends more and more, while the poor get poorer.²⁶ In other words, the energies of the “have-nots” are used for the power, status, and wealth of “the haves.”

The Ethno-Religious Ideology

Ethno-religious ideology is another important issue in Asia today where there exists an ethnocentrism mixed with religious fundamentalism. According to Hsien-Chih Wang, a Filipino theologian, religious fundamentalism is a very vital issue in Asia, especially when it is linked with politics, power, and ethnic identity searching for an independent national identity as articulated in Tibetan, Tamil, Taiwanese, Sikh, and Palestinian traditions as well as in the former Soviet republics of Asia.²⁷ For centuries, religious fundamentalists have been involved in terrible wars seeking their own ethnic identity and security. It is obvious that ethnic groups with their own religions are struggling for political independence and economic justice. For example, the ‘just war’ or ‘holy war’ is fought again and again from the Tibetan regions to the former Soviet Asia.

The more urgent problem is that ethnocentrism mixed with religious fundamentalism is rampant from China to India, Sri Lanka to Pakistan. Specifically, in South Korea, by accepting literal interpretation of the Bible, religious fundamentalism unconditionally supports a government. Most Korean Christians understand that the mechanisms which justified the status quo, both politically and economically had been established by God. Thus, the religious fundamentalism contributes to the ideology of national security. The Asian church needs to criticize the development of the national security ideology and ethno-religious ideology.

Understanding Ideology and Liberation in Asian Theology

Overcoming Poverty

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid..

²⁷ Hsien-Chih Wang, “The Problem of Religious Fundamentalism in Relation to Ethnicity, Poverty and Ideology: An Asian Perspective, 42 *Reformed World* (1992): 25.

A statement by the Third-World Theological Association, “Toward a Relevant Theology”, begins with an emphasis on liberation as the chief motif of Asian theology.²⁸ To know what liberation means, it is necessary to know the Asian socio-political and the religio-cultural aspects of life. In the socio-political aspects, most Asian nations are immersed in poverty,²⁹ hunger, and oppression, due to neo-colonial exploitation and military despotism. Although the period of colonialism officially ended years ago, non-power elite from many nations feel that there exists a neo-colonialism that, together with capitalism, forms an oppressive cultural and economic imperialism.

In the present era, a small ruling elite has the power previously possessed by the colonial rulers. In effect, there has never been a distribution of power. The Indian Preparatory Statement of the TTA puts it this way: “Our independence movement terminated in a transfer of power without a social revolution. A westernized elite, with economic interests integrated into the interests of the outgoing colonial power, became the successor. It has been to their advantage to keep practically everything unchanged.”³⁰ This can be said of many of the Asian nations, where neo-colonialism depends on a small power and economic elite and vast numbers of poor people.

Most Asian theologians recognize the need to solve the problem of poverty in Asia. According to Changwon Suh, a Korean theologian, the methodologies endorsed to deal with poverty rely on five different approaches to theology. First, the Pure Religio-Cultural type is exemplified by the work of Lynn de Silba, Stanley J. Samarta, Raimundo Panikkar, and most of the theologians who belong to the Indi-Sri Lankan area. Their theological concern is that of interreligious dialogue. Their crucial limitation is the lack of socio-political references in their theologies. Second, the Religio-Historical type whose proponents are Rienze Perera, Aloysius Pieris, and Kosuke Koyama, has a broader approach than the religio-cultural type because it handles the problem of “Asian religiosity” from the perspective of the contemporary Asian historical context. Third, the Pure Socio-Political type is endorsed by Edicia de la Torre and Carlos H. Abesamis. Most Filipino Catholic theologians belong to this type which is comparable to the Latin

²⁸ The full text may be found in Virginia Fabella, ed., *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980), 56-58.

²⁹ Major reason for poverty in too many Asian countries is the history of colonialization. Today Japan, Taiwan and South Korea are not poor. Paul S. Chung, Veli-Matti Karkkainen, Kim Kyung-Jae. Eds, *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium* (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publication, 2007), 105.

