the land in which they live. It is a fact that if they have been sinking roots in
the community then they could be more productive in their lives. And
beyond this, their existence in the community should be a blessing for the
whole community. It was the task assigned to the people of Israel since the
time of Abraham, and has been succeeded by the Church of Christ today.

This is to say that our existence should be "homelandized". The govern-
ment and people should identify themselves with the land in which they exist
and live. They should take it as their homeland. They must not be "passen-
gers" merely travelling through it. Since the land is bestowed by God, people
should work together to establish a humanized community in which all
people are brothers and sisters living in peace and harmony.

The use of Actual Beliefs
in Contextualizing Theology

Philip Hughes

There are number of ways in which people have tried to do contextual
theology. Some have begun with Biblical passages or dogmatic formulat-
ions and have examined what they might mean in a particular context or situa-
tion. Others have begun with a particular situation, and have asked what
God might be saying in or to that situation. This paper argues for another
approach: that contextual theology should both begin and end with the "ac-
tual beliefs" held by a group of Christians who are living within a particular
geographical and temporal context.

The paper will proceed by examining what is meant by the term "actual
beliefs", differentiating them from religious traditions and "banked" beliefs.
It will then be argued that contextual theology should begin by analyzing
these "actual beliefs", proceeding to an evaluation of them in the light of
Christian traditions and the environmental context. While the aim of theology
may sometimes be to change the environmental context, this should be at-
tempted by first changing "actual beliefs".

These reflections have arisen out of research on beliefs, attitudes, and
values of Christians and Buddhists in northern Thailand. This research was
conducted by the author in the years 1979 to 1982. Reference will be made to
the results of this research.

Actual Beliefs

The actual beliefs of a person are those beliefs which that person holds,
which influence his behaviour and actions. Such beliefs may be held con-
sciously or unconsciously. They may be deduced from that person's actions.
They include a person's values which determine that person's priorities. They
also include those beliefs through which a person understands events and
situations, and form the grid through which he or she perceives the contexts
in which he or she lives.

The life-style which a person or group adopts reflect the actual beliefs of
that person or group. The values a person places on material goods, on an
inner life of harmony and contentment, on relationships with other people,
on family life, on personal status are all reflected in how that person lives.
The beliefs of a person, for example, regarding sickness, are reflected in what
that person does in times of sickness the places they go to for help, and the
resources they use.

The actual beliefs of a group of people may also be reflected in the art,
the poetry and literature, and the music and dance forms they have created,
or which they have used. Beliefs they hold about the universe and how to live

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1. See for example, Maurice E. Andrew, "What Might God Punishing Mean in South East
2. See for example Peter Lee, "1967 and the Church in Hong Kong: An Exercise in Contextualization" in Ching Fong; Volume XXV, Number 4, December 1982.
the forgiveness of sin, especially by those Christians who had not studied in a theological seminary.

Other research confirmed this pattern. In sermons preached by northern Thai preachers, there were very little mention of the forgiveness of sin through Jesus’ death on the cross. The Thai Christians in no way rejected this idea. It was mentioned, as a formula in three sermons amongst forty that I recorded in northern Thailand. Rather, it had little significance for the Thai Christians, and played little part in their actual beliefs. Neither the orthodoxy of the missionaries nor of the Thai Christians is in question. Neither group would reject the truth of what the other believes. Yet there is a real difference in emphasis and in what is most meaningful.

In other words, one’s actual beliefs, even if one considers oneself to be a Christian, must be distinguished from “Christianity”. The fact that one has decided to adopt Christianity as one’s religion does not imply that all beliefs in the Christian tradition have become part of one’s own belief system. However, it is only as certain aspects of a religion become part of one’s own actual belief systems, that those beliefs influence one’s actions. It is primarily one’s actual belief system which gives meaning in face of anomaly, and a sense of comfort and support in times of distress. According to one’s own belief system, one will identify what is evil in the world and attempt to overcome it.

One’s actual beliefs must also be distinguished from “banked” beliefs. These are beliefs which do not fit in with other beliefs. They are remembered, or stored away, but do not affect the way a person acts, except perhaps, when there is occasion for those beliefs to be “regurgitated”.

A paradigm case is found in institutional forms of education in which students are taught to learn certain propositions. Students may learn these, and be able to repeat them on suitable occasions, such as in examinations, without even understanding what these propositions mean, let alone being able to apply them to their actions. Suppose for example that a student learnt the grammatical rule that the usual ending of English verbs in the simple past tense was “ed”, but did not know how to recognize a verb. The student might well be able to produce the rule in an examination, and yet never be able to apply it. Such a belief as entailed by the knowledge of that rule would be “banked”. It would be deposited, and be unavailable for use.

