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Interactive Pluralism in Asia

Religious Life and Public Space



INTERACTIVE PLURALISM IN ASIA
RELIGIOUS LIFE AND PUBLIC SPACE

LWF STUDIES 2016/I



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INTERACTIVE PLURALISM IN ASIA
RELIGIOUS LIFE AND PUBLIC SPACE

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PREFACE

Martin Junge

In times when fragmentation, segregation and withdrawal seem to be the order of the day, to see people of faith constructively engaging in the public sphere on issues of common concern is a sign of hope. It takes courage and determination not to stay within the comfort zone of one's church or one's familiar academic terrain, but to go out and interact with others who are considerably different. Asia provides many opportunities for the encounter between people of different ethnicities, nationalities, religions, caste and class, but do people of faith actually grasp these opportunities?

This book proposes interactive pluralism as a meaningful and promising way forward for Asian communities and countries. The reflections and analyses pave the way toward such interaction and collaboration. The authors engage in theological conversation with tradition in a way that opens the future as well as with complex and antagonistic dynamics in society in a way that brings people together and creates a sense of belonging and solidarity. This is daring and prophetic; as people of faith, it is precisely this that is our calling. With open hearts and minds and with outstretched hands we engage together with others.

Setting out on the path toward interactive pluralism is clearly an ecumenical endeavor. In this volume, Lutheran voices join those of theologians from other Christian denominations and I appreciate the depth of the theological reflections and the detailed analyses of social and political processes. It has been my experience that we cannot shy away from complexities in our work toward sustainable transformation.

Deeply moved by the transformative power of the gospel, Martin Luther called Christians to a new sense of maturity. The priesthood of believers is a notion that empowered all those who are baptized not only to take responsibility within the church, but also in worldly affairs. As we reconnect

with the insights of the Reformation today, the vision of maturity—both in matters of faith and in worldly issues—speaks right into our time and age. Reformation theology emphasizes that mature Christians actively engage as citizens in their community. Today, it is vital that we understand citizenship as a calling and actively contribute to our societies by joining hands with other citizens in the public space in order to overcome injustice and to promote peace.

This book is based on lively encounter and interaction at a consultation of the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) program for public theology and interreligious relations, organized together with Tao Fong Shan Christian Center (TFSCC) in Hong Kong. I thank TFSCC and Aeropagos for their friendly collaboration.

I commend this publication to all those interested in public affairs and interreligious relations in Asia, and to all who seek to deepen their theological engagement with complex societal realities. The theologians who have contributed to this book provide concrete examples of what it means to be theologically accountable to our traditions as well as our neighbors.

INTRODUCTION

Simone Sinn

In Asia's culturally, religiously and ethnically diverse societies, an amazing overall plurality exists side by side a tangible and dangerous fragility. Authoritarian political regimes, ideologies and colonialism have left their traces and religious and non-religious worldviews significantly influence cultural life. In many countries, asymmetries between religious groups have increasingly gained political and cultural importance, and the predominance of certain religious traditions has become burdensome on the others. Significant differences between the realities in urban centers and rural areas, changing patterns of work as well as transformations in gender relations have led to a renewed understanding of the public and private spheres.

Hong Kong is one of the main economic hubs in the region. Its diverse population and distinct political configuration were the focus of attention in autumn 2014, when the Umbrella Movement visibly shaped the city's public space. For the churches and other religious communities this movement raised the question of how to respond to and engage with the political issues at stake. What are the hopes and visions for shaping and engaging in the public space? What do people of different generations, religious affiliations and gender bring to the conversation? How can shared agendas be developed in order together to work for justice and peace?

Religious communities relate to the state, other religious communities and actors in society in various ways. These are shaped by constitutional and legal frameworks, public discourse and living encounter as well as certain global trends regarding how the relationship between the spiritual and the worldly realms is conceived of. Discussions at the international and local levels appear to have become more polarized. Whereas some praise the crucial role of religions in society and the leadership they provide, others

warn against a dangerous “resurgence of religion” and advocate for a clear-cut separation of religion and politics. In light of this contested terrain, it is vital that religious communities account for why and how they engage with others in the public space and thereby give clarity and credibility to the communities’ advocacy work, social engagement and public relations.

Lutheran theology clearly distinguishes but does not advocate for an antagonistic divide between the worldly and the spiritual realms. It provides a strong rationale for the commitment to the common good and a public sphere that gives space for the different communities to interact peacefully. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of providing education in order to enable people to become mature citizens. “Citizenship” has become a key concept in plural societies and enables the creation of a public space in which people of different religious, ethnic, gender and other identities can interact as different yet equal partners. The concept of citizenship helps to critique discourses of majority vs. minority groups, allows for the naming of injustice and oppression and the joint development of visions of a just society. In order constructively to engage with plurality, dialogical methodologies have become important.

The notion of interactive pluralism captures the idea that communities cannot withdraw into ghettos but need to be actively involved with one another to create a shared public space, where different convictions and perspectives have their place and common commitments and values can emerge.