American liberation theologians' approach. Fourth, the Socio-Cultural type comprises Preman Niles and C.S. Song. Their approach to socio-political liberation depends on doing theology with an Asian spirituality. However, their understanding of spirituality has a heavy, metaphysical tendency because they do not take into account the people's socio-historical experiences. Fifth, the Socio-Historical type includes proponents such as Tissa Balasuriya, Henriette Marianne Katoppo, Yong Bock Kim, and other Minjung theologians of South Korea. Their methods consider the socio-historical experience of the Asian people without losing sight of the creative tension between their religio-cultural expressions and socio-political situations. For them, the subject of doing theology is and ought to be the Asian peoples, as experiencing subjectivity in the socio-historical situation of Asia.³¹

Especially, I prefer to focus on the socio-historical approach and the religious-historical approach. In the socio-historical approach, theologians include a critical social theory as part of their method which has two goals: (1) to recognize the essential reality and (2) to seek alternatives. Most Asian theologians who use social analysis as part of their method see it as one of the functions of theology to recognize the conflicts of capitalism and the influence of neo-colonialism in Asia. For example, Tissa Balasuriya, a Sri-Lankan theologian, points out that the causes of poverty in Asia are by-products of neo-colonialism and the conflicts and oppression resulting from capitalism. He suggests that Asian theology should accept social analysis noting that, in general, analysis of society has not been accepted and incorporated as a basic element in theological reflection in Asia.³²

The religious-historical type, exemplified by Aloysius Pieris, a Sri-Lankan theologian, handles the problem of poverty by relating Asian religiosity to the Asian historical context. He contends that Asian people cannot be liberated from poverty by a socio-political method only. For him, poverty is the condition produced by acquisitiveness and greed. Hence, to do away with poverty, all material progress must be tempered by the ideal of non-acquisitiveness and sharing. In Asia, the antonym of poverty is not wealth but greed or acquisitiveness which makes wealth anti-religious. The liberation from poverty should be pursued by the struggle to overcome mammon.

³⁰ Asian Report Group. "Toward a Relevant Theology in Asia." *Irruption of the Third World*. eds., Virginia Fabella, and Sergio Torres, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983) 63.

³¹ Suh, 218.

In seeking for approaches solving poverty in Asia, I see there are varying views, which depend on societal factors and personal impacts. Unlike the socio-historical type, the religious-historical type stresses change in individual attitudes and thinking more than the fundamental changes in society. I think that we should try to relate reflections to the socio-historical type and the religious-historical type as well since the poverty of Asia is interwoven in both the socio-political and the religio-cultural environments. That is, we should try to have a holistic perspective - social and individual aspects.

Asian ideology is a stream fed by many sources. Central to it is the notion that most Asian nations are poor and oppressed due to neo-colonial exploitation and military despotism. "At this point, the Asian people's socio-historical experience can be an integrator of indigenous religio-cultural spirituality and liberating social-political praxis for world change, because both have a common goal, which is the struggle for freedom and liberation."³³ In this sense, the starting point of Asian theology will be the Asian people's liberation praxis that is, their power as the concrete manifestation of their aspirations organized into a movement for liberation.³⁴

Asian Indigenization of Western Christianity

When one analyzes the religio-cultural aspects of most Asian nations, one sees that a variety of religions and philosophies are followed. Many of the great religions of the world began in Asia: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in western Asia; Hinduism, Buddhism-Jainism, and Zoroastrianism in southern Asia; Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism in eastern Asia.³⁵ Although Christianity started in Asia, it left Asia very early and forced its way back, several centuries later as a westernized stranger and 'intruder' which Asia consistently has refused to entertain. For this reason, Christians represent a tiny minority, approximately 2 to 3 percent, of the Asian population.³⁶ The liability of the minority status of Christianity is compounded by its association with Asia's colonial past. Western missionaries accompanied the trading vessels coming to the East. The missionaries' symbiosis with colonial governments enabled them to hold a

³² Virginia Fabella, ed., *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology*, 24. I base my discussion of the religious-historical and socio-historical approach on Fabella's analysis and discussion.

³³ Suh, 219-20.

³⁴ Suh, 220.

