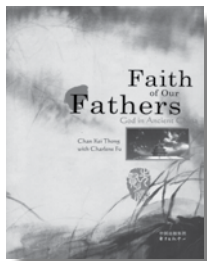


# Editorial Reflections

## *"Faith of Our Fathers: God in Ancient China"*

To order copies of this book: <http://www.daysone.com> (Also available on the Campus Crusade website)



This has got to be one of the most exciting books on missions to China that I have ever held in my hands. This is not to say that no fact or proposal in the book is wrong, I'm not even qualified to judge that. But clearly the work has been very carefully done, very artfully published, and it represents a great deal of careful research.

But more than all that, its thesis is absolutely revolutionary. Note, however, that the title of the book gives you a very false impression. I found that out when I recommended it to a bookstore manager. Right away he told me they already had a video on that same subject and showed me one that talked about Nestorian Christians in China in the eighth century, and then later the Jesuits in the 16th century and so forth. I said no, that's exactly the opposite of what this book is. It's not talking about the faith of our fathers in the Christian sense, but in the Chinese sense. It's specifically speaking of a quasi-biblical faith of their Chinese fathers, going back thousands of years, significantly focusing on a word for God "Shang Di," which represents, according to this book, the true God of the Bible.

This may seem at first glance not such a special revelation. But stop and think. In contrast to the rest of Asia, churches historically fairly exploded in Korea, and, according to many scholars, one major factor is the choice of the word "Hananim" for the word "God" ("Hananim" is a word similar in meaning to "Shang Di" in the Chinese language). Thus, it may very well be that this choice of terminology enabled the Koreans to believe that the Christian missionaries were building on something they already knew only vaguely. A biblical example might be something like the appeal Paul made in Athens to the "altar to the unknown god," which he proceeded to tell them more about.

The implications of simply a choice of word for God are enormous. But the book also goes into extensive detail with

many additional parallels to Jewish belief, parallels ranging from sacrifices to Chinese writing symbols that have Christian or biblical meaning.

The book does not pretend to be saying things that have never been said before, because there are a number of people who have claimed that there are meanings in Chinese writing symbols and it is also true that the famous Catholic missionary Matteo Ricci actually used the word Shang Di in his extensive and very successful outreach to the Chinese around the year 1600.

However, the book is unique in several ways. It collects all of this together, presents it very winsomely and readably, and with lavish and marvelous artistic notations, in color on every page and great attention to detail. This is probably the most beautiful commercially available book I know of.

Originally in Chinese, written by a native Chinese scholar and civic leader, it is now very carefully done over into English and is an open book for anyone who would like to look at it.

As I say, this is a truly revolutionary book, because it may now herald a vast new change of attitude of even the Chinese government when it is realized that the Christian missionaries were not bringing some basically new idea to them, that is, "the religion of foreign devils," but rather further information about a concept which has been basic in all of their history.

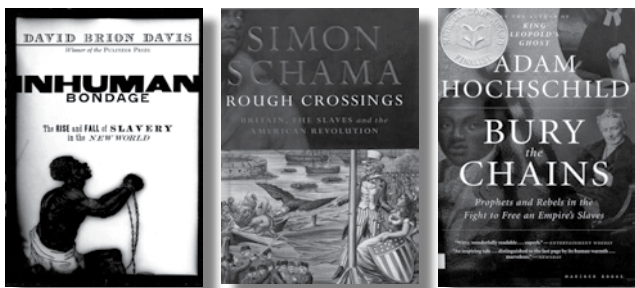
I must say that this is so radical an idea and the implications are so extensive that I don't suppose that all missionaries to China will immediately grasp its significance or implement the implications. On the other hand, I think it is a marvelous thing to consider and it should certainly be discussed and studied and considered as soon as possible by as many key thinkers as are available.

It's perfectly obvious that one of the most eventful developments in mission history of China was the famous 70-year "Chinese rites controversy" in which the whole question of worship of ancestors was deliberated and finally denied by the Vatican, causing all of the missionaries to be thrown out of China and an already large Christian movement to fade into oblivion. Many Protestant missionaries have reconsidered that

hypothesis, especially in outlying territories of China where the same ancestor respect is invoked, but which hasn't caused huge controversies, such as in Sumatra, where a very similar ancestor rite exists and which was taken into the Christian tradition as a fulfillment of the fifth commandment.

These issues of contextualization will not be settled any time soon. On the other hand, this book gives a major boost to the credibility of a very simple idea that the Holy Spirit was there before the missionaries got there. And that we have something that we can in many cases build upon (not replace) as we try to present the gospel of Christ.

If in any case the breakthrough to China can be paralleled as it has been in Korea on the basis of a Korean name for God that refers to a high God they did not know too much about, then this is a very significant and revolutionary book—and a perfectly beautiful one as well!



### Global Slavery

A topic of widespread conversation today is the striking fact that there are reportedly more slaves (27 million) in the world today than were being bartered and sold in 400 years of slavery back in the earlier North Atlantic “slave” centuries. A sentence snatched off the Internet says, “the number of children exploited by prostitution is highest in India (400,000 to 575,000); Brazil is second (100,000 to 500,000); the United States is third (300,000).” (<http://www.thebody.com/content/whatis/art22944.html>) At least this says that this is not merely a “foreign” problem.

