

KITAMORI KAZU AND THE PAIN OF GOD

An Expository Review of an Asian Theology

By Chua How Chuang

PREAMBLE

The story of the recession of Christianity in the West and its advance in other parts of the world in the twentieth century has given rise to what Andrew Walls calls "the post-Christian West and post-Western Christianity." With the rapid growth of Christianity in the non-Western world - undeniably the fruit of the modern missionary movement - the need for theology to be relevant to particular contexts has never been more urgent. It is not surprising therefore to find since the debut of the word *contextualization* in the report of the Theological Education Fund (TEF) of the World Council of Churches in 1972, there has been a proliferation of writings calling for an evaluation of the theological task (e.g. Nicholls 1979, Shorter 1988, Whiteman 1997, Bevans 2002). While the necessity for local theologies to be constructed is hardly in dispute today, what is surprising is that not a lot of actual theologies has been written, especially in a way that does not compromise the integrity of the biblical message.

This essay is not an attempt in that direction. But rather than putting forward the rationale (again) for the need to theologize in a non-Western context, this essay proposes to look at and evaluate a piece of actual and original theological construction by a Japanese theologian. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate thought and discussion on the missiological possibilities and challenges in the "messy" work of contextual theologizing.

THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE IMPASSIBILITY

For the major part of the history of the church, the notion of divine impassibility was taken so much for granted that until recently, it was never really critically examined at all. In all probability *impassibilitas Dei* as a divine attribute came to be accepted as theologically axiomatic after a string of debates over the relations between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the divine Godhead in the third century (cf. McWilliams 1980: 35).

Fiercely-committed monotheists such as Praxeas, Epigonus, and Noetus sought to refute the potential heresy of tritheism by emphasizing the identity of the Son with the Father. Such teaching, however, is problematic for its failure to maintain a clear distinction between the persons of the Trinity, and its necessary implication that God the Father suffered and died in the crucifixion of Christ. This view, known as patripassianism, was rigorously refuted by Hippolytus and Tertullian. In their total rejection of patripassianism - and later, theopaschitism, the notion that the whole Godhead suffered on the cross - the early church fathers unwittingly applied the Stoic ideal of the human person as one who is in full mastery of his/her emotions

onto divine personhood. In other words, the divine ideal was postulated as the inability to experience any pain or suffering.¹ The concept of divine impassibility as we have it today was actually shaped by Thomas Aquinas who, influenced by Aristotelian metaphysics, defined God as an "Unmoved Mover", a pure being with pure actuality and no potentiality (Erickson 1983: 158). God's impassibility as such is understood to mean that God cannot be acted upon or affected emotionally by anything in creation.²

If we believe that God is actively engaged with humankind, why should we not believe that in His compassion He does indeed share in human suffering?

The notion that God cannot suffer, however, has come to be seriously challenged, especially in the last fifty years following the end of the Second World War. The Jewish Holocaust, and the atomic catastrophes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki provided disturbing material that fueled a theological re-evaluation of the infinite Barthian opposition between

God and humans. Christian philosopher Charles Hartshorne (1948) fired the first volley in the debate by asking the question if God could *really* be intelligible to humans if He were impassible. The metaphysical challenge to divine impassibility was so potent that Daniel Day Williams (1967: 172) could claim that it led to a "structural shift in the Christian mind". In the 1970s, a fresh wave of critiques was launched against the notion of divine impassibility, this time by theologians, such as Jürgen Moltmann (1974), James Cone (1975), and Geddes McGregor (1975). Their point is simple: If we believe that God is actively engaged with humankind, why should we not believe that in His compassion He does indeed share in human suffering?

The debate is, of course, not confined to the West. Asian Christians have always thought the notion of divine impassibility unintuitive and strange (see Lee 1974; Kwok 1984; Koyama 1999). Indeed one of the earliest and most provocative analyses on the suffering God came from a Japanese theologian-pastor, Kitamori Kazō (1916-98).³ Kitamori's groundbreaking work, popularly known as *kami no itami no shingaku* (Theology of the Pain of God), was first published in Japanese under the same name in 1946, only a year after the end of the second world war. Kitamori's goal in writing the book is to "convert a villainous theology which teaches that God has no pain" (1992: 29).⁴ This one book was to catapult Kitamori to domestic and international prominence.⁵ In 1960, with the help of some Japanese Christians, American theologian Carl Michalson explored Kitamori's theology and introduced it to the English-speaking world, describing it as a "system with a soul" (1960: 125). Michalson's work created such strong interest among Western theologians that it led to the English translation

of the fifth edition of Kitamori's book in 1965.⁶ The following year, Kitamori earned the international recognition of "having produced the first indigenous Japanese theology" (Yamamoto 1966: 40).⁷

The main concern of this paper is to explicate Kitamori's understanding of divine passibility, which he describes using the expression "pain of God". Before discussing the contents of his theology, we will sketch a brief biography of his life. We shall then focus on these salient aspects of his theology: (1) the exegesis behind the concept of divine pain; (2) the nature of the love of God, and the relationship between divine love and divine pain; (3) the dialectical relationship between divine pain and Christology; and (4) the relationship between divine pain and human suffering. We will also examine Kitamori's theological methodology, especially in the way he relates the Bible to his cultural context. Finally some missiological reflections will be offered as we seek to draw some lessons from Kitamori that can be applied to the task of theological contextualization.