³⁵ Samuel Rayan, "Reconceiving Theology in the Asian Context," in *Doing Theology in a Divided World* eds., Virginia Fabella and Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985) 126.

³⁶ Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988) 74.

privileged status. Because Christianity derived its support from the colonial governments and powerful ruling nations, Asian converts to Christianity frequently came from the middle class and the ruling elite.

Asian theologians today criticize Western Christianity for having allied themselves with the middle class and having treated Asian indigenous religions as idolatrous. This criticism has led them to reexamine the traditions of the great Asian religions. At present, those religions are experiencing a resurgence due to new emphasis on justice. No longer is it possible to categorize Western Christianity as historical and life-affirming and Asia's indigenous religions as ahistorical and life-negating.

The traditions of Asia's great religions--Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism - understand liberation as: liberation from selfishness both at the personal as well as the societal level.³⁷ "Asian people's experience of religio-cultural transcendence must be interpreted as a radical negation of the this-worldly reality which is filled with suffering and misery."³⁸ In the quest for liberation, there are two different types of negation of this worldly reality: 1) that by which people become forgetful of their socio-political responsibility; 2) that by which they become involved in the struggle for liberation in cultural works without direct fighting in this world in terms of people's social biographies, such as using the mask dance, stories, songs, poems, etc. As in the two different approaches, as a whole, most Asians continue to struggle for freedom against socio-political injustice in their respective religions and cultures.

Liberation in Asia, then, includes independence from Western Christianity. The key characteristics of an Asian Christianity are as follow: Asian Christianity has evolved from a missionary effort and exists in a pluralistic religious setting. Asian Christianity involves literal interpretation of the Bible. While there are common characteristics that can be noted in Asian Christianity, it is also important to note that there are significant differences, country to country, in the articulation of Christianity. However, as a whole, there is no doubt that the roots of Asian Christianity are found in Western Christianity. Thus, "Most Asian theologians emphasize the religio-cultural dimension in order to fight against domination by Western metaphysical-oriented theological imperialism."³⁹ The Asian theologians have begun to find identifying elements within each ethnic religion and culture that help to break Western theological imperialism while developing aspects of indigenization.

³⁷ Fabella, *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology*. 157.

³⁸ Suh, 216.

Most Asian theologians use elements found in Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism to understand and explain Jesus. “In Northeast Asia, where Buddhism dominates, Jesus is portrayed as a *bodhisattva* who postpones his own enlightenment in order to suffer with human beings in their quest for enlightenment. In Southeast Asia, where Islam dominates, Jesus is portrayed as a *guru* who demonstrates to his disciples a life of union with God that is at once prophetic and mystical. In south central Asia, where Hinduism dominates, Jesus’ life is altogether a picture of ideal Hindu life and he is incarnated as an *avatar*, a Hindu savior figure.”⁴⁰ Asian theologians also underscore that the mystical or risen Christ has the same qualities as the historical Jesus. “This approach to Jesus can be diagrammed as a circle. At its center stands the incarnation. Emerging from the incarnation are diverse Christologies that interpret the incarnation by means of Asia’s traditions, including Jesus as *bodhisattva*, *guru*, and *avatar*.”⁴¹

Postcolonialism as Resistance to Imperialism

The term “postcolonialism” itself is full of ambivalence and complexities. Especially the prefix “post” means “after,” “having gone through” and “a notion of time which is not linear but constant, marked by events that may be technically finished but that can only be fully understood with the consideration of the devastation they left behind.”⁴² In this sense, Musa Dube explains it as following: “the term postcolonial does not denote that colonialism is over, since the latter did not simply consist of geographical and political domination but also included cultural and economic structures that persist to this day. Postcolonial, therefore, refers to an overall analysis of the methods and effects of imperialism as a continuing reality in global relations.”⁴³ To clarify it, postcolonialism is considered as “not only a simple periodization after Western countries dominated military, but also a methodological revisionism that enables a wholesale critique of Western structures of knowledge and power since the Enlightenment.”⁴⁴

First, postcolonialism is to expose the heritage of imperialism or colonialism, which is still functioning in the postcolonial age and to emphasize on seeking for justice and liberation. Imperialism

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison, *Jesus in Global Contexts* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1992) 59.

