One World, Two Minds

Eastern and western outlooks in a changing world

by Denis Lane

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PREFACE

“East is east, and west is west, and ne’er the twain shall meet.” That observation may have been true when ships took three weeks to travel from Southampton to Singapore, and even more so when the journey swallowed six precious months. However, today the big jets take twelve and a half hours; Concorde could do it in eight. And aboard those faster-than-sound carriers successive waves of Asian immigrants have surged across oceans that no longer divide. Vancouver, Canada, is one-third Chinese. Los Angeles is home to as many as 700,000 Koreans, besides great concentrations of Filipinos, Chinese, and other Asians. East has met West. Yet when it comes to understanding, East and West often seem as far apart as ever. Despite the global village, we operate differently in culture and thinking; and the myths of the arrogant Westerner and the inscrutable Asian persist.

This book is an attempt to bring about a meeting of minds. We think very differently, yes, but we belong to the same human race. By understanding what underlies our ways of looking at life, we can at least learn why we approach things differently.

Too often, we think in comparative terms which turn out to be competitive. And in doing so we quickly prove the old saying, “Comparisons are odious.” One culture is not better than the other, simply different. In the West, for instance, we often shake hands to greet one another, while in some Eastern cultures people bow to each other. In both cases, we are simply expressing polite respect to each other.

At this point, I need to qualify what follows, or I will be leading people astray.

Firstly, because I am dealing with East and West and not, for instance, English and Chinese, I have to deal to a certain extent in generalizations. I trace the Asian background to a largely Confucian heritage, but not all Asian cultures are Confucian. However, the basic principles of thinking are largely common to most Asian cultures, whether they owe their origin to Confucius or not. In the same way, Western cultures owe most of their basic ways of approach to the Greco/Roman period, but they also differ among themselves. Generalization will help us to see different approaches more clearly.

Secondly, all cultures today exist in a state of flux. Change is the order of the day. Western cultures are swamped with Asian religious cults and ideas. Asian societies cannot develop economically without scientific thinking, and scientific thinking is logical thinking,
which is basically Western. Therefore, the differences between us are no longer so clearly marked. The English-speaking, English-educated Singaporean is a mixture of East and West. The Western devotee of the New Age thinks in largely Buddhist terms.

At the same time, the change is superficial. Scratch a Singaporean scientist, and you will find a deeply Confucian heritage. The Korean businessman may know all about economics and be thoroughly conversant with business management, but underneath he still acts and reacts in an Asian way. The Western Buddhist is also still behaving underneath like most of his ancestors. We remain deeply influenced by our original culture.

This book arises from seminars and lectures to mixed groups of Eastern and Western people. Often after such occasions an Asian person has approached me, saying something such as, “Now I understand why I react as I do, and why I feel about Westerners as I do.” And missionaries who have served twenty-five years in an Asian country have said, “Now I understand some of the mistakes I have made. If only I had known these things years ago!”

Thirdly, I write from a convinced Christian view of the world. From that angle, I do not consider either East or West to have grasped the Biblical approach to thought and life. As will be seen, both groups have grasped some aspects of reality, but the fullness is wider than both and often incorporates the best aspects of both, while transcending them. The Biblical revelation is higher, wider, and deeper than anything man has developed. Fourthly, while my experience is limited to the Western and Asian scenes, from talking with Africans I am persuaded that much of the holistic outlook of Asia applies in Africa. The Middle East in its turn is the cradle of the Bible, and the Bible itself is a very Asian book, certainly in the Old Testament and culturally in the New Testament. I am convinced, therefore, that we can all learn something from our differences.

The plan of this book is first to delineate the origin of our differences. Unless we understand where we come from and where the other person is coming from, we will continue to misunderstand each other. All the differences in our cultures spring from these basic sources. Once we begin to grasp this, all our differences become understandable, almost inevitable. Therefore, I trust that this simplified explanation of our backgrounds may help all of us to understand each other better and to relate more effectively.

PART 1
Basic Backgrounds and viewpoints

We need to ask ourselves, first of all, how we view reality. Do we see ourselves as the central figure, the individual person looking out on the world and trying to make sense of it? Or do we see the world outside as the great reality, and ourselves as an insignificant dot on the surface, whose role is not so much to explain and understand reality as to relate to it? These are two fundamentally different approaches, and they sum up the different starting points of West and East.

Western Background and Viewpoint

Greek philosophy, which lies behind most Western thinking, basically starts from the viewpoint of the individual human being. True, that human being needs to understand himself in relation to the world and other beings, but he begins from the standpoint of man. Even more important for modern Western people is the approach of the early rationalist philosophers, of whom Descartes is an outstanding pioneer.

I am not going to explore the various systems of thinking. Rather I want to illustrate the Western position from Descartes’ outlook so that even if my readers are not interested in or are not wanting to trace the development of thought, they can see clearly where our Western outlook comes from. Descartes, who lived from 1596 to 1650, made this famous statement: “I think, therefore I am.” Whatever else that means, he is plainly starting his thinking with himself and his own existence. Colin Brown writes: “Common to all [the rationalists] was a belief in the rationality of the universe and the power of reason to grasp it ... [that] it was possible to draw up a map of reality, provided that one made the correct logical deduction.” (Philosophy and the Christian Faith, Colin Brown, Tyndale Press, 1969, p. 48). From this point of view man stands apart from the world of reality outside of him and seeks to understand it.

Descartes also formulated a method of approach to truth beginning with doubt rather than with faith. He doubted everything until it could be substantiated. In other words, he chose never to accept anything as true which he did not clearly know to be so. After sorting out what he knew and what he did not know, he divided the subject to be examined into various parts. After that he moved from one part to another, proceeding from the simplest to the most complicated. Finally he reviewed everything to make sure nothing was left out of account. This meant, of course, not only dividing reality into parts, but moving from the isolated sections of it to a concept of the whole. Such a process inevitably involved logical thinking and the employment of the ideas of cause and effect in logical progression. In the West this has been
highly developed in the scientific method, which we greatly value. Western economic development would not have been possible without it.

Thinking on this basis moves from A to B to C in logical progression. When this method is applied to the whole of reality and to the meaning of the universe, we argue from the parts to the whole. So for many centuries Western philosophy was looking for a whole to unite the parts, a oneness that would explain and integrate the many.

Descartes himself still believed in God and died a Catholic, but his theories made God unnecessary as a hypothesis, and subsequent thinkers eventually dropped Him from their reasoning or even saw Him as an obstacle to man’s true understanding of life.

Late in the last century and on into this one, Western man despaired of ever finding a true explanation, a true source of unity. The result is a failure to see or largely even to seek any meaning in life, because Western philosophers fail to find anything to hold reality together.

Without the Creator, we are left with an accidental “big bang” as the cause of our being, and ourselves as insignificant small pieces of the accident. Indeed, modern philosophy denies the validity of any knowledge of metaphysical matters, so that the knowledge of God is excluded before we begin. Only phenomena, they insist, can be truly known. As a result, in Western society we live in a disintegrating world, where individual opinions are all equal, where there are no absolutes in ethics or morals and where each person must do his own thing and seek his own fulfillment in his own experience.

Existentialism has reached the man in the street and left him a lonely individual in a disintegrating society, for there is nothing to hold it together.

The heavy emphasis on reason in understanding the universe has tended to make Western man divide even his own psyche into various parts. We divide the whole man into thought and feeling and will, sometimes treating them almost as independent entities. As a result, many Western people have lost touch with their emotions or, in revulsion against a purely intellectual approach, have swamped themselves in feeling. This is summed up in a poster which reads, “One beautiful feeling is worthy more than a thousand thoughts.” We have become a schizophrenic culture.

**Eastern Background and Viewpoint**

I take Confucius as the person to epitomize Eastern thinking, although the holistic view he represents actually preceded him in Chinese culture by hundreds of years.

Man, in this approach to the universe, is aware of how small and insignificant he is. To attempt to understand and explain the whole of reality is a task clearly beyond him. He is altogether too tiny for that. Much more important for the man with this holistic view is that he learn to relate to reality as he finds it. The universe clearly is a whole that functions as a whole, and every part fits harmoniously within that whole. Therefore, he concludes, man must learn to do the same. He must therefore start, not with himself, but with the wholeness that surrounds him. His aim is not to understand the universe, but to relate to it. The most important thing for him is to be in harmony with the whole. And because the individual is so tiny, the whole race needs to be in harmony with the whole. Therefore the race and the people and the clan and the family must come before the individual.

The individual is the tiny dot in the circle, but he is altogether too large in the illustration, being multiplied perhaps by ten million times! The effect of this approach is that man is not divided up into his constituent parts. He relates to the whole with his whole self. When, therefore, he meditates upon reality, he does not just use his reason, he uses his feeling as well. To the Asian, feeling is centered in the belly, not in the heart. So Buddha images often show him with an outsized stomach. The sumo wrestler has a large torso not just because of the weight advantage it gives him. Sumo wrestling is not, in fact, concerned with physical prowess, but with the whole approach of the whole man to his opponent. Physical contact may be brief, but decisive. Concentration and preparation make the difference. The East has not developed a rational approach to reality that calls for understanding how the universe began. The Chinese have no interest in creation. The Buddhist does not bother about how things came to be as they are. The important point is that reality is there, and his task is to learn to relate to it as harmoniously as possible. A Creator God does not enter into such thinking. The only idea of God is pantheistic, not personal. God is everything there is. He may be thought of as immanent, but not as transcendent.
He is in the whole of the universe and part of it, but not above it.

While, therefore, the West has developed extremes of individualism, the East has gone to extremes in wholeness. The aim of the Buddhist is not personal fulfillment, but absorption into the whole and cessation of a tiresome sense of individual existence.

These diametrically opposite ways of approaching reality are the roots from which our different cultures and ways of thinking have grown. Unless we understand that, we shall never understand each other. The rest of this book traces the effect on our relationships of the two approaches. But before we move on to that, I wish to explain Christian thinking.

The Christian Outlook

The Christian does not find the answer to life and its meaning in his own thinking. He does not begin with himself as an individual, nor does he begin by taking the whole as “everything there is” and try to relate to it. He finds the truth about life revealed to him by God, who is above everything there is and who holds it all together and keeps it moving purposefully forward. The Christian does not rely on reason to understand or meditation to relate, but on revelation to give understanding and relationship.

That revelation turns out to be eminently reasonable, for it tells man that God made him in God’s own image and that this image uniquely combines an emphasis on the individual and on the whole.

The Christian believes that God has revealed Himself and has done it progressively through and in history and that that revelation is recorded for us in the Scriptures. God began by revealing His oneness and spent thousands of years dinning into His people’s ears and minds that God is One. Until they had learned that lesson, He could teach them no further, and it took the whole of the Old Testament period to do it.