BIOGRAPHY OF KITAMORI KAZŌ: 1916-1998

Kitamori Kazō was born in Kumamoto on the southern island of Kyushu in 1916. While at high school he encountered the witness of Lutheran missionaries, which led to his conversion and baptism. Kitamori, like all Lutherans of his day, read Young Luther, an extremely popular book written by the Japanese Lutheran scholar, Sato Shigehiko (1887-1935). Sato had actually taught at the Lutheran seminary in Kitamori's native Kumamoto for two years before pursuing further Lutheran studies in Germany under Karl Holl from 1922 to 1924. In any case, the young Kitamori was so impressed by Sato's work that he decided to pursue studies on Luther himself.

As Sato was at that time teaching at the Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary in Tokyo, Kitamori decided to enroll in that seminary upon completion of high school in 1935. It was unfortunate that Kitamori was not able to study under Sato as the latter died that same year. Still, Kitamori received a solid education in Lutheran theology, and graduated from the seminary in 1938. In his first year at seminary, Kitamori read the book of Jeremiah, and wrote a theological essay on the pain of God.⁸ After seminary, Kitamori entered the philosophy department of the prestigious Kyoto Imperial University where he did graduate studies under Tanabe Hajime. Kitamori graduated in 1941, and remained at the university over the next two years working as a teaching assistant.

In 1943, Kitamori received an appointment to teach systematic theology at the Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, which he did so until his retirement in 1984. Throughout most of his years as seminary professor, Kitamori also pastored Chitose Funabashi Church, a church that he founded in 1950 under the *Kyōdan* denomination.⁹ The whole denomination

the war, and Kitamori helped reorganize it and even drafted its Confession of Faith. Although he remained within the *Kyōdan* for the rest of his life, Kitamori was unwaveringly Lutheran in his theology. He refers to Luther as "our pioneer and guide (*sendatsu*) in matters of faith" (1992: 164). In particular, following Luther's *theologia crucis*, Kitamori insists that "to understand everything one must proceed from the Christ of the cross" (:74). For Kitamori, the actuality of the cross is the foundation of all theological thought (*ibid.*).

THEOLOGY OF THE PAIN OF GOD

1 EXEGESIS

It was through the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah that Kitamori was led "to see the heart of God most deeply" (:24). He draws an interesting parallel between Jeremiah and Paul, calling Jeremiah "the Paul of the Old Testament," and conversely, Paul "the Jeremiah of the New Testament" (*ibid.*). Moreover, "'God on the cross' as revealed to Paul is for Jeremiah 'God in pain'" (*ibid.*).

The verse that ignited Kitamori's thought on divine pain is Jeremiah 31:20. In the King James Version,¹⁰ the verse reads:

Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child?
For since I spake against him, I do earnestly
remember him still; therefore my bowels are
troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him,
saith the Lord.

In this verse, the expression "my bowels are troubled" is translated from the Hebrew *hāmû mē 'ay* comprising two lexical items: the verb *hāmāh*, and the noun *mē 'eh*. The latter refers literally to one's intestines or inward parts. In this context, it is used figuratively to refer to the seat of emotions, and is appropriately translated into English as "heart". According to the Theological Workbook of the Old Testament (BibleWorks 6.0), the verb *hāmāh* means to "cry aloud, mourn, rage, roar, sound; make noise, tumult; be clamorous, disquieted, loud, moved, troubled, in an uproar." In the context of this verse, Kitamori sees this verb as describing the heart of God in an emotional state of turmoil, anguish and restlessness (1992: 259). Kitamori's interpretation can be validated from the way *hāmû mē 'ay* is rendered as *bricht mir mein Herz* (literally, "my heart is broken") in Luther's Version, or as "my heart bursts with longing" in Eugene Peterson's paraphrase *The Message*. In the Japanese Literary Version, the translated expression is *waga harawata itamu* (literally, "my insides are in pain").

Kitamori did a further word study on *hāmāh* from Jeremiah 4:19, Jeremiah 48:36, Psalm 39:6, Psalm 55:17, Psalm 77:3, and Isaiah 16:11, and concluded that the very heart of God can be apprehended analogically from human emotions. Indeed there is no way to understand the pain of God other than through the Thomist "analogy of existence" (1965: 153). In other words, human experience of pain is the only means

example of the parable of the Prodigal Son, a story told by Jesus so that “we are permitted to know the heart of God by means of events that happen in the world of men” (:152). Returning to Jeremiah 31:20, Kitamori (1965: 153) comments, “Jeremiah must have seen in God the same condition of the heart which the prophets and psalmists themselves experienced. What kind of condition? The pain! The pain of God!” In other words, Jeremiah saw the severest compassion of God’s love toward sinners, and appropriately used the word “pain” to describe it. Kitamori (:154) justifies his interpretation of Jeremiah by citing John Calvin’s commentary on this verse:

God enhances the reconciling grace further by saying, ‘therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him.’ Here God attributes human feelings to himself; for our bowels are shaken and roar under extraordinary ‘pain’ (dolor), and we sigh and groan deeply under the pressure of great sorrow. God, therefore, expresses his feelings as an affectionate father: ‘my bowels are troubled’ [literally “roar”] in accepting his people back in his grace... God’s nature is to feel this way.