The first section of the book provides an in-depth engagement with theological questions that emerge from current realities in Asia and relates them to classic theological fields such as Trinitarian theology, soteriology and pneumatology. Anselm K. Min introduces the concept of the public space as a space that is constituted through the dialectic socio-political negotiating in society. Min questions traditional ways of setting the spiritual apart from the political and calls on Asia’s rich spiritual resources to help people connect more deeply with their daily realities. He underlines the importance of a theologically sustained understanding of human dignity and solidarity. In light of globalization, a pluralist sensitivity to the other and a unifying sense of solidarity are needed in order to live together in the common space of one country, one region and one world. Min encourages faith communities in Asia to mobilize their profound spirituality to help communities transcend perceptions of identity based on gender, ethnicity, religion, ideology and culture.

Joas Adiprasetya argues for linking the public space to the Trinitarian space. He maintains that unless both theological-Trinitarian and social-public understandings of an open space are creatively intertwined one is unable to construct a robust theological reflection on religious diversity.

He critiques theological attempts that separate the two, either by basing religious diversity on the more metaphysical argument through the Trinitarian lens, without any social implication, or finding sociological explanation for religious diversity, without any metaphysical imagination. Adiprasetya's proposal is centered on the idea of perichoresis that engages with the problem of diversity through the classical idea of participation of all creation in the Trinitarian communion.

Lai Pan-chiu outlines how, in contemporary China, many Chinese intellectuals regard salvation and enlightenment as key for the modernization of Chinese culture. Based on a review of the Chinese Christian discourses on salvation, especially how they address issues related to religious diversity and public issues in China today, he proposes a Christian understanding of salvation that may enhance the dialogue with other religions and their cooperation on public issues, especially the development of civil society in China.

Reexamining the theological separation between creation and salvation, Notto R. Thelle underlines that the crisis during the sixteenth century has left its traces on Lutheran theology. Discussing Lutheran perspectives on other faiths, he pleads for exploring more deeply the Trinitarian structure of God's engagement with this world. Thelle suggests that the isolation of creation and salvation as two separate aspects of God's ongoing creative presence in the world constitutes a potential problem. In the final part, he invites the reader to imagine a Christian mandala of "God in Christ," thus imagining the deep relationality between Christ and the entire cosmos and creating an openness to the wisdom and experiences of other religions.

Kristin Johnston Largen proposes a robust and dynamic understanding of the Holy Spirit as a lens through which Christians can engage with contemporary understandings of "spirituality." Spirituality, often used broadly to indicate some level of religious commitment or awareness, at the same time establishes a distance from any organized religion, particularly any specific church. In addition, many cultures around the world have a vibrant understanding of "spirits." Johnston Largen emphasizes that a Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit is necessarily Trinitarian, informed by the criterion that Christ came so that all may have life, life abundant. Taking the Trinitarian character of the Holy Spirit seriously implies discovering that the Holy Spirit can be troubling, unsettle cherished assumptions and lead to tangible experiences of love.

The second section of the book focuses on contemporary realities in Hong Kong. Kung Lap-yun discusses the identity and self-understanding of the people in Hong Kong after the experience of the Umbrella Movement. During the 2014 protests, the people of Hong Kong expressed relatively strong political consciousness and will. Kung underlines that the people

of Hong Kong recognize that a democratic government is necessary for a fair and just society, stresses the new sense of belonging in Hong Kong and highlights the significance of “localism” with its distinct dimensions in this context. In the final part, Kung focuses on Christian identity in Hong Kong and advocates for linking two core aspects of ecumenism: universality and particularity.

Tracing the demographic expansion of South Asian Muslim ethnic minorities and socio-political transformations, Ho Wai-yip discusses the spatial politics of building new mosques and the development of Madrasah for the Muslim community in post-colonial Hong Kong. He explores the challenges faced by Muslim students and Hong Kong educators and analyzes how ethnic Muslim students and their parents perceive the importance of Madrasah education in terms of Islamic piety, moral education and family honor.

Mok Kie Man Bryan argues that since Hong Kong is surrounded by a handful of nuclear plants in southern Guangdong, the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in Japan should be a convincing argument for discussing the implications of the use of nuclear power and the underlying anthropological assumptions. The accident in Japan uncovered the fallibility and fragility of the human technological order. In the light of Gordon Kaufman’s Christology, which regards the story of Jesus as the norm of human creativity, Mok argues that Jesus Christ is the most powerful symbol for Christians to dispel the perilous myth that human beings are capable of domesticating the unpredictability involved in the nuclear industry. Human creativity must be qualified and transvalued by this symbol in order to help create a more humane world.