Once the people to whom the Almighty was revealing Himself understood that He is One, He then began to show them in Jesus Christ that He is Father and He is Son, distinct personalities. Eventually He also revealed Himself as Holy Spirit too, for the Spirit is clearly God, but equally clearly not the Father nor the Son. For convinced monotheists like the apostles, this took some absorbing, but in the end they were forced to accept that however hard it is to understand, the doctrine of the Trinity is true.

In the doctrine of the Trinity the Oneness of God is not diluted, but the personality of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit is preserved. In other words, the Great Reality, in the image of whom we are created, preserves the personality of the individual and the unity of the whole. The East has perceived one aspect of this reality, and the West has perceived another, but neither has achieved a true understanding. We do not have to fight over our viewpoints; both prove to be true, but each on its own proves inadequate! In the being of God we find individual Persons allowed to exercise their full individuality, and yet the Godhead moves as a unity that is never broken. The force that combines the Three and the One is the force of love. God is a society bound together in perfect unity by the power of His own love. No wonder that Jesus emphasized the need for unity in the church in His high priestly prayer in John 17. He prayed, “...that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me, and I am in You. May they also be in us that the world may believe that you have sent me.” The Trinity is the prototype for man’s fulfillment in this world. We do not find our meaning either in rampant individualism or communal totalitarianism, but in a society of love, where neither the individual nor the group has the pre-eminence, but individuals can be themselves and the group remain united.

In this light, the doctrine of the Trinity is not only a vitally important theological truth, but the answer to man’s search for the true nature of reality. We do not need to be ashamed of the doctrine of the Trinity or be embarrassed by it, for it forms the basis for man’s finding his own true place in the universe. The world is waiting to see a society where each can take his or her place and develop to his or her own potential, yet where love so prevails that all work together in a harmonious whole. Such a society will be held together by love, and such a society already exists in the God who made the world.

The tragedy of the modern world is that the church of God shows little resemblance in practice to the Love Society, which is the God in whom we profess to believe. Christian churches sometimes show no greater love than secular clubs. Sometimes they exhibit totalitarian demands from the leadership, crushing the individual members. At other times, they
portray rampant individualism, with little regard for the body. The world does not believe that the Father sent the Son because the church fails to manifest the kind of unity and personality that God represents. This is the challenge to living that we need to face. The Trinitarian relationships of the God in whom we believe must be lived out in our day if our message is to have any credibility.

PART 2
The effect of background on our thinking

Having examined the background from which so many differences between the East and the West have developed, we now move on to see the effect of this background in various areas of life, beginning with the ways in which we think.

The Western Approach

The West has developed a way of thinking which is limited, exclusive, and pointed in one direction. We centre our attention on the brain and rigidly exclude feelings. We tend, in fact, to look down on the person who “emotes” rather than thinks.

By pursuing this way of reasoning, we have been enabled to investigate our environment and to a large extent control it. Science cannot advance without the exclusion of all false trails and a rigid concentration on one thing. This scientific approach not only affects all our thinking, but means that we usually have in mind a goal that we want to achieve and go straight for that goal, ignoring side paths and diversions.

We in the West pride ourselves on our logical thinking, because it has enabled us to achieve so much in technology. We value the man of reason and have exalted reason to the supreme place. We like to think of ourselves as “reasonable” people who follow through on our principles.

In actual fact, however, we Westerners are not as good as we think we are in going straight to the goal and ignoring side paths. Anyone who takes part in discussions will know that before five minutes have passed someone will have gone off on a tangent. I was at just such a discussion in a men’s meetings this week. We began discussing the environment and our attitude towards it. At the end, the chairmen said, “We have not exactly kept to our subject tonight, but we have covered many things, and I think it has been valuable.” There are very few discussions where those remarks do not apply.

One of our problems in the West is that often in a discussion we think we have defined a particular goal, when in reality the two sides of the debate have slightly different ideas of what it is. Disagreement follows, because we are not really talking about exactly the same thing. Then we talk past each other and go away convinced that the other person is “unreasonable.” In fact, neither of us has closely followed reason in understanding what was being discussed in the first place. Politicians in particular have developed great skill in appearing to address an issue while in fact skating narrowly past it to something they want to say.

Our direct approach in the West also makes us impatient of long discussions and eager to arrive at a conclusion. As time is important to us, we do not want to spend hours going round and round a subject and getting nowhere. “Let’s keep to the point and get this meeting over,” we frequently fret.

The Eastern Approach

When we meet the East, we discover that discussions do go round and round the subject and seem to be getting nowhere. Then suddenly a conclusion appears as if by magic. We are surprised by the conclusion, mystified where it came from, and frustrated by the time taken to get there. What is happening? Beginning with the whole rather than with the individual, Eastern people do not reason only with their intellects, their brains. People are whole beings, and they use their whole being to review the situation. Not only so, but they look at the whole situation and not just the point under discussion.

Furthermore, their aim is not simply to reason out an answer in understanding, but to relate to the whole situation in a holistic manner.
The whole situation includes all the people present at the discussion. Those people are not simply individuals, but people to relate to.

Relationship includes such factors as “Is he older than I am?” “Is she in a position more important than mine and therefore above me?” and “What is my blood relationship to this person?” In relating to the whole, the whole person is also involved, so that intuitive feelings play a part, a sensitive part, in the discussion. An Eastern group therefore will spend a long time going round and round a subject, each time round developing a more understanding feel of the discussion. Easterners not only wait for their elders or superiors in social life to speak first, but bear in mind what they say. This does not always produce “yes” men either, though what is said by older and wiser people will influence the individual. In this context, to go straight to a solution is considered rude and impatient.

Eventually, after a number of times going round the subject and viewing it from different angles, the group may suddenly, or more gradually, narrow down to an agreed solution. This solution is not simply seen to be reasonable or voted on as agreed, but felt by all to be right in the circumstances at the particular time and in view of all the different kinds of people involved in the discussion. The answer is not limited to one aspect of the human personality, the brain, but involves the whole person.

Western women may understand the holistic approach better than Western men, who sometimes become very impatient with the more intuitive sense that women have. The East understands such intuition and sees it as part of acting as a whole person. Lin Yu Tang, the Chinese philosopher, quoting Adolph Reichwein in China and Europe (London: Kegan Paul, 1925), wrote, “Western men were born ‘with knives in their brains’; the weapon of logic was too sharp; it cut up almost everything which came into contact with it and offended the truth, which was always whole.”

The Eastern way of thinking may be seen in Chinese attitudes to their written characters. They do not simply interpret the character by its logical meaning, but want to “feel” the character. When Lilly Abegg was learning Japanese in Tokyo and asked her teacher the meaning of a particular Chinese character, she was told, “Foreigners always want to know everything exactly. We are different. We think rather in clouds.”

I too had to learn that to ask a teacher, “Why do you do this?” was to him a nonsense question. Cantonese, for instance, has a number of endings, like la, lok, la ma, neh, but you will not find a teacher of language who can tell you when to use them. Yes, they will tell you some approximate sense for some of them, but in the main you have to learn to use them by feel, not by reasoning. So Abegg makes the comment, “Whoever has spent any length of time in East Asia soon realizes that he must be patient and let things ‘simmer.’ Energetic enquiries and continual fresh arguments merely do harm, for they create turbulence in the ‘cloud formation’...”

When we review these different ways of thinking, we realize that they are not contradictory, but complementary. Science cannot be done without clear, logical thinking and careful exclusion of extraneous factors. The East has therefore had to come to terms with logical, brain-centered reasoning in order to develop the scientific skills necessary for economic advance.

On the other hand, the West is learning that confining our thinking purely to one line leads us into difficulties. We find that in developing one thing we are damaging another. We exploit the oil and use it, but in doing so we pollute the environment and reduce the quality of life. We can make fish nets that catch everything on the bottom of the sea, but before long we find there are no more fish left to catch. Blinkered thinking is dangerous thinking. Above all, we need to understand why we think in different ways and learn to appreciate the positive points of each other’s way. Neither East nor West has the whole truth and nothing but the truth. In some spheres of life we need disciplined cerebral thinking. In others we need a more intuitive and holistic approach. Even in the scientific realm, Westerners are learning that truth sometimes lies in two seemingly irreconcilable extremes. Light travels in waves and in direct lines, but logic tells us that it cannot do both at the same time. We have to hold the two truths in tension until we can understand more fully. The Westerner becomes impatient to resolve the difficulty, while the Easterner simply accepts the fact and lives in relation to it.
The Christian Viewpoint

From the Christian point of view, we may note that the Scriptures are written in two very different languages. The one, Hebrew, is very Eastern in its approach. Hebrew deals with concrete images, and revelation occurs in the pictured lives of people who manifest the truth of God by what they do or by ways in which they disobey. We find no exposition of faith, but we do find Abraham, the man of faith, living out the life of faith in concrete existence. The other language, Greek, is logical and precise and wonderfully suited to abstract thinking and teaching. Paul reasons in a logical way, although at times his fertile mind shoots off at all kinds of tangents. But Greek is much more precise than English, and in the New Testament we find very close reasoning. So in Romans we have an exposition of faith and what is involved in it.

If God’s revelation of Himself to humanity is communicated in ways that are characteristic of both Eastern and Western thinking, we may conclude that our different ways of thinking in the world are complementary rather than conflicting. We may also learn that if Christians are to think in a truly biblical manner, we have to enter into the opposite kind of thought from that to which we are used. Westerners must learn to appreciate a more concrete, holistic approach, and Asians must learn to think in a more logical manner. Neither of us can lay claim to having the language of Heaven.

PART 3
The outworking of differences

A. IN POLITICAL OUTLOOK

The Western Approach

The Westerner begins with the individual and, looking back on Greek society, admires democracy as the ideal form of government. He wants to have his say in who will rule him and how he will do it. He believes in Rousseau’s social contract, by which power is handed over by the people to those who govern. He sees authority as delegated from the people upward to the rulers, an authority that they can take back at the next election.

The Westerners’ catch phrase therefore is “One man, one vote,” which, of course, includes women as well. He jealously guards individual rights. He demands freedom for the individual as primary. Though his theory of government does not always work out perfectly in practice—for he may be allowed to vote only once in four years, and the person whom he elects will almost certainly vote according to his political party rather than according to the desire of his constituents—at least that elected leader can be removed from office the next time round.

In the modern West emphasis on individual rights has multiplied as the search for an overarching unity has been increasingly abandoned. Now that we see ourselves as isolated entities, needing to find meaning as individuals, we have become increasingly impatient with all kinds of authority which pretend to unite us. Consequently conflicting groups, emphasizing opposite “rights,” all demand that their particular rights be established. So pro-life groups oppose pro-abortion ones, feminists oppose traditionalists, Greens oppose capitalists, racial groups divide against each other. Each time society disintegrates a little more in the process. What is happening in Russia and Yugoslavia is not as remote from Britain and America as we would like to think.