To strengthen his case, Kitamori quotes a whole host of other commentators, including C.F. Keil’s comment that “God suffers pain on account of Ephraim his son” (:155). In sum, Kitamori’s exegesis led him to the insight that the pain of God is engendered when God refuses to stop loving those who turn against him. Anticipating a common objection, Kitamori (1992: 11) is quick to point out that divine pain is therefore not to be understood in the substantive sense (*jittai gainen*), but only in the relational sense (*kankei gainen*).

Next, Kitamori observes that the word *hāmāh* is also used in Isaiah 63:15, but in this context, it refers not to divine pain but to divine love (:156-57). He concludes that the Hebrew word *hāmāh* carries the semantic content of pain and love simultaneously (:157). This linguistic paradox is “not simply a mystery of language, but also a mystery of grace” (ibid).¹¹ If Kitamori is right, the question to ask then is this: How should we understand the relationship between love and pain? Here is where Kitamori’s theological creativity becomes most evident.

II. THE NATURE OF GOD’S LOVE: THREE ORDERS OF LOVE

Using Augustine’s concept of *ordo amoris*, Kitamori (1965: 117) suggests that the love of God can be understood as comprising three orders: (1) the immediate love of God, (2) the pain of God, and (3) the intent love rooted in the pain of God.

(A) THE IMMEDIATE LOVE OF GOD

The object of the immediate love of God is the person who is completely worthy of receiving it. Such a person is loved directly by God without mediation. This is the love that exists ontologically within the Godhead. The Father loves His completely obedient Son with a full and immediate love. God’s love for Adam and Eve in their pre-Fall state was also an immediate love. Sin, however, betrayed that love. Because

sin has come in between God and humans, God is no longer able to love human beings with an immediate love. Moreover, mediated by sin, divine love can only turn into divine wrath (1965: 118). And as a result of the universal effects of sin on humankind, all humans have now become objects of His wrath.

(B) THE PAIN OF GOD

The righteousness of God demands that sin should never be forgiven. Yet the scandal of the gospel is that God has acted in an “ungodlike” and “improper” way (:119). Instead of repulsing those who must be repulsed, God desires to forgive sin, and enfold (*tsutsumu*) and embrace (*daku*) the sinner (Kitamori 1992: 204-205). The gospel is indeed hard to believe, but it is true: God *still* loves the sinner who has lost all claim to be loved. However, as Kitamori (:155) points out, divine love is not a smooth and easy love, for it is “the love for the enemy” (Rom 5:10). There is a real conflict within God Himself between His love and His wrath. And that conflict engenders pain: “God who must sentence sinners to death fought with God who wishes to love them. The fact that this fighting God is not two different gods but the same God causes his pain. Here heart is opposed to heart within God” (1965: 21). The pain of God is most fully manifested at Golgotha, the site where “God fought with God” (1992: 28). For on the cross, not only was the love of God supremely revealed, but so was the wrath of God. Citing Theodosius Harnack’s interpretation of Luther, Kitamori argues that divine pain is the “tertiary” (*tertium*) that unites the wrath of God and the love of God (ibid). Kitamori elaborates,

The Lord [Jesus] wants to heal our wounds, which were caused by God’s wrath; this Lord suffers wounds, himself receiving his wrath. “... with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53: 5)... The Lord was unable to resolve our death without putting himself to death. God himself was broken, was wounded, and suffered, because he embraced those who should not be embraced. By embracing our reality, God grants us absolute peace. *But the peace has been completely taken away from the Lord who grants us absolute peace.* “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (1965: 22, emphasis in text).

In sum, in order to secure atonement for humankind, it was necessary for God to experience deep pain through the unspeakable suffering and ultimate sacrifice of His Son. Only then would divine wrath be placated and divine love realized.

(C) THE INTENT LOVE ROOTED IN THE PAIN OF GOD

Herein lies a deep divine mystery. The death of Christ results in *mors mortis*, the death of death (so John Owen). For the resurrection of Christ vindicates His death, and demonstrates the victory of the pain of God: divine love has conquered divine wrath! Forgiveness of sin is now not only a possibility; it has become an actuality. God is now able to welcome sinners back as His reconciled children, in the same way the waiting father welcomes the prodigal son home. Our wounds have been healed by Christ’s wounds, and our pain saved by God’s pain. The victory of divine pain is “the intent love rooted in the



pain of God" (:94). Yet, argues Kitamori, while God is now able to love us freely, He is still not able to love us immediately (:123). For God's love for us will always be mediated by divine pain. The reason is that the intent love of God is "constantly being shipwrecked" by sin (ibid). By this Kitamori seems to mean that even though we who are forgiven are delivered from the penalty and power of sin, we are still not delivered from the presence of sin. The reality of sin's presence continues to pose a constant threat to our faith, seeking to drive a wedge between us and the love of God. For this reason, it is important for Christians to live a crucified life (Gal 2:20), remembering always "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).