⁴¹ Pope-Levison, 60.

⁴² R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998) ix.

⁴³ Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000) 48.

functions as the diverse sort of discursive formations such as ideology, hidden norm, culture and way of thinking among the once colonized people. In this respect, the main concern of postcolonial discourse interrogates Eurocentrism which originated from a collective Europe as a mark of superiority and then it was firmly consolidated in opposition to the rest of the world's cultures. Eurocentrism as a form of discourse tends to have been internalized and reproduced by the colonized people.

Above all, the most destructive aspect of cultural imperialism is not what it does to the colonized people but what it makes the colonized people do to themselves. That is, people internalize the way the imperial culture views them, little by little. The cultural imperialism is to establish a chorus of values, beliefs and practices, which is employed to legitimate a status quo of the political, economic, and cultural system. The colonized people are imposed on the imperialist and thus lose their identity unless they reflect their culture to the imperial culture. Paradoxically speaking, this postcolonial discourse is not about the colonialism (West), but about the colonized "Other."⁴⁵

Second, postcolonialism deals with a new identity as a hybridized identity --"the formation of hyphenated, fractured, multiple, and multiplying identities."⁴⁶ This hybridity is not about the melting away of the difference between East and West, "but involves a newfound independence, achieved not simply by rejecting provincial, national, and imperial attachments, but by working through them."⁴⁷ The feature of the new identity will juggle different values and concepts, which based on negotiation of difference between each other. In this sense, Homi Bhabha presents hybridity as "a strategic interruption of the manner in which cultural difference is constructed and sustained in colonial contexts. Thus Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity is an analysis of what happens at borders and boundaries."⁴⁸ In the same time, Bhabha has tried to address how to connect ambivalence and hybridity to resistant discourse.⁴⁹ He adopts the hybrid reality as the third space occurring between self and other, here and there, Eurocentrism and Third World.

⁴⁴ Virginia Fabella, M.M. and R.S. Sugirtharajah. Eds., *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000) 169.

⁴⁵ R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism* 16.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 17.

⁴⁸ Susan Abraham, "What Does Mumbai Have to do with Rome? Postcolonial Perspectives on Globalization and Theology" in *Theological Studies*: Jun 2008; 69, 2; ProQuest. 382.

Third, postcolonialism is to retrieve multiple voices in the center of resistant discourse and to unmask the link between ideas and power which lies behind Western texts, theories and learning.⁵⁰ “Postcolonial discourse is not about the territorial ejection of imperial powers or about learning, Caliban-like, the art of cursing the evils of empire. Rather, it is an active interrogation of the hegemonic systems of thought, textual codes, and symbolic practices which the West constructed in its domination of colonial subjects.”⁵¹ Succinctly put, postcolonialism is “a discursive resistance to imperialism, imperial ideologies, and imperial attitudes and to their continual reincarnations in such wide fields as politics, economics, history, and theological and biblical studies.”⁵² In this sense, postcolonialism is most essential to Asian liberation ethics.

Understanding Ideology in Asian Liberation Ethics

Toward a Liberative Ideology

In the Asian context, the dominant ideology functions strongly through the ruler’s propaganda that distorts reality for their own political power. This has led to and sustains Asia’s under-development and poverty caused, to a large extent, by dependence on other nations that control our destiny. Francisco Moreno Rejon, a Latin American theologian, indicates that this situation has consequences for an ethics of liberation that must supply the criteria of conduct that would be effective in transforming such an oppressive situation. “All reflection, as the philosophy of liberation has clearly shown, takes place in the setting of particular historico-social co-ordinates which have to be fully understood not only as conditionings but also as ethic-methodological options.”⁵³

Under the effect of the dominant ideology, Asian people are confused about the values and norms that should guide their lives. For example, Asians often seem to place more importance on money under the aura of developmentalism or capitalism than on human dignity. Many Asians seem to prefer to ignore

⁴⁹ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*. 이경원 역 『탈식민주주의! 저항에서 유희로』 (과주: 한길사, 2003) 306-315.