This current wave of concern certainly makes it necessary to get a larger historical perspective on the phenomenon. One of the best books to do that is a recent book by a senior Yale professor, David Brion Davis, who has nine sturdy books behind him. His book *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) is subtitled “The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World.” It goes into fascinating detail as is almost always the case of history when you get

really close to the action. It is clear that there would have been no Civil War nor any abolition of slavery at that point if it had not been for profound spiritual awakenings. That is what this book clearly brings out. The author has an interesting comment: “The question arose: how to translate an individual’s momentary repentance and religious commitment into a just and righteous society.” He goes on to say that in the 1820s and 1830s “Evangelical churches and revivalists were also addressing fundamental questions about the meaning of human life, justice and the human ability to rise above sin.”

It is interesting that he notes that the revivals of the time generated reform movements which “were religious in inspiration, but too radical to be accepted by existing churches.” Skipping over the war’s gory statistics, we come to the fact that twice as many soldiers died of disease as died on the battlefield. Another tidbit is that there were 100,000 Southerners who joined the Union army.

More important in my opinion is a comment on the book’s dust jacket with which I have to disagree: “(the book) is the ultimate portrait of the dark side of the American dream. Yet it offers an inspiring example as well—the story of how abolitionists, barely a fringe group in the 1770s, successfully fought in the space of 100 years *to defeat* one of human history’s greatest evils.” (Italics mine)

The reason this quote is questionable in the context of this particular moment today, when global slavery is again on our collective conscience, is the simple fact that the Civil War did not end slavery. That it did so has been a false impression that has governed many people’s minds for many decades. It’s somewhat similar to the impression people have that Satan was defeated at the Cross. Defeated? Yes, in potential, the Cross was the turning point against Satan, but he still is, according to Peter, “roaming around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

In other words, we can gladly accept the fact that slavery became consciously objectionable to people in certain parts of the world, perhaps more in the West than elsewhere. But, we must not close our eyes to the fact that a considerable number of people even in the West still practice slavery or promote slavery or produce slavery—or ignore massive, global continuing slavery.

This is the virulent reality with which our concern at this moment needs to be nourished.

Another recent book written by an English historian of equal repute is called *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves, and the American Revolution* (by Simon Schama, New York: Harper Collins, 2006). This book, which naturally confines itself primarily to the Revolutionary period (unlike the book I just mentioned), provides Americans with a bracing and valuable view of that war from the other side of the Atlantic. An unusual feature of this book is that it goes into very great detail about the rise of sentiment in England—long before the American Declaration of Independence—concerning slavery. It speaks of the heightening sense among many in England that America was the land of slaves—and, in fact, generally mistreated slaves. I know for a fact that nothing even close to this perspective was ever dealt with in any of the schoolbooks I read growing up in California. Specifically, the very idea that America was not only a bastion of slavery, but that the American revolution was in part, perhaps in great part, fought as a means of preserving that slavery (while the Civil war was the opposite). Most books record very plainly that the British did in fact offer slaves in America freedom if they would recruit to the ranks of the British in the American conflagration called the Revolutionary War. Long before even the Declaration of Independence thousands upon thousands of slaves responded to that fond hope. Though they were not necessarily treated the way they expected, some of them did survive in Nova Scotia, and then later, after being transferred to the newly founded African country called Sierra Leone.

On the other hand, the book makes eminently clear that in those places where 60% of the population consisted of black slaves (in parts of the south), it wasn't very obvious that the Southerners would be happy with a policy of British military forces tempting slaves to revolt against their masters. Thus, for landowners, whether liberty from Britain was the main thought, or the mere preservation of their own safety was the main thought, it is difficult to determine in a given case. To his credit, this esteemed British author does indicate that quite a few leading British citizens were favorable to the American colonists—even after the Declaration of Independence—still believing that some sort of agreement could be brought about. There cannot be any doubt that Britain was way ahead of us on this issue. The book makes equally clear that without some earlier “Wilberforces” such as Granville Sharp, a profound believer and Bible student, William Wilberforce would not have been able to do what he did. The tortured twists and turns of politics and law in

Sharp's era should give us pause if we think we can completely eliminate global slavery in our time.

So, back to the present “27 million” slaves in the world today. This is only 5% of the total number of people today who are essentially (and functionally) under the virtually total control of “masters” of varying sorts, all the way from prison guards to industrial land owners. Even in the case of these 27 million people, the vast proportion are driven into slavery because of economic necessity. It is not just a case of “injustice” but a case of extremity. Humans have a long and consistent record of taking advantage of people who are powerless. Hundreds of thousands of boys are forced into hard labor in Pakistan, their families facing no other alternative. Half of them die by the age of 12. Rescuing young boys and girls is great. It is a relatively superficial response to a much larger problem of hopelessness that is the driving engine.