Translating the knowledge of "Jesus Christ and him crucified" into the language of divine pain, Kitamori stresses that it is only within the pain of God that we are sheltered and protected from the wrath of God (1965: 123-24). "God's pain is truly our peaceful abode... [for it] results from the love of the one who intercepts and blocks divine wrath from us" (ibid). Kitamori (:126) tells this fascinating parable to illustrate his point:

A traveler is walking across a field in summer, when suddenly a thunderstorm breaks out above him. There is neither tree nor habitation; the traveler must walk on alone, in danger of being struck by lightning at any moment. Around him the lightning is striking here and there; in a minute it may strike him dead. But look! A mysterious hand is stretched over the traveler, covering and protecting him. Guarded by this loving hand, he can safely walk on through the thunderstorm. Because of that wonderful hand the lightning will not touch him. But look further. Like a linen cloth pierced by countless bullets, the hand which protects the traveler is being repeatedly struck by the lightning. This protecting hand is catching and intercepting the thunderbolts, which should fall on the traveler.

In other words, the forgiven and reconciled sinner is called to trust and fear God at the same time. When a person puts his/her wholehearted trust in God's intent love, a love rooted in His pain, s/he can be fully assured of God's love protection to the point of knowing that "even the very hairs of [his/her] head are all numbered" (Lk 12:7). Yet it is this same God that one needs to fear. Outside of God there is power that is capable of destroying us, but it can never destroy us completely the way that only God, by virtue of His wrath, can (Lk 12:4-5). It is hence imperative that the one who has been forgiven as a result of the pain of God lives his/her life in such a way that s/he is always within the protection of His intent love.

Kitamori does not say if the intent love rooted in the pain of God ever becomes an immediate love. He does mention the theological reality of an incomplete and unfulfilled sanctification as long as we are in this world (1965: 143). The fact is that as long as sin is present, the love of God will remain in an unresolved condition. But that is not a critical problem, for we do have an eschatological hope in a glorious End, when the suffering of the world, corresponding to the pain of God, is completely diffused (1992: 241).¹² Presumably, then and only then will the pain of God be fully resolved, the expected consequence of which is that humans will once again become the objects of God's immediate love.

(3) THE DIALECTAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIVINE PAIN AND CHRISTOLOGY

According to Kitamori, there is a "purposeful structure" between Christ and divine pain (1972:84). Here he constructs a dialectal relationship between divine pain and Christology by tracing a double movement between the pain of God and the historical Jesus. The first movement is that of Christology reflecting theology. Kitamori argues that it is only when we recognize the birth and death of Jesus Christ as "the pain of God", and His resurrection as "the love rooted in the pain of God" that the facts of the historical Jesus become "the fact of the gospel" (1965: 33).

Indeed the Christmas story is a story of not only of joy, but also intense suffering. The slaughter of the innocents and the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt (Mt 2:13-18) are very much part of the Christmas narrative. Too often we hear a sanitized version of the Christmas story with these painful episodes edited out. Yet it is through these very episodes that we catch a glimpse of the reality of divine pain. In the same vein, the resurrection of Christ makes sense only in the light of the crucifixion, that is, the pain of God. Only then can we appreciate the resurrection not just as victory over death, but as love rooted in the pain of God.

The reverse movement from the pain of God to the historical Jesus is equally important. Following William Wrede, Kitamori insists that belief in the heavenly Christ must precede belief in the historical Jesus (1965: 33). In other words, the historical Jesus did not become Christ by virtue of what He did; rather the divine Christ, the eternal Word of God, became flesh and dwelt among humans (Jn 1:14). Through the Incarnation, the pain of God entered the historical plane as a person (1965:34).

In fact Kitamori further argues that the pain of God implies the necessity of the *historical* Jesus. Referring to Luther, Kitamori (:35) stresses that the pain of God deals with "real sin" (*verum peccatum*), and not "imaginary sin" (*fictum peccatum*). Since the historical world is the world of real sin, the only way for the divine Christ to personify the pain of God is by becoming a real, historical person (ibid). For only a real, historical person can bear the responsibility of real sin. This point certainly presents a potent argument against the pluralist notion (common especially in Asia) that truth has to be ahistorical in order to be universal (cf. Ramachandra 1996: 126-30).

The scandal of historical particularity is that it serves the universal purpose of salvation. Moreover, as Kitamori points out, it is only the decisive mediation of divine pain in the context of human history that can serve to refute every sort of docetism (1965: 35).

In sum, the whole life of Jesus was one of *via dolorosa*, the way of pain (:43). Jesus was born to die. "The whole act of God's entering into the world itself already implied his death. Not his death, but his birth meant the pain of God for Christ" (ibid). For this reason, argues Kitamori, John 1:14 is incomprehensible without John 3:16.