The Eastern Approach

In order for us to understand the Eastern approach, we need to see how a holistic view was worked out in China under the emperors.

As the whole welfare of the Chinese world depended upon the group’s relating correctly to the whole, the emperor carried responsibility for seeing that the nation was continually in harmony with that whole, i.e., the universe consisting of “everything there is.” If he succeeded, then the country would be spared natural disasters and political upheaval, and the people could live in peace and carry on their normal lives.

One of the emperor’s jobs, therefore, was to draw up a calendar of auspicious dates for doing certain things such as planting crops or weddings. Everyone else must obey, or they would be responsible for breaking the harmony of the universe and causing calamity to the nation. No individual therefore dare step out of line, for he was not only disobeying
the emperor, but upsetting the whole of society and bringing evil upon all his fellow citizens. On this understanding, the only important worship in China was that conducted by the emperor.

As a result of this view, when political or natural disasters multiplied, people felt justified in questioning whether the emperor was doing his job and carrying on his relationship with “heaven” satisfactorily. If problems reached a certain proportion, people would conclude that he had lost the “mandate of heaven.” Then he could justly be overthrown. “Heaven” in this case does not signify God, the Creator of all, but the force that moves behind the seen world.

Emperors who lost the mandate of heaven had little hope of getting it back. Very rarely has a Chinese emperor done what Napoleon did in regaining his throne. This explains why, in more modern times, Chiang Kai Shek never really had a hope of returning to power in mainland China, for to the mass of the people the universe itself had rejected his rule. This also explains the alarm in the communist leadership over various natural disasters that have happened in China in recent years. The protests and bloody crackdown of Tiananmen Square in June 1989 also carried a frightening warning to the current holders of the heavenly mandate. Communists may not believe in the mandate of heaven, but five thousand years of Chinese belief do not disappear in forty years of indoctrination. It is what the people believe that counts.

Overemphasis on the whole as opposed to the individual tends towards totalitarianism, even as overemphasis on the individual tends to anarchy and disintegration. We see the tendency of many Eastern people toward passive acceptance of strong government and semi if not altogether totalitarian regimes. It is axiomatic in the East that the reigning “emperor” by whatever name he may be called has the right to determine the course of the nation, because the whole is much more important than the individual.

Therefore, while the West boasts of its democracy, the East persists very often in a system of more or less benevolent dictatorship. The West overbalances to the individual, and the East toward the state.

**When East and West Meet**

When the two basically different viewpoints met each other in the 19th century, neither side understood the basic outlook of the other. The Chinese emperor viewed himself as responsible for maintaining the harmony of heaven, not only for China, but for the whole world. China was, after all, the Middle Kingdom, center of the universe. In the meantime Britain was printing maps with her little country in the middle of the world!

The Westerners saw themselves at least as equals of the Chinese, and as those who had come to trade on equal terms. The emperor saw them as suppliants coming to the ruler of the universe to implore the favor of trading in his country. That the Chinese saw trade as one of the lowest occupations of human beings did not help. When the West refused to accept the position of suppliants and forced China to trade by military means, relationships hit bottom. Soldiers in Chinese eyes were the lowest of the low, and being compelled by military force to open its doors to Western trade was the biggest humiliation that could be inflicted.

We still feel the impact of those early conflicts of ideas today. When Prime Minister Thatcher wanted to negotiate with Beijing on the base of the treaties of the last century, she did not realize that to the Chinese those treaties are still “unequal treaties,” forced on a humiliated and, at that point, militarily weak country. So, before anything was said, talks over the future of Hong Kong carried the heavy burden of history, resulting in miscommunication.

We also saw the difference in political outlook work out in practice in Vietnam during the war. American forces were frustrated when local villagers had little interest in individual freedom and switched allegiance from the Saigon regime to the Viet Cong overnight, depending on which group was in control for the moment. From the peoples’ point of view, they had never had a say in government and never expected to have one. Moreover, the one in control had the mandate of heaven to carry on government; so even if that control switched back and forth, the individual simply related to the person with power at the moment.

Differing views on the status of political prisoners also illustrate the way in which we come at situations from opposite ends. To Amnesty International, for the government of Singapore to keep communist or other political dissidents in prison for years on end is an abuse of human rights. To the Singapore government, the welfare of the society is paramount.
Therefore, if certain individuals threaten the whole of society, to detain them and prevent their doing anything to disrupt the peace is a right course to take.

Singapore’s head of state, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, has openly stated that he has based his view of government on Confucian principles. Abegg notes what those principles involve when she quotes Sun Kuang, a Confucian teacher before Christ, as saying that “a wise ruler establishes authority over the people, guides them by truths, reminds them from time to time by ordinances, makes truths clear to them by expository treatises, and forbids deviation by penalties.”

Mr. Lee has carried out Sun Kuang’s advice. As a “wise ruler” he has been largely responsible for turning a poverty-stricken, war-ravaged country, left with massive unemployment by a premature British withdrawal and warned that on leaving Malaysia it had no chance of survival, into the country with the second highest standard of living in Asia. He established authority over the people to an extent that many Westerners would find impossible to accept. He guides them by truths, reminds them from time to time by ordinances, in fact, every two or three months he launches a new campaign urging people to avoid litter, stub out cigarettes, give up chewing gum, etc., etc., even banning pinball machines. Deviation from the litter rule leads to a $500 fine and, unlike the British speed limit, means what it says.

In the laissez-faire attitude of British society, with increasing crime and social disintegration, I have often heard people wish that Mr. Lee could take over Downing Street. I doubt, however, if we Britishers would like his rule once his policies began to bite. We have not grown up with a Confucian background that sees these policies as normal.

With all its Confucian influence, however, Singapore today represents a society where East and West meet head on and where that society is forced to grapple with the consequences. The present leadership has inherited a population that, because it is increasingly English-educated, increasingly imbibes Western attitudes from books and the media. This makes Singaporeans less inclined to accept Confucian attitudes in government. That, in turn, makes older leaders see the gains of the last few years being flittered away by irresponsible Western individualism. Eastern and Western thinking struggle together, seeking to find a middle way that preserves the best of both worlds.

I am not concerned in this book to make value judgments on the relative merits of Eastern and Western approaches to government, but simply to point out the differences and to try to help us understand where they come from.

The Christian Viewpoint

The Christian sees the world as in rebellion against its true ruler and therefore never able to achieve true peace and prosperity. So long as man refuses to accept the direction of God and does not submit to His law, so long will he be unable to achieve a perfect society.

But Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God that He had come to bring, a kingdom ruled in a totalitarian manner. But in His kingdom the sting of absolute rule is removed by the Ruler’s being perfectly just and loving and not seeking anything for Himself. In His case absolute power does not corrupt absolutely or at all, in fact, for He is not seeking His own welfare, but the welfare of His people. This totalitarianism therefore enables the individual to live in perfect freedom in subjection to Christ, of course and to fulfill his destiny without conflict with society.

This kingdom is already “in you,” when a person accepts the absolute rule of the Lord, who is the absolute ruler. That person then seeks to implement the laws of the kingdom in his or her life. But that person also knows that the full coming of the kingdom is not yet and that therefore he will not attain perfection in this life for himself or for his society. He accordingly looks forward with eager anticipation to the personal return of Jesus Christ to reign as King.

We, therefore, still live and will always live in an imperfect world until the time when Christ returns. That means that the Christian will not be deceived by promises of a utopia here on earth if only we follow some ideology or guru. He is not misled by George Bush’s promise of a brave new world, for he knows that all brave new worlds soon look remarkably like the sad old one.

On the other hand, the Christian is not a total cynic. He does not give up on this world, for he knows that God has given man a mandate to rule it to the best of his ability. Therefore the person who is subject to Christ will seek to play his part in the political life of this world and to contribute to the best government that is humanly possible.
B. IN EDUCATIONAL METHOD

The Western Approach: Think for yourself

Western education seeks to teach the student to think for himself, to find out for himself all that he can. So even in junior schools students are set to do research projects in the library or classroom. In the process children learn to apply principles to different circumstances so that they can use those principles in their future lives. This method leads to creativity and inventiveness. Learning to think in right ways becomes more important than filling the head with facts. In Western classrooms there is almost no learning by rote. On the other hand, the poor literacy and reading level of many Western people betrays the weakness of too much individual exploration in learning.

The role of the teacher in the West is to lead the student in his discoveries, rather than to tell the student what he ought to know. He encourages individual thinking and expression of opinion. Children are taught to ask questions and encouraged to express their doubts about a subject. In the course of discussion a person puts forward his viewpoint, and others question it or discuss it. That person defends his view, and others may attack it. At the end of the discussion the students expect to have learned something from the interaction.

The Eastern Approach: Instruction from teacher to student

The hierarchical nature of society in a holistic view of the universe gives a very high place to the role of the teacher. He or she is highly respected, even long after the student has graduated. When a close friend of ours was very sick with cancer, many of her former students of twenty years before came around to visit her and to bring gifts. One lady even brought round meals to cook for her.

Because the teacher in Eastern society ranks above the student, his teaching must not be questioned. The good student receives what the teacher gives and feeds back to the teacher the same material in as close a form to the original as possible. Students do not think of questioning anything the teacher has said. The student learns many things by rote and develops a strong ability in pure memory work.

Because he learns by accepting just what is taught, the student does not develop a capacity to use the material in any other circumstances than those in which he has been taught. So, though a car mechanic may have learned to take a Ford carburetor to pieces, but may not be able to cope with a carburetor of any other make. He does not learn the principle and then apply that principle in many different situations.

But he thoroughly learns what he is taught.

When East meets West

For many years the scientific method of approach found little acceptance in the East for it demands the application of principles to particular situations. Development needs and a desire to share in the riches of industrialization have changed that. Yet still many people find the application of principles very hard to do. Students become very frustrated when their minds are full of facts, but they do not know how to use them. A newspaper cutting a while ago mentioned South Korean students protesting on this very point to their university. When they graduated they knew many things, but did not know how to make use of that knowledge.

In teaching expository preaching in Korea, I am constantly asked, “How do you do it?” The questioner is asking for a formula which he can follow and which will result in the finished product’s being automatically produced. But preaching is like music. While there are rules of harmony in music, and there are certain basic notes to be used, every composer has to use those principles to create his own symphony. There is no formula for composing sonatas or sermons. But using principles and applying them calls for a different way of thinking from that to which Asian people are used.