One may learn what various philosophers have said or written, and be able to reproduce their ideas and opinions, without ever having reflected on what significance such opinions might have for one’s own ways of thinking. Even more pertinent is the fact that theology and the Bible may be learnt in such ways. The various opinion of different theologians may be learnt. The contents of the Bible may be firmly engraved on the memory. Yet, the beliefs are merely “banked” or stored away unless they have been related to one’s own beliefs which determine how one lives.

Actual Beliefs: the Starting Point of Theology

It is important that theology deal with actual beliefs, and avoid storing ir-

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3. This is developed in Philip J. Hughes, *Proclamation and Response*. Chiang Mai: Thailand; Manuscript Division, Payap College; 1982.

relevant propositions. As in the example of the grammatical rule, a necessary condition for beliefs to become part of one’s actual belief system is that the new beliefs can be fitted in to the system that is already in existence. One must know the meaning of the terms in the new belief. One must already understand and accept the presuppositions involved. In other words, the new belief must be presented in an assimilable form.

The problem of assimilation may be illustrated using a “thought-experiment” of how the sentence “Jesus Christ bore our sins on the cross” might be understood in the context of northern Thai culture. First of all, in order to understand the sentence, the name Jesus Christ must be understood as the name and title of a particular person. If one has already learnt the category “God”, one will be able to categorize Jesus Christ more fully, not only in relation to other men, but also in relation to God. The cross may also be learnt as an abbreviated expression for a method of killing people accused of being criminals. Thus, one will be able to understand that this sentence refers to the death of a particular person who was related in a special way to the Great Spirit called God, and that he was killed in a method used for people accused of being criminals.

In Thailand, the word for sin which has been used by the missionaries, is the word for demerit in the Buddhist system. The idea of demerit will not pose any difficulty in understanding in northern Thailand, as it refers to the result of committing those sorts of actions which have undesirable consequences. Thus, bearing sins might be understood as suffering the consequences of evil actions. The idea of a man being killed as a criminal, although he was innocent, makes sense. He bore the consequences of the evil actions of the people who killed him.

The idea that Jesus Christ suffered the consequences of Thai people’s sins, committed two thousand years later in time, and four thousand miles away in space, and bearing those consequences in such a way that has implications for our bearing the consequences, is not so easily assimilated. These ideas are based on presuppositions about the nature of sin as being a universal condition of which actions are only symptomatic, and about sacrifices which can take the place of oneself in bearing the consequences of this universal condition. The amount of accommodation which this requires in the concept of demerit is also used for sin in northern Thailand and the presupposition of schemas for dealing with sin is enormous.

The difficulty in understanding the sentence does not mean that the sentence cannot be learnt. But will remain superficial. The sentence will not be assimilated into one’s structures of meaning and of understanding the world because some of the basic categories and presuppositions which it is based do not exist. One might find other illustrations to explain the sentence, such as the idea of a ransom being paid to a king on behalf of a subject who had done wrong. But one still has difficulties in understanding why such a ransom payment should be necessary, and why the king should accept the death of his son as such a ransom payment. A king whose power is absolute is free to decide whom he will bind and whom he will loose. and would not need a ransom unless he personally decided that he wanted one. If, on the other hand, one worked on the image of an absolute moral law which required payment, it would seem an imperfection in that moral law to accept payment from a person other than the one who committed the crime against the law. The search for appropriate “redemptive analogies”, to use Don Richardson’s phrase, is not always successful.

In northern Thailand, there is a strong tendency to return to the presupposition of demerit that a little more merit can balance the account. Why should this presupposition be rejected? To maintain that this is not the Biblical definition of sin will not solve the problem, but will only make the concept of sin more unassimilable.

Why should missionaries insist that the idea that “Jesus Christ bore our sins on the cross” be assimilated? Why not just learn the idea? Why not also learn that it is something that we should be glad about, and that the appropriate behavioural response to its affirmation is to be happy, thank God, and tell other people? If the idea is not assimilated, it will not be integrated with one’s symbolic universe of meaning. One may continue to be deeply worried about acts of demerit, for example. One may still fail to forgive others. The sacrifice for sin will not be seen as the ultimate solution to the basic problem of human beings, which makes this universe a place of meaning and ultimate hope. If the idea is unassimilated, its truth may be affirmed or denied, and one may still be happy about the sentence, if that is the response one has been taught.

If theological education is to overcome this problem of theological beliefs being “banked”, theology must be directly related to the forms of belief, the presuppositions and categories of thought which form the web which influences action. Education must be seen, not as a process of depositing knowledge, but as a process of changing beliefs, attitudes, and values. If education is going to effectively introduce new beliefs, it must relate them to prior structures of thought and conception. It must present them in assimilable forms.

Theology, as an educational activity, must be developed in relation to other beliefs, attitudes, and values. It must be developed in cultural cognitive contexts.