(4) DIVINE PAIN AND HUMAN PAIN

One of the wondrous implications of the Incarnation is that in person of the God-man Jesus we see the unity of divine pain and human pain (:56). This means that God knows our pain and suffering. For not only is the Son the object of God's pain, but through the Son all human beings have become the objects of God's pain as well (:57). Kitamori would even go so far as to say that "[s]ince he [God] is the Father of mankind, he also experiences pain when we suffer" (ibid).

In the light of divine pain, how then should humans deal with their pain? Kitamori focuses on three areas in this discussion: service, mysticism, and ethics. First, he calls all Christians "to serve the pain of God" by following the Lord of the cross (:51). By this he means that we are to accept our pain and use it as a testimony to divine pain (:54). In so doing, "our pain is transformed into light; it becomes meaningful and fruitful" (:52). On this point, Kitamori is rather vague - he does not quite explain how we can concretely use our pain to witness to the pain of God. He does, however, hold up the example of Abraham to show how the latter served God by his willingness to sacrifice his son at God's command even though it must have been a most painful decision for him (:50-51). For this reason, Kitamori prefers to call Abraham the "father of service to God" rather than "father of faith" (:50). Human pain finds healing only when it serves the pain of God (:52).

According to Kitamori, the Bible teaches two ways in which humans can render service to divine pain. The first is "to let our loved ones suffer and die" (:81, emphasis in text). In so doing, we are witnessing to the pain of God, since we experience the pain of God the Father who let His beloved Son suffer and die. The thought here is that we need to trust God when our loved ones suffer and die, because He knows precisely the pain involved. This is a powerful theological counterpoint to the health and healing industry so rampant in the modern church today.

The second means by which to render service to the pain of God is "for us to suffer and die" (ibid, emphasis in text). When we allow ourselves to suffer, we are witnessing to the pain of God because we identify with God the Son entering pain and dying. In sum, to serve the pain of God with our pain is, in biblical jargon, to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus (Mt 16:24). It is to recognize and accept that our calling as Christians is one of pain and suffering (cf. 1 Pet 4:12-19).

Next, there is a mystical dimension to serving divine pain with human pain. Both Paul and Peter speak of our union with Christ in His suffering, death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-5; Gal 2:20; Gal 5:24; 2 Cor 1:5; Phi 3:10; 1 Pet 2:21; 1 Pet 4:13). Indeed the expression "in Christ", scattered throughout the Paul's letters, assumes this mystical union. Kitamori applies this spiritual reality to relate human pain to divine pain: the suffering Christian is absorbed in the pain of God and become one with Him in pain (1965:71). Kitamori (ibid) believes that this is what Paul meant when he taught that "we who have been baptized into Christ

were baptized into His death" (Rom 6:3). The mysticism of being united in Christ is the mysticism of pain (:72).

Here Kitamori anticipates a problem in his theological system. The defining characteristic of mysticism is in its immediacy. However, because the love of God rooted in pain is not an immediate love, in what sense can we then claim a sound mysticism of pain, of becoming one with God in pain? Kitamori resolves this problem by appealing to his Lutheran heritage. Christian mysticism, he argues, must be based on the doctrine of justification (:74). True faith is solafideist. Citing Galatians 2:20, Kitamori shows that justification necessarily leads to mysticism (:75). Confident that we are justified by divine grace through faith, Kitamori asserts that "in the mysticism of divine pain, we become immediately at one with God who denies immediacy" (1992:123). It must be said, however, that in spite of Kitamori's creative theologizing, his explication of the mysticism of pain remains rather opaque to understanding.

What is clear though, is that the mysticism of pain creates an ethic of pain. That is, union with Christ places ethical demands on the believer. First, s/he is called to put to death all that belongs to the flesh (Col 3:5; Gal 5:24). Kitamori (1965:77) suggests that "[t]he most effective method to destroy sin is to constantly lay the pain of God on ourselves." In other words, we are constantly to remind ourselves of our oneness with Christ and His pain. When we do that, the lusts and desires of the flesh will lose their grip on us. But we do not overcome sin with our own strength. For the love of God rooted in the pain of God produces the gift ethical sanctification through the empowering of the Holy Spirit (ibid). Our response is to "walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16), "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18), and live such that we "do not grieve the Holy Spirit" (Eph 4:27).

Second, because of the unity and commonality of humankind, we can feel our neighbor's pain as intensely as our own (1965:86). Kitamori defines "neighbors" to include both believers and non-believers (:89). Pain and suffering are existential human realities everywhere, but only the believer is able to make sense of pain and suffering because of his/her understanding of divine pain. For this reason, the believer has the ethical responsibility of showing the way to the unbeliever. Kitamori (:90) elaborates, "When the believer who has felt the pain of God in his heart loves his unbelieving neighbor as intensely as himself, the unbeliever is borne on the body of the believer into God's pain." In the process, the unbeliever is "transferred from darkness to light," and becomes a believer (ibid). When the believer shares the pain of his/her neighbor and relates it to the pain of God, then s/he is truly living out his/her calling as "light of the world" (Mt 5:14). Here we see divine pain realizing an ethic of pain, which in turn leads to faith (1965: 86).