On the other hand, when Asian students come to the West, they outshine their Western fellows in examinations. Many Vietnamese refugee children have amazed their teachers by the high scores that they obtain in fact-learning subjects. They have learned the skills of this kind of learning and developed their memory capacities far more than the Western children have.
An Asian student in the West may have great difficulty at first in summoning up courage to ask questions in a group discussion and may feel almost rude when he does so. How dare he question the proposition of a teacher!

A Western teacher in the East, on the other hand, feels that he has found a wonderful place. No one challenges his propositions. Everyone quietly accepts his teaching, and he has no problems at all with discipline. Surely these people are ideal students! Only later does he realize that being able to answer examination questions accurately does not necessarily mean understanding what he was talking about.

When East meets West in joint discussion, the effect is even more startling. Having been taught to voice his views, the Westerner immediately puts forward his ideas. He does not see them as infallible and fully expects them to be knocked back quite strongly. His Eastern friends regard his quick speaking as surprising. They would not dream of speaking until their seniors or others with a higher place in the scheme of things had put forward their views. Being polite and deferring to guests in their midst, Asians raise no questions. The Westerner meantime is surprised at the silence. He is not used to this. He begins to think that perhaps his views are better than he thought. Coming from a background that dislikes silence in a group and finds it uncomfortable, he feels pushed to say more and more. The meeting proceeds, and the Westerners viewpoint is accepted. Then everyone goes out and does something different!

Two myths are perpetuated in such a discussion. One is the myth of the arrogant Westerner, quick to express his ideas and too impolite to wait for others better than himself. The other is the myth of the inscrutable Asian. “I thought those people had accepted my proposition in the meeting, yet they went out and did something else,” complains the Westerner. Neither is understanding where the other person is coming from.

The Christian Viewpoint

Jesus clearly taught His own authority as a teacher. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.” (John 13:13). Hebrews 13:7 exhorts us to “respect your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”

At the same time, Jesus not only spoke truth with authority, but he also made people think. His parables left people to work out their meaning and apply them to their own situation. Certainly that was so in the basic principles of life He gave in the Sermon on the Mount.

There is a place for the authority of the teacher, but there is also a need for the student to be able to question and to learn to apply principles to differing situations. We need to learn facts, but we also have to learn how to use them.

C. IN APPROACHING THE ENVIRONMENT

The Western Approach

As the Westerner stands outside of reality and seeks to understand it, he can regard it objectively and intellectually, without necessarily having his feelings involved. He reasons by taking small pieces and seeking to build up a coherent view of the whole. He does this logically, moving from one point to another and taking full account of cause and effect.

Because the Westerner tends not to see himself as a part of the environment surrounding him, he therefore feels that he can manipulate and control it without fear. As he sees no spiritual force behind the universe holding it together, he has no sense of offending any force or being in acting on the environment. He has until recently regarded himself as the summit of creation, or more accurately to his thinking, of evolution. As the one creature able to think, he is able to control all the others, and nature as well.

Science and technology have blossomed under this approach, leading to the many benefits of modern life in medicine, water supplies, heating, lighting, the elimination of drudgery, and so much else.

At the same time, the greedy consumption of resources and the desire to get rich quick has led to the danger of the resources being used up and the possibility of our polluting our environment to life-menacing levels.
Now, however, Western man is realizing that even one act of interference has unknown reactions that expand like the ripples created by a stone thrown into a pond. The food chain has proved to be a complex hierarchy of creatures, each dependent on the life below it for survival. Break the chain, and disaster may result. A medicine that deals with one problem may create a dozen new ones.

**The Eastern Approach**

The Eastern person sees himself as a part of the whole, and a very insignificant part of it. His duty is to live in harmony with the whole, not to interfere with it. To interfere is to upset the harmony of the universe and the mystical reality that lies behind it. In short, interference invites calamity.

Chinese have therefore always admired discoveries for themselves, but did not necessarily develop them further or apply them to living. They discovered gunpowder centuries before the West knew about it, but it was Westerners who developed the skill of killing each other by developing it into modern weaponry.

For many years, and indeed until approaching the middle years of the twentieth century, Asia was not interested in science or in using it in daily life. To the Westerner, listening to the stone as it grows may seem strange, but to the Easterner, at least in the old days, to break it open and take out the minerals is stranger—tantamount, in fact, to vandalism.

The Eastern attitude to the environment has sometimes led to an acceptance of natural disasters rather than determined attempts to control and deal with them. This is not entirely true, but sufficiently so to see the effect of their worldview.

**When East meets West**

The interchange of ideas is perhaps more noticeable in this realm than any other.

The East has come to realize that you cannot have a modern state and economic development without interfering with the environment. With ever-increasing populations and no industry, countries are doomed to poverty of growing proportions. Scientific development, therefore, has become a major objective of every country.

The resulting rush for riches has caused many Eastern countries to forget their own background philosophy, leading to levels of pollution and exploitation of people and resources that are horrific. A small country like Singapore is well aware of the danger and has had the financial ability to keep the environment in mind in the course of its development. But larger countries, desiring an influx of foreign investment, have turned a blind eye to the problems of the future.

At the same time, the West has become alarmed at the prospect of dangerous pollution levels and has begun to wake up to what could happen in a comparatively short time. Parallel to this has been the upsurge of New Age thinking, which is really Buddhist thinking in new, sophisticated Western guise. Many of those associated with the Green parties in different countries are strongly influence by this thinking. Seeing the divine as “everything there is” and themselves as part the divine, or the divine as a part of them, they have adopted the Eastern viewpoint; they seek to relate to the environment rather than to manipulate it.

So while the East is attracted to the Western approach in this area, the West is drawn to the less hectic and more relational Eastern one.

**The Christian Viewpoint**

The Biblical view of our relationship to the environment is often maligned and misunderstood. Genesis 1:28 has become a useful stick with which to beat the Christians. There God gave to man authority over His creation and the command to “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”
This verse is blamed for the “rape” of the environment. Indeed, men have used it to support any form of exploitation and have used it as a basis for their selfishness. If they have used the verse in this way, they have misused it, for taken in its context and true meaning, it teaches human responsibility as much as human authority.

God indeed did give man, the summit of His creation, authority to look after the universe and rule it, but not for his own selfish purposes. Man was to “work it and take care of it.” (Genesis 2:15). He is not an owner but a tenant. He will be called to account for his actions.

Other parts of the Bible support this contention. In Ezekiel 34 God takes the leaders of Israel to task for their neglect of their responsibilities in government and their selfish use of resources. In verse 34 He rebukes them for polluting the environment in these words: “Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of the pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you muddy the rest with your feet?” Then in Revelation 11:18 God’s wrath is directed in the last judgment against “those who destroy the earth,” who in their turn will be destroyed.

Man is viewed in the Scriptures as sharing the same kind of life as other living creatures, but as also being radically different, capable of fellowship with God, and created in His image. He rules the environment under the Lordship of God, but he is also intimately involved in it. He must therefore behave responsibly. Therefore those who destroy the earth are liable to judgment, the British and Americans for acid rain, the Japanese and Norwegians for destruction of whales, the Thai, Malaysians, Brazilians, and Indonesians for the wholesale cutting of the rain forests, the Russians for the wastelands of Eastern Europe, each of us responsible for our own sins.

D. IN VIEWING HISTORY

The Western Approach: Linear and evolutionary

The West sees everything as advancing from the simple to the more complicated. Life begins with the amoeba and culminates in the human frame. Civilization moves from the barbaric and primitive to the sophisticated and developed. Society moves from the tribal through the feudal to the capitalistic. Communism takes the process on through the socialist to the communist. But as Communism is now discredited, this has to be thought through again. So devastating has the collapse of communism been that some have talked of the “end of history,” as though there is no other progress possible now.

To Western man “Time marches on,” moving ever forward to some final utopia.

The Eastern Approach: Circular and repetitive

To the Easterner the universe is always in a state of flux and change. History goes in cycles, moving round towards a golden age and then back again into darkness. Time and space are largely illusory. Because the universe is not going anywhere in the Eastern mind, the aim must be to escape from the circular process of the wheel of life.

When East Meets West

The West is always talking about progress and evolution. The East has tended until recently to be more patient with things as they are. As history is always repeating itself, why get so worked up at the current situation?

Communism has had a large impact on changing Eastern viewpoints for communism is basically a Western philosophy and based on evolutionary theory. Faced with the appalling injustices and evils of existing society in China, the communists seized upon communism as a way to break the circle and reach out for an ideal society.

Yet today the West is wondering whether history is really moving anywhere, and people in China must be wondering whether the cycle of events is taking another turn of the wheel. Few people are content today to stay in their present situation, but neither East nor West has a coherent answer to the question, “Where do we go from here?”
The Christian Viewpoint

The Christian bases his understanding of things as they are in the fact that God made the world and that He is in sovereign control of all history. History is His story.

The Christian believes that God not only made the world and made it very good, but that He did so for His good pleasure. He also made man for fellowship with Himself and for an eternal destiny. When mankind, in the person of its federal head, Adam, chose to go its own way and carve out its own destiny in independence of God, He already knew how He would act. The Scriptures tell the story of God’s calling out a people for Himself from among the human race. They trace the account through a chosen person, Abraham, and a chosen nation, Israel, to a chosen people from among all nations in the New Testament.

History centers upon God’s own Son, “who in His human nature was a descendant of David,” fully and completely human in all respects except for sin. He was “promised beforehand through God’s prophets in the Holy Scriptures,” foretold as the One who holds the answer to the human dilemma. Above all, He was “declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead.” (all quotes from Romans 1:4). Being both man and God, Jesus Christ occupies a unique position in history, joining God and man together. Being sinless, He is able, through His death on the cross, to die for our sins, and being God, His death is effective for all who avail themselves of it.

The rest of history for the Christian is the story of God’s “calling people from among all the nations to the obedience that comes from faith,” inviting all men to accept the offer of reconciliation to God through Christ.

In His infinite love and patience, God governs all history to this end, giving men and women maximum opportunity to return to their true obedience. But one day, the Christ provided as Savior from sin will return as Judge of all, and then we will truly come to the end of history and the beginning of the eternal rule of God.

History, therefore, for the Christian is neither a meaningless cycle of repeated ages, nor an optimistic evolution to better and better times. Rather, history is the story of moral and spiritual ups and downs, with political movements providing the background to the real drama. This drama is acted out in the lives of people and nations as they move closer to or further from their Creator and His Christ. History moves forward in the plan of God to the final consummation; it is His story of His purposes moving toward their inevitable fulfillment.

E. IN ISSUES REQUIRING ACTION

1. BASIC ATTITUDE

The Western Approach: Personal initiative and enterprise

The Westerner admires the go-getting entrepreneur who asserts himself. “Go for it!” is a current phrase to sum up this attitude. “Don’t be a doormat!” expresses similar sentiments, as does, “Don't allow people to walk over you.” The explorer, the business tycoon, the sportsman who excels—these are the heroes of our society. Someone has said that anything is forgiven in our society except failure. The politician out of office receives little attention; the bankrupt business man is forgotten.