It is for this reason that theologizing should begin with actual patterns of belief and action rather than, for example, with Bible study. Straight Bible study does not encourage assimilation to occur. Indeed, if the Bible is studied for its own sake, the possibility of the assimilation of Biblical conceptions and principles may not even become an issue. One may study lengthy passages about the Judaizers and attitudes to the Mosaic law, or about idolatry and the worship of bits of wood and stone. The question of relevance to one’s own beliefs, attitudes, and actions does not arise naturally out of such materials. One must deliberately explore how such passages and ideas might be relevant. Even then, the answers how they are relevant and how such Biblical contents might be brought into relationship with other things one believes is difficult to determine due to the cultural distance of the Biblical world from our own.

The Biblical writings were written in cultural contexts different from our own. Thus, many of the questions with which they deal are not directly relevant to us. They use illustrations which were appropriate to the cultural contexts in which they were addressed, but not directly to ours. They were written on the basis of presuppositions and in terms of categories of thought that we, in other cultural contexts, do not share.

Christians hold that the Bible is a prime witness to the nature of ultimate reality. It has a normative function for Christians. Yet, that normative function will be executed effectively only by bringing the Biblical teachings and principles into contact with our actual beliefs and practices. Rather than studying the Bible for the sake of its contents, the theological task should involve the evaluation of our actual beliefs in the light of Biblical principles. Rather than studying answers to questions which we have never asked, it would be better to take the question which we are asking to the Biblical witness. In these ways, the processes of theology must be carried out in cultural contexts.

These processes of theology must be distinguished from traditional academic theology. In the past, much of what has been called theology has been the academic building of systems of ideas. Theology has been concerned with the elucidation of beliefs in the Bible, and with development of the dogmas of ecclesiastical authorities. Theology has been concerned with the systematization of beliefs about God. Such activities have had, and still have, some value. In a complex society, there is a place for people to be recognized as specialists who "know" the theory which gives meaning to the universe. Lay people may not have that ability, or the opportunity to understand the meaning or the underlying theory itself. But those who know the theory give them confidence that theory is still valid, and that the universe still has meaning.

In distinction from such academic forms of systematic theology, there is also an important place for theories which take the actual belief system which lay people hold as their starting point. There is a need for these belief systems to be analysed and evaluated. This should be an important aspect of pastoral work. This is part of the nature of theological education. If one is going to help other people, or oneself, to make better decisions to act, to find greater resources in times of anxiety, or to see things in more satisfactory ways, one must deal with actual beliefs and not with abstract theological systems.

The Evaluation of Actual Beliefs

It is important to start theology not just with a knowledge of what the actual beliefs of a person or group of Christians are. One needs also to be able to appreciate those beliefs. It is very hard, if not impossible, to theologize with belief that are not one's own, whose emotive content one does not share. Theologizing which does not share the passion with which the beliefs are held will be dry, and unlikely to be persuasive.

Theology must arise out of actual beliefs and experience. It must feel the passion of its concerns. It must appreciate the resources with which it deals. It must arise out of an identification with the group of people, an identification with them in their context.

Yet, theology cannot rest with the actual beliefs of a group. It must go beyond them, seeking to evaluate them in terms of the needs of the context and situation, and in the light of Christian traditions. Most of us are aware that our faith is weak. We do not always do what is right, or think or believe what we should. We are not always aware of the evils that are around us, and we easily confuse them with what is good. Our beliefs often prove to be inadequate for situations with which we have to deal. We are unable to use the resources that God has given us because of our lack of faith and belief.

A review of our actual beliefs in the light of Christian traditions is an important part of evaluation. As we discover the hopes and aspirations of the Biblical writers and of Christians throughout the history of the Church, we can compare them with our own hopes and aspirations. As we consider our own resources for attaining those hopes and aspirations, and for dealing with evil, in the light of the resources referred to in the Biblical writings and used by Christians throughout the centuries, we may find other resources that we can use in our own situations.

A review of our actual beliefs in the light of Biblical writings and the history of the church will show us the limitations of our beliefs. It will show us new possibilities that we can consider. It will suggest to us mistakes and misapprehensions that we have made. We may not be able to transfer beliefs easily from one setting into another. But we may find ways in which we can broaden our outlooks, and correct mistakes.

The Bible, and Christian traditions have a certain normative value for Christians. In the evaluation of our actual beliefs, it is important to measure them against the basic norms that we find in Christian traditions. For example, the importance of identifying with the poor and with those who are suffering has been a fundamental theme in Christian traditions. It is a basic norm against which our life-styles and our beliefs about how we should live and how we should relate to other people needs to be evaluated.