Before we leave this section, a final word is in order. Earlier we mentioned that it is in the person of Jesus that we see the unity of divine pain and human pain. Kitamori sees the church, being the extension of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, as now tasked with the responsibilities of bearing the pain of God in the world and relating human reality to

(1985:123) himself refers to the way Basil the Great (330-397) rejected substance as an ontological category in describing the Godhead, and in its place used the concept of communion: "Instead of speaking of the unity of God in terms of His one nature, he (Basil) prefers to speak of it in terms of the *communion of persons*: communion is for Basil an ontological category. The *nature of God is communion*" (emphasis in the original). Since the love between the three trinitarian persons is an immediate love, there cannot be eternal pain with God, contrary to Kitamori's assertion (1965: 123). How does Kitamori's theology fit into Cappadocian trinitarianism? Or are the two systems so completely different that no fit is possible? This is a problem that needs to be addressed if Kitamori's theology is to be a complement to other contextualized theologies (cf. Hiebert 1994: 93-103; Bevans 2002: 28-33).

Ultimately all language expressing divine realities is necessarily anthropomorphic or anthropopathic. But this does not mean that we uncritically and unilaterally impose our human categories on our theology. The possibility of God-talk is predicated on the theological fact that God always speaks in human terms. Nonetheless, theologians need to constantly wrestle with the nature and limits of God-talk, for there is the ever-lurking danger of humans creating God in their own image. On this matter, Kitamori seems to be rather uncritical. For instance, extrapolating from 2 Corinthians 4:10 Paul's teaching that we must always bear in our bodies the death of Jesus, Kitamori concludes, rather curiously, that "Jesus will be in agony even to the end of the world" (:64).

Missiologically, there is much to glean from Kitamori's wisdom. Kitamori has shown how cross-cultural theology is best done: not by confrontation between East and West, nor by mutual indifference, but through respectful conversation. Next, if we truly believe, as Kitamori does, that "the answer to every human problem lies in the gospel", then our theology must engage lived human realities. The existential problem of pain and suffering is a human universal, and simply cannot be ignored in both our theologizing and missiologizing.

For Kitamori, "theology begins with wonder" (1962:45). It should also end in wonder. Kitamori's theology passed the test on both counts. Kitamori certainly stirs up within the reader a fresh wonder for the mystery of the Atonement, and a deepened gratitude for the gift of salvation. Indeed the yardstick by which to assess any theology is that theology's ability to instill praise for God. In the words of J.I. Packer, "theology must always lead to doxology."



CHUA HOW CHUANG served as an OMF church planter in Japan. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D in Intercultural Studies at Trinity International University, Illinois.

NOTES

¹There are, of course, biblical passages that have been used to support divine impassability, such as Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 110:4; Jeremiah 4:28, etc. These are the same

unchangeableness), a doctrine that is often held in tandem with divine impassability. The Bible does speak of God acting and feeling like a human being, but the argument is that such language is to be regarded as purely anthropomorphic or anthropopathic. This is, of course, rhetorical, since descriptions of divine impassibility are also couched in anthropomorphic or anthropopathic language, albeit negatively (e.g. Num 23:19).

²J.I. Packer describes the impassable God as a God locked in a "frozen pose" (personal communication).

³Following Japanese convention, Japanese names are cited with the family name first. The romanization of Japanese words follows the familiar "modified Hepburn" system. An important point to note is that in the older system, the long vowel *ō* in the final position of a word is rendered *oh*. Hence we often see "Kitamori Kazoh" instead of "Kitamori Kazō". For the purpose of this paper, the latter transliteration is used. Also, in the case of well-known names of people and places, such as Tokyo, long-vowel macrons are omitted (i.e. Tokyo instead of Tōkyō).

⁴The Japanese version of Kitamori's book referred to in this paper is the 9th edition. The English translation of quotations taken from this book is mine, and each citation is referenced by the year of publication 1992.

⁵It must be said that during the first few years of its publication, Kitamori's book was not well received by Japanese theologians. Yagi Seiichi (1997: 88) offers three reasons for this. First, many thought that Kitamori's ideas were patristicist. Second, Kitamori criticized Barthian theology at a time when it was predominant in Japan. And finally, Kitamori's theology was perceived by some to be a veiled justification of Japanese culture, at a time when Japanese tradition was regarded very unfavorably as a result of Japan's tragic defeat in the war.

⁶This is the English translation referred to in this paper: *Theology of the Pain of God*, tr. M.E. Bratcher (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1965). Citations from this English version will be referenced by the year of publication 1965.

⁷The 12th edition of Kitamori's work was published in 1995. The book has also been translated into German (1972), Spanish (1975), Italian (1975), and Korean (1987).

⁸It is easy to attribute the theme of Kitamori's theology to the suffering of the Japanese as a result of the country's defeat in the Second World War. The fact is that Kitamori reflected on the pain of God fully ten years before the end of the war. It is true that the circumstances surrounding the war gave greater relevance to Kitamori's ideas and brought them into sharp focus. That notwithstanding, Kitamori insists that divine pain is a fundamental biblical theme and constitutes "the very heart of the gospel" (1992: 24).