A third book, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in a Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* written by Adam Hochschild (New York: Houghton-Mifflin Company 2005), outmatches the other two despite their incredible virtues. This book is not only as historically replete with fascinating detail, but is written by a professional writer who does an outstanding job in producing what is as spellbinding as any fiction novel could possibly be. This is especially certain since truth is stranger than fiction, as they say. The only drawback of the book is that the table of contents has clever chapter titles that give you no idea whatsoever what they are about until you read them, whereas the other two books are straightforward in the sense that you can follow the train of thought and the structure of the book by looking at the table of contents. This third book is in fact an earlier book by a full year than the other two, and it very well may be that some of the material brought into view by this researcher/journalist was actually of help to the other two authors.

Probably the most significant thing of all of these three books and especially the latter is the fact that they were able to build on actual documents, letters, and, above all, journals, written by people back in the days when personal journals were exercises of candid honesty and often great detail. I must add that it's a great shame that journalizing is no longer in vogue and thus that future historians are going to have a terrible time recounting the present in anything like the detail of these three books but especially the latter. Email and blog records do not last like hard copy does.

In fact, I would urge every serious believer to get a copy of this third book. It gives remarkable insight into the tremendous power that the Evangelical Awakening had in the 18th century and how without it most of these significant events would have never happened. The author does not display any particular bent in trying to defend or portray Christianity in a good light, but the Christian impact simply cannot be concealed in view of the detail of the book itself.

The author, on the other hand, is able to deliver some amazing, lurid and shocking facts about people in high places who were Evangelicals yet whose blindness in society was totally incomprehensible. Take for example John Newton who endured the great horrors of slavery, yet after his conversion he continued to be a slave trader. For 30 years he didn't lift a finger or say a word against slavery until very late in his career. It's not as though he didn't think slavery was bad, but, as for many others of his time, *it was just one of those things about society that was unthinkable to try to change* (especially since enormous industrial concerns were propped up and made possible by the slave trade). It is like getting rid of Big Tobacco in the USA—every state is now dependent on both casino income and tobacco money.

One of the remarkable features of this book is that it gives a great deal of credit to the Quakers for their longstanding awareness of the evils of slavery and their active opposition to it. They also were able in a very timely way to come to the aid of, and do their work through, some of the "Anglican" and acceptable leaders when it came to working against public opinion (where they had endured at least 500 martyrdoms as a result of their opposition to English customs of various sorts).

### *On the "Roots" of Insider Believers*

**I**n this case, my reflections focus specifically on one of the points in L. D. Waterman's article "Do the Roots Affect the Fruits?" (this issue, pp. 57–63). Clearly, the "roots" of those who believe within the best variety of "Insider Movements" is a matter of no small importance. If anyone is building solely on Muslim "roots" then that is not enough!

The practical question is "Who, if anyone, is encouraging Muslims who believe in Christ to build merely on the Qur'an or on merely Muslim culture?" As I understand it, the whole purpose of reaching Muslims within their culture ("Insider Movements") is to lift them above it, but not out of it, by introducing Biblical truth to them. If not, that would indeed be tragic.

A similar question of mine is in regard to what comes up at the end of Waterman's article. I ask, "Who, if anyone, is equating Muslim believers in Christ with Jewish 1st century believers in Christ?" The idea here is that there is, of course, no parallel between the Old Testament as roots and the Qur'an as roots. If anyone is saying there is, it is not right. But who is saying that?

A parallel would be that of trying to lead Roman Catholics to Christ. If, in that process, we don't feel they have to abandon the extensive cultural features of their upbringing, we are not necessarily assuming their Roman Catholic roots are adequate. No, we want them to go to the Bible. For many Roman Catholics there is, in a practical sense, no Bible. They, in effect, may be just as far removed from the Bible as Muslims. The same could be said for a lot of Presbyterians, Baptists, Anglicans, Lutherans, etc.

But in all cases, Jewish, Greek, Muslim, Catholic, Mormon, Presbyterian, the whole point is to lead them beyond their cultural and religious roots to the Bible. The true roots are the *Bible*. In this sense the Bible itself leads us to accept the earthen vessels of human cultures and religions and to seek to fill those vessels with the imperishable treasure of the eternal Gospel, the inspired scriptures, the truth of God. There are no other roots of comparable significance.

Thus, both the means and the goal are the same whether we draw a parallel between outreach to Mormons with their Book of Mormon, Muslims with their Qur'an, Jews with their Talmud, Hindus with their various scriptures, or Presbyterians with their Calvin's *Institutes*. The goal is to lead them to the true roots of Scripture. But that does not require them to forsake their Mormon, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, or Presbyterian communities. In all cases the culture and religion will both need change and refinement.

In each of these cases the "roots" of the OT and the all-important NT are at differing "distances." Amazingly, millions of Hindus today, unlike all the others mentioned above, do not through their religious culture have even the slightest connection to our Bibles. Yet, they are some of the most serious and cogent Bible believers on the face of the earth. And culturally they are still very much Hindu. That is the meaning of the Jerusalem Council. Many Evangelicals, by contrast, reduce faith and discipleship to a set of doctrines, while their lives are hardly rooted in the Bible at all! **IJFM**