⁵⁰ Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*. 17.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Francisco Moreno Rejon, “Seeking the Kingdom and its Justice: the Development of the Ethic of Liberation” *Concilium, the Ethics of Liberation-The Liberation of Ethics* eds., Dietmar Mieth and Jacques Pohier (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1984) 37.

that under developmentalism, people do not receive fair wages. Most Asian nations do not have a real capacity to make their own decisions within an environment of neo-imperialism.

Under the development ideology, there are great gaps between the environments of the urban and rural areas. The youth prefer city life to rural life. The youth have no interest in the agricultural industry of the rural areas. The youth leave the rural areas, thus, widening the gap between city and country life. They are attracted to the manufacturing industry because they make more money in industry than in agriculture. The oppressed and deprived people do not believe in their government or in the churches. Most churches serve the vested interests of the elites, thus strengthening their exploitive powers.

The function of ideology in Asia has to take a positive position: worldview to change the present disorder to transform concrete socio-political structures that are unjust, not only analyzing reality but also transforming into a well-framed socio-political program or project. In other words, our ideology should be changed to promote liberation and to develop a program for the betterment of the social order for the poor, the marginal and the oppressed.

Toward Asian Liberation Ethics

Noticing these problems related to ideologies, our ethics must be understood in a prophetic sense. Our theological position “cannot leave us indifferent; on the contrary, it must always provoke the question: ‘So what must we do?’ (Acts 2:36-8). This is how the ethic of liberation goes beyond the sterility of so many ethical theories that remain trapped in the naturalist fallacy. A prophetic theology challenges, not only in the intellectual sphere, but also in that of praxis. The response has to be an ethical one: a practice of liberation.”⁵⁴

I suggest that in a prophetic sense Asian liberation ethics be built as follows: The subject of Asian liberation ethics ought to be the Asian people, who are the poor, deprived and oppressed. In other words, Asian liberation ethics must be one that speaks of the experience of the Asian people in terms of finding full humanity and liberation. Asian liberation ethics must serve the interests of the poor people for they are called by God to be the architects and builders of their own destiny.⁵⁵ In fact, the Asian

⁵⁴ Rejon, 36.

⁵⁵ Fabella, *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology*. 156.

community who struggles for the liberation has discovered its own self-understanding in the concrete struggle of people in Asia who are working for liberation, justice, equality and human dignity.

Asian liberation ethics embodies the principle that rules should be made *by* the people in a community and that they can and should be continually evaluated. In this respect, Asian liberation ethics must integrate the insights and values of the Asian major religions which are so important in the lives of the people in terms of the action and commitment to the people's struggle for *full humanity*. The key principle of an Asian liberation ethics is full humanity, so Christianity and all religions have to see what they can contribute to the development of *full humanity*. Asian liberation ethics considers critically the question of a so-called dominating ideology because the ruler clearly despises the people, for his/her own power and status presuppose the people as objects. The ruling political power legitimates this view. Asian liberation ethics refuses to accept the dominant ideology and language of the ruler, for this language only rationalizes oppressive and exploitive power relations.⁵⁶

Asian liberation ethics emphasizes the responsibility individuals have to stand and fight for liberation. There is no possibility of the person in isolation to be put right. A person can be put right only in dynamic relationship to society for a full humanity for all *with* people and *by* people. Christian communities, especially, in Asia, should discover in their faith the need to take an active part in the struggle for their liberation. In this respect, Asian liberation ethics poses many ethical questions having to do with power, the class struggle, social responsibility, sexism, and violence. Asian liberation ethics has to deal with the basic question, "How can we be good while liberating ourselves? The imperative resides not only in the being good but equally in the action of liberating ourselves."⁵⁷ Following Rejon, I believe that Asian liberation ethics has to help to solve the central problem of Asia, "the situation of poverty, spoliation, oppression and death suffered by the vast majority of its believing and exploited people."⁵⁸

Asian liberation ethics insists on the need to embrace the oppressed peoples in Asia as brothers and sisters in the coming kingdom of the compassionate God. The lack of recognition of full humanity of the oppressed people by the controlling powers makes it clear that Christians are forced to take sides: for the poor and against the oppressors. "That means that without being fanatical, it has to give priority to the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 213.