⁹*Kyōdan* is short for *Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan*, literally, the United Church of Christ in Japan.

¹⁰The King James Version is the closest to the Japanese Literary Version, the version that Kitamori used. Both versions are similar in linguistic style.

¹¹At this point, it is important to note that, contrary to what some have supposed, Kitamori did not construct his whole theology on a single verse (cf. Dyrness 1990: 143). While it is true that Jeremiah 31:20 pivotal to Kitamori's thought, he was careful to interpret that verse in the context of the whole Scripture. Throughout Kitamori's book, a total of 327 different Scriptural texts from 30 biblical books were cited.

¹²Here Kitamori draws an interesting correlation between the diffusion of the gospel throughout the world and the diffusion of the world's suffering and divine pain (1992: 240). The global spread of the gospel is an eschatological sign pointing to the end of the world's suffering. It is not clear how the suffering of the world is related to divine pain though.

¹³M.E. Bratcher, the English translator of Kitamori's work, defines *tsurasa* as "the feeling of inevitable fate and sorrow that overhangs

REFERENCES CITED

- Bevans, Stephen B. *Models of Contextualized Theology*, Rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).
- Cone, James H. *The God of the Oppressed*. (New York; Seabury Press, 1975).
- Dyrness, William A. *Learning about Theology from the Third World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990).
- Erickson, Millard. *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983).
- Hartshorne, Charles. *The Divine Relativity*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1948).
- Hiebert, Paul G. *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994).
- Kitamori, Kazo. *Theology of the Pain of God*. Tr. M.E. Bratcher from the 5th ed. of the Japanese title *Kami no itami no shingaku*, published in 1958 by Shinkyō Shuppansha, Tokyo. (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1965).
- _____. *The Problem of Pain in Christology*. Tr. by Raymond Hammer. In: *Christ and the Younger Churches*, ed. Georg F. Vicedom, pp. 83-90, (London: SPCK, 1972).
- _____. "Christianity and Other Religions in Japan," *Japan Christian Quarterly*, 1984, 50(1): 23-30.
- Koyama, Kosuke. 1999. *Water Buffalo Theology*. 25th ann. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis).
- Kwok, Pui Lan. "God Weeps with Our Pain," *East Asia Journal of Theology*, 1984, 2: 228-32.
- Lee, Jung Young. *God Suffers for Us: A Systematic Inquiry into a Concept of Divine Passibility*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974.
- McWilliams, Warren, "Divine Suffering in Contemporary Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1980, 33(1): 35-53.
- McGregor, Geddes. *He Who Lets Us Be: A Theology of Love*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).
- Michalson, Carl. *Japanese Contributions to Christian Theology*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1960).
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, Tr. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden from the German *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).
- Nicholls, Bruce. *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979).
- Otto, Randall E. "Japanese Religion in Kazoh Kitamori's Theology of the Pain of God," *Encounter*, 1991, 52(1): 33-48.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002).
- Ramachandra, Vinoth. *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).
- Shorter, Alyward. *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988).
- Shweder, Richard A. *Why Do Men Barbecue?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
- Theological Education Fund, *Ministry in Context*, Report for 1972. Geneva: Theological Education Fund, 1972.
- Walls, Andrew F., *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996).
- Whiteman, Darrell L. "Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 1997, 21(1):2-7.
- Williams, Daniel Day. *What Present Day Theologians Are Thinking*, 3rd ed, (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).
- Yagi, Seiichi. "The Third Generation, 1945-1970," In: *A History of Japanese Theology*, ed. Yasuo Furuya, pp. 83-111, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).
- Yamamoto, Kano. "Theology in Japan: Main Trends in our Time," *Japan Christian Quarterly*, 1966, 32: 37-47.
- Zizioulas, John D. *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON ASIAN THEOLOGY