At the same time, because the individual is so much left to his own devices to make some sort of sense out of a meaningless world, self-fulfillment becomes a main aim. “Do your own thing” is a popular watchword. With life so short, modern belief dictates that each person find “his own thing” quickly, and that may mean trying a succession of jobs or experiences in order to find the right one. What fulfills one individual does not do the same for another, and we are not allowed to pass value judgments on anyone for his or her choice. I met a stewardess in an American airport who was about to take her first full flight after training. She had been a teacher and had had her own children. Now that the children were grown up, she was embarking, in midlife, on a new career. Many others do the same kind of thing.

Another favorite outlook is “It’s your life. Don’t let anyone else tell you what to do with it.” Here again, the individual must make what he can of his own life. With no God to direct his ways, he has to find his own way and make the most of the time that he has left to him, for, he is assured, there is nothing beyond this world.
The Eastern Approach: Finding my right place and role in the whole, in order to live in harmony

If I am to live in harmony with the whole of the universe and with my fellow men and women, then I must find my rightful place in that universe. Fulfillment is finding my place and role and doing what that place and role demand. The emphasis therefore lies with acceptance and humility. Lin Yu Tang writes, “In discovering the true self, man finds unity with the universe, and, conversely, in finding unity with the moral laws of the universe, man realizes his true self, or true manhood.” (From Pagan to Christian, p.71).

So when two Korean people meet, they want to know how they should relate to each other. Thus each of them tries to find out the other’s family history. The relationship they have, and even the level of language they use, depends on this.

A missionary in Indonesia’s Batak society needs to be given a suitable name that fits in with the people among whom he or she is serving. This will enable him or her to function more effectively, because people do not know how to relate to someone who has no determined place in the community, and the name determines the relationship.

Age, position, family, former relationships all play an important part in the East. When one of OMF’s Japanese missionaries was to come to Singapore to head up a missionary training program, I was to be over him in administration. We spent some time discussing the way in which he should address me and I should address him. We could not use our first names. I had been his teacher in seminary nearly twenty years before, and therefore I would always be his teacher; he would not be comfortable in any other relationship. I could not use his first name, because even his close Japanese friends would not be free to use that. I could have used the honorific title of Sensei, to which he was entitled in Japan. But that seemed to him too formal for our current relationship. So we settled on the Japanese equivalent of Mr. We needed to spend that time discussing names so that we could feel comfortable and, indeed, so that both of us could feel we had established a right level.

In the same way, the genealogies that seem to Westerners so tedious and unnecessary in the Old Testament and in the Gospels give meaning to the relationships of the Bible to Asian people. One tribe in Indonesia showed no interest in a version of Matthew that had omitted the genealogy. As soon as it was inserted in its usual place, the Scripture came alive to them.

Relationships have certain defined parameters in different cultures. One day, traveling in a taxi with a missionary friend in Seoul, Korea, the driver asked my wife if her friend was her daughter. My wife replied, “No, she is my friend.”

“No, no, no,” said the taxi man, “She cannot be your friend. Is she your daughter?” He could not comprehend the idea of people being friends with an age difference of some fifteen years between them. In Indonesian society, you can be “friends” only with people of your own age level. This is a part of taking your right place in the whole of reality.

When East meets West

When the Westerner comes to Asia with his initiative and drive, seeking to “get things done,” he naturally appears to the Asian person as arrogant and lacking in manners. He has not bothered to find his role or waited to form relationships, but pushed ahead with his ideas and expected others to respond to him. The Asian does not realize that the Westerner is simply doing what he would do in his own society, expecting to be questioned and to have his view challenged.

When the Asian retreats in front of the Westerner’s pushing, the Westerner mistakes it for acceptance of his ideas. When he finds they have not, in fact, been accepted, he views the Asian as inscrutable. He mistakes the word “yes” to mean “I agree,” when, in fact, it means only, “I have heard what you are saying.”

Many Eastern young people view the independence of their Western counterparts with some envy. Always having had in the past to relate to the views of seniors in the family, school, and workplace, when Asian students come to the West, they revel in a new freedom. They are freed from close family supervision and the restrictions under which they have always lived. When, however, they return home and reenter the Asian cultural sphere, they have to revert to the old ways and find it very difficult.
On the other hand, to the over independent Westerner, Asian corporateness and relationships have a great attraction. In his fragmented society the Westerner may have experienced little or no deep family relationships and perhaps little sense of community. In Asia he finds he has a place in a network of relationships which provide a framework for meaning.

**The Christian Viewpoint**

The Christian life is a life re-orientated around Jesus Christ and His will. This involves loving God and loving our neighbors. Because self-centered living denies the truth of the gospel, the Christian must put Christ first, others next, and himself last. As Paul expresses it in Philippians 2:4, “Each of you should look, not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Jesus put it even more strongly: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34). Extreme self-assertion is therefore out.

On the other hand, the metaphor of the body which is used so much in the New Testament illustrates that everyone has a role to fulfill in relationship to everyone else. Each individual member of the body of Christ does have his or her own place, and every member is individually vital to the functioning of the whole. So the value of the individual is preserved. Therefore, the role of relationships and the role of the individual are to be balanced in a harmonious whole. The whole truth lies neither with Western nor Eastern cultures.

The West is at present impatient with any kind of predetermined role for governments and people, men and women, children and parents, viewing as it does every single person as an isolated individual with totally equal positions. But the Christian viewpoint does indicate clearly defined roles in the state, in the workplace, and in the family roles established by God Himself for the smooth running and stability of society. Without the authority of God as an accepted truth, we have no basis for defining roles, but once we accept His authority, they become important elements in integrating society.

2. **METHOD OF APPROACH**

**The Western Approach: Programs, progress and success**

In asking the question, “How can I get this job done in the best and quickest way possible?” The Westerner defines his goal and aims at it, eliminating as many side paths as he can. He wants a clear statement of the path to his goal. He wants you to come to the point and “put your cards on the table,” to be open about what you are doing and to present your case firmly and straightly.

The Westerner, therefore, comes to Asia with his programs of aid. He does not want to waste time talking about things but wants to get on with them. He is prepared to negotiate, but he wants to know where he stands. Clear definition and a signed agreement make him feel comfortable. He wants to have it in writing.

**The Eastern Approach: Harmony, people, and relationships**

The question asked is, “How can I preserve the harmony of this situation?” This does not mean that the Asian is not concerned to gain his objective, but that in doing so he wishes to maintain relationships. As Lin Yu Tang writes, “Chinese may be liars, thieves, corrupt officials, but it will be rare to find a Chinese common laborer or farmer who does not place first emphasis on good personal relations and good manners, or who can be called rude or ill-bred.” He also cites a story in which a rich carpet owner refers to the thief as “the gentleman on the roof” (From Pagan to Christian, pp. 81, 82).

Rather than present a cut-and-dried program, the Easterner wants first to feel the atmosphere and sense what others are thinking, particularly those to whom he bears a relationship. He is not in a hurry to disclose his thoughts but does so gradually in the course of lengthy discussion. He is concerned to save everyone’s face even if he wants to get the best of the bargain.

Doing business with an Eastern person may seem to take a long time. Discussions may not seem to be going anywhere, but in the process relationships are being formed which may prove in the long run to be more important than the business under discussion. The story, for instance, is told of an American businessman in Japan. Visiting his Japanese counterpart one evening, he carried in his pocket a contract for signing. Being culturally sensitive, he said nothing during the evening, which passed pleasantly by with social chit chat. As he reached the doorway on leaving, his friend said, “By the way, I
think you brought a contract with you tonight. May I please have it?” When the American handed him the document, the Japanese business man went straight to the end of the document, signed it, and handed it back. Astonished that he had not even read the contract, the American asked him, “Are you not going to read it?”

“No,” said the Japanese, “You are the kind of man I like to do business with.”

Another aspect of the concern for relationships is that Asian organizations will keep an elderly leader in a top position even if he may be past his best and possibly something of a hindrance to forward progress. Where the West would give him a golden handshake and put him aside to retire, in the East he is retained in an honorable, though maybe nominal, position. So the aged Communist leaders still persist in China, despite their geriatric state.

**When East meets West**

Because, where Westerners always want to bring programs, Asian are more concerned first of all to establish relationships, anyone wishing to prosper in Asia must be willing to spend time cultivating the right relationships. Little profit may seem to come for some time, but eventually the doors will open far more widely than the Westerner ever expected.

Westerners are impatient of long discussions that seem to be going nowhere, but they have to be willing to sit through those discussions in order for their counterparts to feel comfortable at expressing their thoughts. Often an Asian visitor will sit through an evening of ordinary social intercourse and reveal the real reason why he came for the visit in the last few moments of the evening. Signs of impatience on the part of the host may leave the real reason hidden away, with the visitor feeling that the host is not really interested.

Anyone, therefore, who wishes to do business with the East has to think long-term. Western businessmen want to cash in on “the billion dollar market” that is China. At present, doing business there is a long, hard, and frustrating process, with perhaps little to show for it. But those who cultivate relationships now are those will reap the reward in ten or twenty years time. Ten years is a short time in Asia and a short time in relationships. Who you are and how you relate are much more important than what you have to give or to sell.

**The Christian Viewpoint**

Jesus Christ dealt gently with people. He never rode roughshod over their personalities. He respected their refusals as well as inviting their responses. He never allowed the program to dictate what He did. So if a woman with an issue of blood interrupted his journey to help a dying girl, He spent time attending to her need. People mattered to Him intensely.

Yet He was not without His program, a program that responded to His Father’s direction rather than the demands of others. When His disciples told him that crowds of people were expecting him and “Everyone is looking for you,” He replied, “Let us go somewhere else so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” (Mark 1:38). People mattered, but He did not allow people to manipulate Him—a very difficult balance to achieve.

Jesus’ program was never allowed to be prominent in people’s minds. He did not insist on it. He allowed it to be interrupted. And when He died, it looked as though His program had proved a failure, for no one was true to Him. Success came through sacrifice not triumphalism.

Western missions, by and large, have not learned the lessons of Asian culture. Hordes of Western missionaries come to the East with programs that they want to see translated and implemented by the Asian churches. As one church leader said to me, “We let them come and present their program, and when they have left, we get on with our work!” Western Christians are often obsessed with goals and success, bolstered by methodology.