⁵⁷ Rejon, 39.

quest for the poor.”⁵⁹ An Asian liberation ethics, our neighbors and the kingdom are to be the main points of reference. The purpose of Asian liberation ethics is the building of a new world order based on equality, peace, and justice. To do this, Asian liberation ethics seeks *justice* and the *healing of relationships* which speak of God’s preferential option for the poor. Asian liberation ethics presupposes a relationship of the living God with the poor, and of the poor with the living God, which is specifically what the Bible and theology are about. The questioning of the Bible through the postcolonial reading and of the theology provides a new hermeneutics that will, in turn, to refine the ideology for Asian liberation ethics.

We need to keep working on making clear what is the ideology behind liberation and the role of Christianity should play in such an ideology. Faith and ideology are different, but they are interrelated. Faith without ideology cannot lead to action. Faith and ideology are intrinsically linked together, each with a distinct role. In this sense, the task of ideology that faith adopted is not simply to interpret the world, but to change it. Faith is “maturity by the way of ideologies, the possibility of fully and conscientiously carrying out the ideological task on which the real-life liberation of human being depends.”⁶⁰ After all, to make our faith a living faith, our ethics as formation⁶¹ tries to put into practice.

The interconnection between faith and ideology is relevant not only at the level of praxis but also at the level of concept and explanations. In other words, there is a connection between ethics and ideology. Ethics as an explanation of a given faith needs to take into consideration the ideology that keeps faith alive. Faith, then and not only ideology, is praxis oriented and related to the strategy to reform or change concrete situations. In a sense, ethics and ideology point to the horizon of liberation.

Conclusion

Even though the contents of different ideologies vary greatly, all ideologies, in general, either have a liberating aspect or an enslaving aspect. In Asia, the controlling ideologies are developmentalism,

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁰ Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 122; Juan Luis Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 106-110.

⁶¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls “ethics as formation”. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: touchstone, 1995) 82-86.

national security and an ethno-religious ideology that diminish our own cultures and indigenous religions. These ideologies create a false consciousness and justify the privileged status of the dominant class. They are not liberative. Therefore, they should go through the process of correction. They should be corrected and criticized in order to become a liberative ideology, one which has been liberated from prejudice, distortion and deception so it can contribute to the liberation of oppressed people.

Furthermore, in Asia, liberation from Western Christianity, as well as from poverty and imperialism, will lead to “a full humanity.” That *full humanity* refers to all people living *fully* at the political, economic, and religio-cultural level. In this sense, Asian liberation ethics is considered within the context of creating a society in which no one is to be marginalized, discriminated against or violated because of lack of power or limited resource. It is about the liberation of people from oppression, exploitation, marginalization, colonialism, and violence. It is not apart from the work of postcolonialism. I understand Asian liberation ethics as a way of just-making in 21st-century society. Asian liberation ethics can be depicted as realizing full humanity for all. Only then, will the ethicist, the oppressed and the poor people be brought together in an ideological bond.

Abstract

This paper deals with the role of ideology in Asian liberation ethics. To accomplish this task, the notion of liberation and ideology is discussed in relation to the Asian context and Asian theology. Regarding the notion of liberation in this study, the term is examined by focusing on the materials of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) and on the materials of the postcolonialism. I focus particularly on the meaning of ideology in the work of Aloysius Pieris, a Jesuit priest in Sri Lanka who describes himself as a Christian-Buddhist and who is committed to the poor. Pieris describes ideology as a worldview not false consciousness, which is a framework used to understand and relate to the world. For him, the worldview is programmatic to change the present disorder in the world. There is good ideology for him. He uses ideology in a positive sense to mean a contribution of the liberation of people. In order to discuss the notion of ideology in the Asian context and the meaning of liberation in Asian theology, especially I prefer to focus on the socio-historical approach and the religious-historical approach. In the

end, I suggest that a definition of ideology aims to build an ethics of Asian liberation that is about the liberation of people from oppression.

Key Words

Ideology, Asian Liberation Theology, Asian Liberation Ethics, Postcolonialism, Karl Marx, Aloysius Pieris.

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