- Adams, Daniel J. *Cross-Cultural Theology: Western Reflections in Asia*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1987.
- Anderson, Gerald H., ed. *Asian Voices in Christian Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976.
- Elwood, Douglas J., ed. *What Asian Christians Are Thinking: A Theological Source Book*. Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers, 1976.
- England, John C., ed. *Living Theology in Asia*. London: SCM, 1981.
- England, John C. "Contextual Theology in Asian Countries: A Selected Annotated Bibliography." *Missiology*, 1984, 12(4): 477-89.
- Fabella, Virginia, ed. *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1980.
- Fujita, Neil S. "'Conic' Christianity and 'Donut' Japan." *Missiology*, 1994, 22(1): 43-53.
- Gnanakan, Ken., ed. *Biblical Theology in Asia*. Bangalore, India: Theological Book Trust, 1995.
- Han, Chul-Ha. "An Asian Criticism of Western Theology." *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 1983, 7(1): 34-47.
- Honig, Anton G. "Trends in Present Asian Theology." *Exchange*, 1982, 11(32/33): 1-75.
- Hwa, Yung. *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology*. Oxford: Regnum, 1997.
- Koyama, Kosuke. *No Handle on the Cross*. London: SCM, 1977.
- _____. *Three Mile an Hour God*. London: SCM, 1979.
- _____. *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai*. London: SCM, 1984.
- _____. "The Asian Approach to Christ." *Missiology*, 1984, 12(4): 435-47.
- _____. *Water Buffalo Theology*. 25th anniversary ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999.
- Kwok, Pui Lan. "God Weeps with Our Pain." *East Asia Journal of Theology*, 1984, 2: 228-32.
- Levison, John R., and Priscilla Pope-Levison. "Toward an Ecumenical Christology for Asia." *Missiology*, 1994, 22(1): 3-17.
- Mackie, Steven G. "God's People in Asia: A Key Concept in Asian Theology." *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1989, 42: 215-40.
- Moore, Michael S. "A Critical Profile of Choan-Seng Song's Theology." *Missiology*, 1982, 10(4): 461-70.
- Phan, Peter C. *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003.
- Pieris, Aloysius. *An Asian Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988.
- Ro, Bong Rin, and Ruth Eshenaur, eds. *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts: An Evangelical Perspective on Asian Theology*. Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1984.
- Ro, Bong Rin, and Mark C. Albrecht, eds. *God in Asian Contexts: Communicating the God of the Bible in Asia*. Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1988.
- Song, Choan-Seng. *Christian Mission in Reconstruction: An Asian Analysis*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1975.
- _____. *Third-Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979.
- _____. *Tell Us Our Names: Story Theology from an*

Asian Perspective. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984.

Theology from the Womb of Asia. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986.

Spindler, M.R. "The Biblical Factor in Asian Theology." *Exchange*, 1982, 11(32/33): 77-101.

Sugirtharajah, R.S., ed. *Asian Faces of Jesus*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993.

Tano, Rodrigo D. "Towards an Evangelical Asian Theology." *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 1983, 7(1): 155-71.

Thomas, M. M. *Towards a Theology of Contemporary Ecumenism*. Madras, India: Christian Literature Society, 1978.

Veitch, James A. "Is an Asian Theology Possible?" *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1975, 28: 27-43.

Wong, Wai-Ching Angela. *"The Poor Woman": A Critical Analysis of Asian Theology and Contemporary Chinese Fiction by Women*. New York: Peter Lang, 2002.

REPORT ON OMF'S 1ST MISSION RESEARCH CONSULTATION

The 1st OMF Research Consultation was held from 23rd-27th August, 2004 at OMF-IHQ. 28 Participants (15 represented various Fields, 4 from Home centers and 9 from IHQ) deliberated on key issues and agreed on a number of study projects. The purpose of the Consultation was two-fold:

1. To provide a forum for mission thinkers within OMF to identify and commission research projects that will contribute significantly to the advancement of God's mission in Asia.
2. To develop a network of reflective practitioners who will stimulate and support one another in mission reflections so that the research outcomes will have a wider impact for the church in Asia.

Arising from the Consultation, 5 outcomes are expected:

1. MISSION ROUND TABLE:

OCCASIONAL BULLETIN FOR OMF MISSION RESEARCH
Nine papers were presented and discussed:

- Trends in Asia by Dr. Miriam Adeney (Respondents: Ian Prescott and Rose Dowsett)
- Globalization by Warren Beattie (Respondent: Shelley Trebesch)
- Will Asian Christianity Blossom or Wither? By Tan Kang San (Respondent: Paul Woods)
- Women in Mission: OMF-A Women Affirming Mission? By Rosemary Harley
- An Outline History of the Role of Women in CIM/OMF Leadership by Lois Michell
- Kitamori Kazo and the Pain of God: An Expository Review of an Asian Theology by Chua How Chuang
- China Research: The Endless Maze by Tony Lambert (Respondent: Patrick Fung)

- Contextualization and Discipleship by Song Minho (Respondent: David Harley)
- Reconfiguration of Western Theology in Asia by Lee Moonjang (Respondent: Warren Beattie)

These papers will be disseminated to Home and Field centers 3-4 times a year as the Occasional Bulletin for OMF Mission

Research called "Mission Round Table". They are also available online through the "Research Round Table," a secured and web-based forum hosted by the Research Department.

2. SIX STUDY GROUPS

Six study groups will discuss and develop research projects under the themes of globalization, contextualization and discipleship, Buddhist Resources, Muslim Resources, Women in Mission and China Research. The groups will aim to complete one specific project that has

significant impact on the Fellowship and field practitioners. For example, the China Research group will revise and update the "China Awareness Seminar" manual; the Contextualization group will develop a "Contextualized Discipleship" book project and training seminars over the next 1-2 years. The Women in Mission group will further research on how women in OMF can be encouraged to use their gifts in leadership and ministry roles. Buddhist and Muslim Resource groups will work with key leaders to produce useful materials for field practitioners.

For all study groups, contributions from OMFers are sought and not limited to the initial participants of the Research Consultation. Please suggest names of folks from your fields.



Participants of the Mission Research Consultation 2004