The most important thing for a new missionary to the East to do is to establish relationships. He needs to forget his program. Instead of rushing to learn Bible vocabulary in order to preach the gospel, he is better advised to learn good, colloquial language, so that he can relate well to the people.
The new missionary needs to form his relationships with his own peer group. Close friends cannot usually be cultivated across the age gap. But missionaries who spend time getting to know students of their own age at universities and seminaries will find that ten or twenty years later they have an open access to leaders in society and in the church.

But they must stay around. Short-term service may accomplish some things, perhaps more to the benefit of the short-termer than for the good of the ministry; but those who wish to make a deep impact must remain for ten years at least and preferably twenty or thirty. The sad fact today is that most missionaries go home after ten years at the most, just at the time when they are beginning to reap the benefit of their relationships. I have found that after twenty years of service doors were open wider than ever before, and after thirty they are unbelievable.

Sometimes when we negotiate with a church to loan a missionary to them to assist in an extension program, we agree on a job description. This sets out in writing what is expected of the missionary and the church. The church then usually files the job description and spends the next year or two looking at the missionary. He may feel that his contribution has been forgotten and that the church is falling down on its responsibilities. But they want to see if he adjusts to the culture and learns their language and their ways. If he does, then the door begins to open, and before long he wonders if he will ever have a free moment.

3. TAKING ACTION

The Western Approach: Planning ahead and goal-setting

Logical thinking causes the Westerner to look at causes and effect. He therefore seeks to bring about the cause that will lead to the effect that he wants. He sees himself as in control of his life and environment.

Modern technological advances encourage an almost total belief in man’s being able to come up with effective answers to every problem. So, although the AIDS epidemic threatens a major disaster, people expect medicine eventually to come up with a vaccine or antidote and therefore fail to realize how serious the problem is. In the same way, we consume our resources at an alarming rate because we tend to expect that someone will come up with some new way of replacing them. So why worry?

What works well in technology is also assumed to work well in other spheres. So the Western businessman plans his strategy for development, sets his goals, and goes for them. He seeks to eliminate all side paths and goes straight for the goal. This may involve a certain amount of ruthlessness. If profits are the aim, then environmental preservation may be too costly to care about unless government makes him care. Similarly in dealing with the welfare of the working staff, when legislation in recent years mandated expensive benefits for full-time employees, some employers decided to dispense with the whole group and then re-employ them in a part-time capacity.

In all of this, Western man’s motto is, “Think ahead. If you aim at nothing, you will hit it.”

The Eastern Approach: Spontaneity—now is the right time, so do it!

As the Easterner thinks intuitively after reflection on a situation for some time, he may suddenly feel that now is the right time to act. He may not be able to give a rational explanation why he needs to act now and is not bothered to have such an explanation. The Asian responds to the opportunity that feels right at the moment.

The motto in the East is, “Do it now while the time is ripe.”

When East Meets West

The Westerner in Asia is easily thrown by the seeming suddenness of decision and lack of planning. One moment people are discussing a subject and seem to be going round and round, and the next a decision is made and being acted upon. This may indeed have been true of the Japanese assault on Pearl Harbor. Military leaders had been considering this option for a long time, but suddenly it seemed the right time to act; so they did. Lily Abegg points out that “Pearl Harbor surprised us in Tokyo just as much as it did the Americans. And did not the unconditional capitulation of Japan ... come just as
unexpectedly as the earlier attack?” The behavior of the Japanese diplomats in Washington in 1941 looked as if they had made a deliberate attempt to deceive the White House, but could it have been that those diplomats were caught by surprise as well?

The Eastern person in his turn finds the Westerner’s desire to know all the facts in advance to be over-cautious. He feels the Westerner waits too long before he does anything, when the time to act is now. He feels that counting the cost is overdone.

A modern illustration comes from Korea. A young person appeared at the home of a missionary there and said that he felt that God wanted him to be a missionary overseas. When the foreigner asked him where he was thinking of going and when, he answered, “To the Philippines on Thursday”! To the Westerner that appears irresponsible and not to have been thought out. But that young man had probably been mulling over the subject for some time; suddenly the whole had crystallized in his mind, and it was the time to act.

When the Westerner comes to the East with his neatly planned program, he may find his counterpart is not really interested in it. And when the Westerner has his plans for the day carefully worked out to the last minute, he may suddenly find his host has a different and unexpected agenda. We have learned over the years of visiting our friends in Korea that we will not really know what will be the exact timing of events until we get there. Asking for detailed planning in advance is a Western approach and meets with no success. So why not ride with the tide and save ourselves the frustration of an altered timetable?

On one occasion in Korea we were sitting round the lunch table discussing the morning’s seminars. My wife had been speaking to the women, and as the subject was clearly of interest to the men as well, our host suggested, without warning, that my wife should speak to the men that afternoon—in fact, in half an hour’s time! So she did.

In the same way some crises occur that to the Westerner could have been foreseen and averted by forward planning. On one occasion in the course of a week of meetings in Asia I was informed on the Wednesday that the place of meeting would not be available on the Friday and that we would have to find another meeting place in a hurry. In actual fact the cause of the change was a meeting that had been arranged weeks before. The crisis could therefore have been foreseen, but nobody looked ahead until the date was upon us. Such situations frustrate Westerners, but not our Asian friends. We therefore have to learn to put our hearts down in Asia, and they have to learn to accommodate to our timetables when they come to the West.

The Christian Viewpoint

Jesus did tell His disciples to think ahead. He told the parable of the king who carefully sits down to work out whether his army is big enough to go to battle. If not, he sends and asks for peace. Similarly, when a man volunteered to follow the Lord wherever He went, Jesus warned the volunteer that although foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, He did not know where He would be sleeping that night. For that reason, Jesus let the man know, he must count the cost of following before doing it, especially as Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem to die!

Yet in His ministry Jesus was not bound by programs. He would decide to move on without prior warning. He seemed to change His mind quickly whether He was going to go up to the feast or the Passover in Jerusalem in John 7:10. He allowed Lazarus to die, but then walked into the lions’ den of enemies at Jerusalem in order to raise him up.

Paul had a strategy for reaching the Roman world for Christ. But in Acts 16:6–10 we find him trying one avenue and then another before a vision at Troas convinced him he should cross into Europe at Philippi.

Clearly an over-organized program becomes a straitjacket that hinders as much it helps. At the same time, a totally disorganized program will run into other problems. Once again, we have to learn from each other.

F. IN FEELING SECURE

The Western Approach: My geographical space
In England we say, “An Englishman’s home is his castle.” His home is his own place, fortified against intrusion. Set in the grounds of large houses we find the notice, “Trespassers will be prosecuted.” The Western individual needs room to breathe and a place into which he or she can retreat and be safe. In many homes young people have their own room, and if they do not, they usually want one.

**The Eastern Approach: My mind is my area of privacy**

Living as a member of a large family, with limited accommodation in a heavily populated country, the average Asian never has the luxury of space to himself. Moreover, with the ideal family home having three generations living in it, from the time a child is born he is with others. He sleeps in a room with his or her brothers and sisters and perhaps with the parents as well. Children in an average family have never been able to choose their own drapes or curtains or to have their own ornaments and personal belongings in a place of their own. There is therefore no space which a person can call his own. Sometimes the only space within the whole house where someone can be alone is in the bathroom. In these circumstances the Eastern person finds privacy in the realm of his or her own mind. There no one can intrude, and each can think his or her own thoughts.

**When East Meets West**

When new missionaries arrive at our orientation course in Singapore, the Westerner usually prefers to have his or her own room. When we accepted our first Asian missionaries, we gave a lady her own room, thinking she would appreciate it. On the contrary, she was quite upset and felt lonely all by herself; she was not used to the isolation. On a retreat on one occasion, two rooms were booked for a party of four or five girls, but they all gathered in one room and stayed there all the time.

The West in recent years has set great store by sharing feelings openly and developing friendships that way. But given that the only area of privacy for an Asian is within his or her own mind, too much probing by a Westerner into a Asian’s thoughts can be threatening. The developing of deeper relationships between East and West, therefore, needs time and sensitivity.

On the other hand, Asian people can view the Westerner’s seeming preoccupation with having everything in a room matching and right is an unnecessary waste of time and money. But to the Westerner this is a part of his or her security. So when I was a new missionary, and we were moving around a great deal, a wise senior person advised me to unpack and put out personal belongings, even if the stay in a place was temporary. Doing this made the place home, however short the visit. But it was a Western solution to the insecurity of uprooting.

**The Christian Viewpoint**

Unity and individual personality reflect the unity and trinity of the Godhead. Preserving both the oneness of fellowship and the integrity of the person are not therefore mutually contradictory. The secret of balance is love as the cementing force, for love is sensitive and kind. In a successful East/West relationship each party makes a habit of remaining aware of the other person’s background, realizing that early experience deeply affects each one’s psychology. Both sides will respect their partner’s need for geographical or internal space to be himself.

**Part Two**

**Part 4 - The effect of differences on our religious outlook**

**A. General approach**

**The Western Approach: Personal decision and choice**

Religion in the West is something intensely personal. When a person probes into another person’s religion, he interferes in a delicate area. Discussing religion in public, in fact, is considered taboo. Because people judge that no one can discuss religion without argument, polite conversation avoids the subject. The one time the average Englishman is willing to talk religion is when he has had something to drink! Along with politics, the subject of religion in Western society carries the
label, “Explosive, hand me with care!” Though what a person believes, in Western culture, is his own business, many Westerners will encourage others to believe in something because they feel that to believe in nothing is not good. At the same time, they judge that what that person believes does not really matter, for faith must remain a personal choice. No one can be sure of God, in any case. Parents, therefore, are not usually too worried what their children believe in the area of religion, unless they become involved in one of the predatory cults than brainwashes its victims. Parents adopt the attitude, “You are old enough; believe what you want. It’s your life.” In this climate the only people who can be out of step are those who believe strongly in truth and revelation, for truth implies that other points of view are wrong. A person is considered arrogant if he believes anything in religion is true while judging other views false. Such ideas cut across the prevailing view that valid knowledge of “truth” cannot be attained, that everyone is guessing, making all guesses equal.

The Eastern Approach: Communal decision and conformity

In Eastern cultures the family, not the individual, makes the decisions. This is not only true in Chinese culture, but also in all forms of Eastern tribal communities The individual conforms to the decision of the group. As mentioned earlier, the worship offered by the emperor in ancient China was the only worship that really mattered. So long as he maintained the harmony of heaven, all would be well. The only responsibility of the individual was to maintain the worship of his ancestors. Religion, therefore, was always a matter for the state rather than the individual. Communists did not introduce state control of religion; they simply followed the time-honored practice. As always, any other group worshipping another god or in another way was a threat to the harmony of the state. So Christianity only flourished in China when the emperor was friendly to the missionary force. As soon as the atmosphere changed, Christians went out of favor and were regarded not only as unorthodox, but subversive. That remains true under today’s brand of communist totalitarianism. Yet people happily talk about religion all the time. As most Asian religions have no great doctrinal content, the question of truth rarely enters into the conversation. And, though people will happily discuss different viewpoints and do it in public, they do not expect to change their religion because that has come down from their families. Why not discuss other ideas?