When evaluating our actual beliefs in the light of the Bible and Christian traditions, it is easy to pay attention only to those aspects of the traditions which confirm our own ideas and current patterns of living. It is difficult, but necessary, to allow Christians traditions, and particularly the Biblical witness, to stand in judgement on us. Yet, this is necessary for our faith to become more whole. At this point the work of the Biblical scholars and church historians is helpful. Through their scholarship they can help to ensure that justice is done the Biblical record and traditions of church history in the evaluation of our actual beliefs. They can help us to guard against biased readings of the materials.

Our beliefs also need to be evaluated in terms of their adequacy to deal with the environment in which we live. This involves analysis of our environment, and of our attitudes to it. To fully understand our environment, we need the help of social, political, historical and economic sciences. We need to look not only to what is happening in the present, but what developments are occurring. We must take into account the future we are helping to create and of which we will be part.

We must ask if our attitudes to our situation are appropriate or adequate. Are we fighting what is evil and supporting what is good? In many places, the environment is rapidly changing. Industrialization in taking place. Cities are growing. Technology is changing patterns of living. In our evaluation of the environment, we must look to the future, trying to anticipate what will be the results of our present attitudes, beliefs, and policies. Are we helping to create

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a better world in the future, or are we participating in the creation of an environment which will bring suffering to people?8

However, our analysis of our context and our response to it must not be carried out apart from the evaluation of actual beliefs. If it is, then those who are engaged in the analysis will find that they have lost the support of the community. They will not have carried the church or Christian group with them. It may be frustrating to the person who believes that he or she sees what should be done, and yet finds that his or her vision is not shared by others in the community. Sometimes it is tempting to go ahead on his or her own. But the responsibility of the person doing the theology is to lead the whole group in seeing the inadequacy of prior responses to the environment, and of identifying new responses. Yet, as actual beliefs are changed, other people too will catch the vision. The community will be able to act as a group, and the potential for changing the situation will be increased.

Theologians have a three-fold responsibility: to God, Christian community, and environment. They must understand and empathize with the beliefs of the people in the Christian community, and live and work in solidarity with them. But they need also to help the people amongst whom they work to develop their beliefs in response to God as He has made Himself known to us in the Christian traditions of the church and in the Bible. They also need to help those people to develop their beliefs in relation to the world in which they live, in order that they will be able to co-operate with God in the extension of His kingdom.

8 The problem of the Christian response to the rapid changes that occurring in Thailand has been described by Kosuke Koyama in “Thailand: Points of Theology Friction”, in Gerald H. Anderson, editor, Asian Voices in Christian Theology. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1976. This essay provides a good illustration of the importance of relating our actual beliefs, as Christians to the environment, including the processes of modernization.

Creativity, Integration and Solidarity in Ministerial Formation in N.E. Asia

Jung Sung Rhee

A New Understanding of the Church

What is a church? This question has been raised, answered, challenged and redefined for the last thirty years, and yet the same question is repeatedly raised by different people in different corners of the globe.

For almost nineteen years the doctrine of the church has remained relatively unchanged except for a few notable anti-church movements like the Quakers, Jehovah’s Witnesses and others. Traditional concept of the church can be divided into two categories: one is the Roman Catholic Church which is said to be built on the tradition of the Apostolic succession, and the other is the Protestant Church which is based on the belief that the Church is the body of Christ. Besides these two traditional concepts a few new concepts in the past thirty years have emerged. Because of the radically changed society in which the church is now located, the church has been studied, re-examined and criticized from many different perspectives.

Challenges came mainly from those who had great concern about the roles and functions of the churches in the new age and more specifically from Christian youth groups in the Sixties and Seventies. They were the ones who were exposed to this new complex society and were not ready to face it. They could not find real working principles to solve the challenges for a better society, and the churches seemed to entrench themselves in the old moral and religious teachings which are considered by many young people as outdated ones. This is truer in the Third World churches than in the Western Churches.

For the last twenty years we were thrown into the situation where no rules, no ethical codes, no religious doctrines were respected and supported without challenge. Churches and pastors have been challenged by the people within and without and often by college and seminary students for the Church's inability to cope and to solve the problems revealed by critics as well as by the young people. However, theologians and church leaders have shown great efforts to re-think and re-examine their traditional teachings and doctrines, in particular the nature and function of the church, and they have come to a new understanding of the church in a wider perspective which had been completely neglected by the pre-war generations. This is the idea of Missio Dei: God is working both in and through established churches, and at the same time He is working apart from the organized churches. In relation to this issue our attention is drawn to two Japanese philosophers, who in recent years conducted a debate on the issue of whether there is salvation outside the established churches or not. They did this by exploring the possibility of a union between Christianity and Buddhism. Yagi Seiichi postulates the unification of Jesus’ teaching (the rule of God) and Paul’s teaching (Urchristentum) with the Intuition (satori) of Buddhism. According to him we can find an Absolute which can be found in other religions, and thus implies that one can find salvation outside the established churches. Takizawa Katsumi

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