When East Meets West

Asians do not always understand the Western emphasis on personal decision in evangelism. When major decisions have always been made by the group, the individual does not expect to choose or to have to choose for himself. On the other hand, Western evangelical Christians find it desperately difficult when a whole kampong or tribal village decides to become “Christian.” The Westerner has no experience of group decisions on such a personal matter. Surely, he feels, ever one must make his own decision. But without group decision in Asia, there is no decision at all. As one Easterner said, when he realized the truth of the Gospel and wanted to believe, “If I believe, here do I live, what work do I do, and whom do I marry?” By believing on is own, he would cut himself off from the society in which he lived. When the Western evangelist comes to the East, he follows his usual practice of asking people to decide and uses the current method in so many places of asking people to come forward for counsel. What he does not realize is that in a community where people do everything together, coming forward with others does not indicate personal commitment. If others are going forward, remaining people think, Let’s join the rest! So hundreds of attendees register “decisions” by signing a piece of paper or saying yes to a counselor. But few of the join the church or otherwise commit themselves to Christ or the Christian faith. A Malay taxi driver in Singapore underlined for me the difference between the group and the individual point of view. As we had been talking happily about his religion and mine, I asked him, “What does your Islam do for you?” That, of course, was a very Western question, and I should have known better. “My family is Muslim, and since I was six years old I have been going to the mosque,” he answered. “We are all Muslims, and we do not change our religion.” What Islam actually did for him was of no interest at all. What the family believed mattered more than anything else.

The Christian Viewpoint

In the Old Testament God deals with people in family groups. In the New Testament the promise is “to you and your children,” and in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul declares the faith of one parent sufficient somehow to separate his or her child to God. At the same time, the New Testament is clear that God calls individuals to Himself and works is salvation in those individuals. Yet they are born again into the family of God, the body of Christ, the Christian community. In missionary activity we need to respect the decision of groups to turn to Christ and enter the visible community of believers, at the same time teaching them the truth that each one must also have a personal relationship to God.
B. The doctrine of God

The Western Approach: Agnostic

By and large, Westerners feel that “God” is unknowable. The only things we as agnostics can know in reality are phenomena that we can touch and taste and handle and investigate in the laboratory. To the agnostic, noumena—the world of ideas and metaphysics—cannot validly be known with any certainty. Man has “come of age” and no longer needs the idea of God to explain his environment and to enable him to cope with life. For all practical purposes, therefore, God is dead and irrelevant. Modern Westerners have little concept of a God who really exists. Religion has to their minds evolved from human beings seeking to find a meaning in life which will unite the mass of individual events and experiences. Therefore everyone is guessing at his or her own solution, and for one person to suggest that his or her guess is better than everyone else’s sounds intolerably arrogant. At the same time, Westerners, with their individualistic bent, feel that if people want to believe in God, there is no harm. In fact, this may provide them with a psychological prop that can be useful. Some people are more “religious” than others, and if you are religious, you are welcome to believe, but if I am not “religious,” I am made differently and will not need religion.

The Eastern Approach: Pantheistic

God cannot be separated from His creation, the Easterner believes, and therefore He is not a person in the strict sense of that term. How the world began does not matter. We have to live in harmony with all that there is. The world is spiritual and not just material, and learning to relate to the forces permeating the universe is what leads to peace and harmony. Eventually being absorbed into the whole frees the individual of the sufferings and frustrations of existence as he or she melts into the eternal mass.

When East Meets West

Western secularism and materialism have invaded the East alongside scientific thinking and development. Large numbers of young people, therefore, see themselves free from the obligations of religion, especially those aspects of folk religion which are more superstitious. Eastern religious thinking has invaded the West in the West’s revulsion against the barrenness of materialism and the emptiness of secularism. New Age thinking incorporates the idea of a spark of the divine being in everyone and of our needing to develop that spark and live in harmony with the universe, thus finding our fulfillment. In stress-ridden societies the calm and peacefulness such teaching promises attracts many followers.

The Christian Viewpoint: Theistic

The Bible turns other ideas of religion on their head. The God revealed there is the source of all being. He is reality, and all created beings owe their origin and sustenance to Him. They are created by Him, for Him, and will eventually return to Him. In the Bible we do not have a religion so much as a revelation. That revelation is progressive, culminating in God Himself becoming Man and revealing Himself in terms that no one can say are too difficult to understand, a Word made flesh, a living human life. Because of the nature of revelation over against a religion, Christians insist with all humility that you cannot put the Gospel alongside other religions and say that all are equally true. Guesses cannot rank equally with reality. Two times two equals five may be a good guess and better than two times two being made equal to seven, but it cannot rank alongside two times two equaling four. Christianity may be rejected as false, but it cannot be accepted as simply one of several ways to God. The Christian God claims to be both above creation as its Maker and Ruler and to permeate His creation as the One who sustains and keeps it. But He cannot be identified with His creation as “everything there is.”

The doctrine of man

The Western Approach: Evolutionary

Having a body in common with the animal, the Westerner concludes that man is simply a more developed kind. Because he can reason, he has been able to control other creatures. Still, in some ways he may be inferior to them. For instance, some animals care for the young in a way that some humans do not, and animals do not slaughter one another in so indiscriminate a way as men kill one another. Animals generally kill only for food. When man’s body dies, the Western agnostic believes, that is the end. Life has no purpose to it, because there is no unifying factor. Therefore the sensible thing to do is not to look for a purpose but to find fulfillment in “doing your own thing” and fulfilling your true self. No value judgments apply to the individual’s choice of alternatives. What one chooses, the other may not. Each must find his own particular satisfying experience, whether that be through drugs or good works.
The Eastern Approach: Relational
To the Eastern mind, where man came from is not important. He is here, but he is infinitesimally small and insignificant. An illustration of this Asian mindset came a few years ago when veterans of the terrible death camps on the River Kwai returned to Thailand to revisit the area of their sufferings and to remember their comrades who died. As television cameras recorded the scene, a Thai farmer appeared and with considerable heat decried the ridiculous folly of these Westerners who attached so much importance to a few individuals. In his mind men are too insignificant to worry about a few people dying in a prison camp. His impatience simply reflected the wider Asian view of the smallness of the individual in the context of the whole. Because life is full of suffering and because this comes from the illusion of individual personality, the Easterner believes that man needs to lose that illusion if he is to find peace. He can erase the illusion through meditation and finding inner harmony with the forces behind the universe, hoping ultimately to be absorbed into the whole and escape from the wheel of existence. Until he can escape, he is doomed to endless reincarnations in the context of continual flux and change.

When East Meets West
The hopeless nihilism and despair of the Western world has little appeal to the East, but the impression of peace that comes from Eastern meditation and the thought of being in harmony with the whole of creation is very attractive to the West. The Westerner lives a frantic life as he seeks to crowd every experience he can into the few short years he spends on this earth. He works up considerable stress and in that state finds the quiet meditative approach of Buddhism a balm to his soul. Here is another way of living. This is the appeal of New Age thinking to the bustling Westerner. On the other hand, the Asian may be drawn to the thought of freedom from the burden of relationships and the responsibilities they bring. How wonderful not to have to consider the family in every decision, but to be able to do what you would like without a qualm of conscience!

The Christian Viewpoint
The Christian Scriptures teach that man is made in the image of God, for fellowship with God, and to worship and enjoy Him forever. Man is not made just for this world, but is destined to live forever in fellowship with his Maker. But the Scriptures show man in the beginning going disastrously wrong, choosing to live a life centered on himself and making his own destiny. History, the Christian believes, is God’s story of His working to redeem man and to bring him back to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of His own Son, Jesus Christ. Only the Son could redeem mankind because only He is worth all of mankind, and only He, the sinless, could die for the sinful. Therefore, only through Jesus Christ, the Christian learns, can man fulfill his destiny. Not only can he be reconciled to God in this life, but when Jesus Christ returns to earth, the Savior will deliver those who have put their faith in Him from the presence of sin and evil. Then those who have been redeemed will be freed from sin and sorrow, death, pain, separation and sickness. The Christian believes man is responsible and answerable to God for his life and, above all, for his attitude to Jesus Christ. If man chooses to reject His way, a costly and sacrificial way provided by God Himself, then man condemns himself to eternal separation from God. To reject an offer of reconciliation made possible by such a cost has to be the biggest insult a creature can offer the Creator.

D. The nature of sin

The Western Approach: Sin, an extreme offence against others.
Because modern Western man has no sense of God and has dismissed Him from his thinking, only serious moral offences against others count as sin. Even adultery, which used to be looked upon as a serious breach of conduct, can now be dismissed as “an affair,” a minor event. Lying, disobedience to parents, stealing, and the like may have social consequences and offend people, but they are breaches of the socially agreed standards rather than “sin.” “Original sin,” in the sense of a basic wrong bias in man’s nature, has been dismissed as out of date. Man is basically good, the West has decided, and therefore needs educating rather than saving from his sin and sinfulness. If he goes wrong, he is the victim of his heredity or his environment.

The Eastern Approach: Sin is bad manners, ungentlemanly conduct
In the Eastern mind right and wrong constitute two complementary parts rather than opposing sides to morality. Both are part of the whole and therefore balance each other. No more moral stigma attaches to right and wrong than to male and female, dark and light. Because wrong is usually visited with punishment and right with reward, wrong should be avoided. But the two do not cancel each other out. The Westerner balances his accounts in his mind between right and wrong to see whether he is in the red or in the black. The Easterner expects to receive evil in this life or the next for evil done in this
one, and good in this life or the next for the good he has done in this one. To the Easterner “sin,” therefore, does not have
the sense of moral turpitude. For that reason it does not need cleansing or blotting out. But sin breaches the harmony with
reality and therefore disturbs the peace of the whole. And sin offends against society in the sense that it intrudes into the
balance of harmony. The Asian sees man’s nature as basically good.

When East Meets West
Modern Eastern and Western viewpoints are not that far apart. “Sin” is no very serious matter. Both see man as beginning
with a basically good nature. People today are not aware of a God who will judge them and to whom they will one day
have to give an account of their actions. They see sin as needing education and treatment rather than meriting punishment
and judgment.

The Christian Viewpoint
Sin to the Christian is primarily an offence against God, the Creator of the universe and the final Judge. Man was created
“very good” but morally untested. When God commanded him not to eat of the “tree of the knowledge of good and
evil”(Genesis 2:17), man failed the moral test. Instead of trusting his Creator and believing that He meant what He said,
man reached for control of his own destiny, broke the commandment and rebelled against God. The Christian believes
that the sin of the first man has affected all human beings ever since, so that man is born with a warped nature and
proceeds through life in a spirit of rebellion against the will and rule of God. Man wants to be master of his own fate and
captain of his own soul, whereas in reality he is a mere creature before the almighty Creator, made to serve Him. Sins
flow out of this basically sinful nature of man, leading to offences against God and other men and women. Sin, therefore,
accounts for the horrifying history of man’s inhumanity to man and for man’s lost state, in which he cannot find his true
way. Christians maintain that this is not only the revealed truth about man, but also the only rational conclusion to be
drawn from the evils we see around us daily. Sin, therefore, is man’s basic problem. Moreover, when the first man sinned,
the Bible teaches that death entered the world in the form of separation from God, who is life. This leads in turn to the
separation of body and soul in death. As Paul expresses it in Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.” Sin therefore, not
only has disastrous consequences in this life and in society, but leads man to a lost eternity. Christianity is virtually the
only religion which teaches this fundamental truth, taking it from the revelation of God and not from the musings of men.
Lin Yu Tang understood the difference when he stated that before you can make a Chinese person a Christian you have to
make him a sinner, i.e., make him aware of the real situation. Western people need the same revelation of the truth.

E. Spiritual forces of evil

The Western Approach: The devil does not exist
From his viewpoint the average Westerner lives in a predetermined, mechanical, and material universe. As far as he is
concerned, spiritual forces do not exist. Belief in spirits, he supposes, arose in man’s primitive state through lack of
scientific understanding of the forces of nature. Alongside of disbelief in the unseen - in a reaction against the barrenness
of a purely materialistic universe - is the current revival of interest in the occult and the unseen. So horoscopes, ouija
boards, spiritualistic seances and healing, Satan worship, and the ancient pagan religions like Druidism attract popular
interest.

The Eastern Approach: Good and evil forces are complementary
The world to the Easterner is a spiritual world. Spiritual forces underlie what is seen, and they affect human beings.
Though some of these forces are evil spirits, and some are good spirits, they are not seen as hostile or opposed to one
another. Demons and good spirits are, in the Eastern mind, complementary parts of the one whole. Thus evil spirits must
be placated, lest they do harm, and good spirits must be worshiped so that they may bring the worshiper blessing and good
luck.

When East Meets West
Many so-called “free thinkers” in Asia have turned way from the more superstitious practices of their parents and have
adopted the secular outlook of the West. Where English has become a major language of education, this shifting of
viewpoint proceeds faster. Communism, which is basically a Western ideology, has also campaigned, with limited
success, to eliminate a belief in spiritual forces in China. At the same time, the West shows increasing interest in all forms
of Eastern spirituality as manifested in the Maharaja and other Indian gurus and in Buddhism. Materialism creates a
spiritual desert, where travelers through life look for any oasis in the dryness.
The Christian Viewpoint

Because God, the Creator of the universe, is Spirit, the Christian believes that the ultimate reality is spiritual and that man, made in the image of God, is created for fellowship with Him. Right in the beginning, Scripture indicates, angelic forces rebelled against the rule of God. Since being cast out from Heaven, they have waged incessant warfare against God and His creation, continuing to the present day. While evil forces hate and oppose God, Christians believe, they are not equal in power with Him and will ultimately be judged and condemned. In the meantime, the Christian Scriptures teach, the devil is “the prince of this world, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (John 12:31, Ephesians 2:2). But on the cross, Jesus, the Son of God, executed judgment on the devil and “disarmed the powers and authorities,” making a spectacle of them and “triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2:15). The force of the gospel now is to open people’s eyes and to “turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 26:18).

F. Attitude to ancestor worship

The Western Approach: Dismissed as superstition

The Western man looks on ancestor worship as superstitious. With his individualistic outlook, the secular Westerner even has some doubts about the value of the family as an important building block of society. He is concerned for his children, but may not care for his parents when they are elderly. His interest in his ancestors is largely limited to tracing his family tree.

The Eastern Approach: A vital link with history and the whole of reality

Chinese people have worshiped their ancestors since long before the time of Confucius. The link of family worship can, in fact, be traced back as long as five thousand years. Many modern young people may not believe that the spirits of the ancestors will really come to haunt them if they do not worship them, or that those spirits will wander about, homeless and starved if they do not offer food to them; but so long a chain of tradition creates a strong emotional pull to conform. In any case, why risk the possibility of bad luck by breaking the chain? Moreover, by not continuing the worship, the individual is not only dishonoring his own parents in the eyes of society, but interrupting the harmony of the universe that has come down through the centuries and has been preserved by right rituals. Even if an individual does not believe this for himself, he has to be very strong to make a break. I sometimes use as an illustration of the emotional difficulty Asians find in breaking with such a long tradition my own difficulty in breaking what I have been taught is right. When I sit down to a meal, as an Englishman I have always been taught that the correct way to ask for the salt is to ask for the salt is to ask my neighbor if he would like it. This is the polite way of asking him to help himself first and then pass it on to me. In America I would receive the answer, “No, thank you,” and that would be that. Americans are very direct, and if you want the salt in America, you simply ask for it. The American cannot see why I need to go in a roundabout way. But Asians cannot see why we need to talk at all. If you want the salt, stretch out your hand and take it. As you will likely be sitting at a round table, the salt is usually within reach in any case. But this is where my problem begins. Every time I reach for the salt in an Asian context, I hear my mother smacking my hand and saying, “Don’t be rude; if you want the salt, ask for it properly.” My mind knows that to reach for the salt is perfectly acceptable in Asia, but my emotional roots make it very hard for me to do so. How much more with a tradition that goes back more than five thousand years!

When East Meets West

The Westerner tends to be rather dismissive of the practice of ancestor worship and does not understand the long history or the outlook that accompanies it. At worst, he sees it as harmless superstition, at best as a praiseworthy respect for previous generations. For the Easterner, ancestor worship is an integral part of his psyche, closely connected with his love and concern for his parents. He finds it desperately difficult to break from what he probably sees at worst as a useless superstition and at best as a real necessity to preserve blessing for his family.

The Christian Viewpoint

The worship of idols and spirits was common in the Mediterranean world, where the gospel was first proclaimed. Early Christians differed in their viewpoint about offering food to idols. Some considered that as the idols represented only gods who were not really gods at all, believers were strong enough to eat the food offered to idols without any contamination. Others believed that because evil spirits were behind the gods to whom the food was offered, Christians must break with the practice or be influenced by those spirits. For this reason the apostle Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10:14-32 are today absolutely up to date in an Asian situation. The discussion still continues among Asian Christians, but the
consensus among evangelical Christians is that ancestor worship is too connected with spirit forces to be harmless and that therefore Christians cannot continue to practice it. This often leads to real difficulty for new believers.

Attitudes to doctrine and dogma

The Western Approach: Impatience and rejection

Because he has cast off the idea of God, the modern Westerner dislikes any kind of authority in religion. Unless God has revealed Himself and given a reliable source of information, everyone, he feels, is guessing about what God is like. As modern man has rejected the possibility of revelation, he sees any claim to authority as arrogant. He therefore caricatures such views as “Fundamentalism,” a useful and emotive way of dismissing a view as bigoted and fanatical, however reasonably presented.

The Eastern Approach: Practice is important, doctrine is minimal

What you do makes the difference in Asian religions. Since God is viewed as “everything there is”, no one can define everything there is very accurately. Worship, meditation, alms-giving, and other practices maintain the harmony of the universe. Because what a person believes about the nature of the forces behind the universe matters very little to the Asian, doctrine plays a very small part in Asian religions. While most Thai Buddhists have no real understanding of the eightfold path and other elements of pure Buddhism, they do know that offering rice to the monks in the morning and adding gold leaf to the temple will make them merit. To these people, what a person does is more important than what he believes.

When East Meets West

Most Westerners who study Asian religions study them in their pure form. With their historical background of Christian thinking and the importance of true doctrine in Christianity, the Westerner wants to know the doctrines of another religion. He does not usually realize the emphasis on practice as opposed to belief. On the other hand, when Asian people become Christians, they tend to emphasize the importance of what Christians do in terms of worship, offerings, rituals, and festivals, rather than on the basic beliefs on which all practices are based.

The Christian Viewpoint

The Christian believes that God and His will can be known, because God Himself has revealed Himself. He has told us what He is like and what He requires of us. In the person of Jesus Christ, Himself God, He has come to earth as the living Word and revealed to us the way in which we should live. While on earth Jesus claimed to be the way, the truth, and the life, and that without Him no one can come to God to approach Him (John 14:6). Revelation therefore has content and, like the statement of Jesus above, is either true or false. That makes doctrine very important indeed and explains why Christians have always insisted on true loyalty to Biblical truth. What we do flows from what we believe, so that faith comes before works, though works are expected to follow. Believing right things about God, Jesus Christ, life, death, Heaven and Hell determine the eternal destiny of men and women. If God has revealed to man what He is like, then we have to conform our idea of God and of the meaning of life to that revelation. To believe God’s revelation is not therefore the arrogance of self-importance, but the humility of submission to the Word of the Almighty. True doctrine is vital.

H. Approach to prayer

The Western Approach: Asking God to change His will or His mind

Many Western people still have a lingering belief that somehow prayer may help. A person may aver that he or she does not believe in God or may claim to be “agnostic,” but may still turn to prayer at certain times. Prayer to most Westerners is a means by which a “religious” person seeks to get God to change his or her circumstances. We ask God for a fine day for an occasion, for healing for sickness, for blessing on a wedding. Prayer is an emergency weapon when all else has failed and when a situation becomes desperate.

The Eastern Approach: Prayer is seeking harmony with the whole

Eastern people operate at two levels. The ordinary person concerned to change his circumstances will use all the means of religion to assist him in his pursuit—mostly folk religion, which operates at a different level from the basic philosophy of the East. People approach the gods with the right offerings to bring rain, to obtain a child, and to find out the winner of the lottery. On the higher level, however, prayer is more a means of obtaining and maintaining harmony with the universe or the whole of reality. Prayer does not therefore consist in asking, but in meditating, in listening, in thinking quietly, in allowing the whole being to be at peace.
When East Meets West

Many Western Christians tend to make asking the major part of prayer. So prayer meetings often consist in “shopping-list” sessions, where praying people tell God all the things that they want Him to do for them. This stems, at least partly, from our Western individualistic approach and also from our desire to see our program forwarded. The Eastern practice of listening and relating has much to teach the busy Westerner. He does not have to meditate in a void or seek to relate to reality as a whole, but he can learn to meditate on the truth of God and allow it to penetrate and saturate his thinking.