The third section of the book engages with religious plurality in India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and Myanmar. Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar examines the shape Christian engagement in the public space should take in the current Indian context of aggressive religious nationalism pursued by fundamentalist groups such as the Hindutva. Deriving impetus from subaltern studies he argues that an authentic and appropriate method would be one that grants epistemological privilege to the perceptions and perspectives of the margins. The contentious issue of conversions in India, in particular of such marginalized communities as the Dalits and Adivasis, is used as a case study. Rajkumar advocates for the reshaping of Christian engagement “from the ground up” through an epistemological shift, which embraces the agendas and agency of the margins and takes on an ek-centric shape (or an other-centered shape). Thus, the Christian engagement in the public space can be reinvented as an engagement of and for life and can recover the promise of promoting peace, fostering freedom and upholding human dignity and integrity in India today.

Fernando Sihotang provides insights into Indonesia's long-standing experience with religious plurality and underscores the importance of a stable constitutional framework for embracing religious diversity. He shows how the concept of Pancasila helped to envisage and build an independent Indonesia. The socio-political changes following the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998 provided new opportunities for realizing freedom in the country, but also brought challenges to democracy. Sihotang points to problematic sharia-based local regulations and refers to examples of strong interreligious solidarity. He proposes that the understanding of communion that strengthens relationship-building and trust across communities be deepened.

Arata Miyamoto describes the contemporary religious landscape in Japan and identifies changes in religious practice in recent decades. This includes religiously motivated public activities in disaster relief and volunteer activities in the social and environmental fields. Considering the complex context of religious life in Japan, Miyamoto discusses the Lutheran legacy and develops an ecumenical understanding of *missio Dei* and underlines the importance of moving beyond a closed denominational mind. In exploring the relational character of mission, he suggests embracing an understanding of cohabitation that reinforces relationships within this shared world.

Sivin Kit reviews the events and the public discourses around the “Allah” controversy from 2007-2015 in Malaysia, where people struggle to reclaim the public space as they challenge divisive ethno-religious centric discourses. Kit reflects on the implications of the public debate for interreligious relations and points out that the public discourses critical of the government appeal to the principle of justice and solidarity not only for Christians but for all Malaysian citizens. In addition to reaffirming constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, Christian leaders and like-minded Muslim voices point to the significance of reimagining solidarity in a religiously diverse society.

Saw Hlaing Bwa describes the role of religion in the public space in Myanmar, emphasizing that Buddhism plays a crucial role in the public life of the country and its political establishment. At the same time, Myanmar is a pluralistic country in which also other religions like Christianity, Hinduism and Islam coexist. While officially relations among religious communities are referred to as being harmonious, conflicts of interest exist. Recently, religiously motivated conflicts have escalated and Bwa provides insights into the Christian and Buddhist tradition to demonstrate how resources from within these communities can help to transform conflict and develop a constructive relationship between religious communities through interfaith dialogue.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

THE ROLE OF RELIGIONS IN THE DIALECTIC OF PUBLIC SPACE IN ASIA

Anselm K. Min

There are three things I would like to cover in this essay: the historical and social constitution of public space; central features of the tensions and conflicts inherent in the public space of a pluralist society; and the multiplicity of challenges facing different religions in Asia. I shall briefly outline the first two since these merely constitute the background for the third part on which I would like to focus.

THE CONSTITUTION OF PUBLIC SPACE

What do we mean by “public” space, and how does it come into being? We distinguish between “public” and “private” space, between “public” and “private” interest. What makes some things a matter of the public sphere and some things a matter of the private sphere? If two people simply exchange letters as friends, the content of the letters should remain private. However, if those two friends happen to be conspiring either to throw bombs at people gathered in an Olympic stadium or to bribe an official in order to garner special government favors, the content of their letters is a matter of public interest. Today’s public is not the same as the public two hundred years ago; their common interest and consciousness of that common interest would be rather different. What constitutes the public and what constitutes the private have been central concerns of political thought since ancient times, and remain highly controversial because our deepest social interests are at stake.

In my following remarks on the historical constitution of public space I shall rely on what may be called a “dialectical” theory of society devel-

oped by such thinkers as Hegel, Marx and Dewey. Human beings are not only thinkers and believers; they are above all agents or those who have to act. We are because we act, not primarily because we think. When we act, however, our actions have consequences, some of which affect only those directly involved in the transaction and others that affect those beyond the immediate agents. Among the latter are some whose scope and extent are so extensive and lasting so as to need control or management by promotion or prohibition. This is the birth of the public, which “consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for.”¹ We call “officials” those who are set apart to represent, protect and promote this interest of the public or public interest. The republic or *res publica* refers to the totality of things that belong to the public such as public buildings, public funds, the various offices authorized to act for the public and the very authority to make and enforce laws. When the public is “organized by means of officials and material agencies to care for the extensive and enduring indirect consequences of transactions between persons,”² we call them the “people.” Through this organization the public becomes a political state. In the following, I shall present the dialectical-ontological origin of the state, not its historical or empirical origin, which, however, presupposes the ontological.

All the components of the public and its organization into a state are thoroughly historical in the sense that they are always changing through different times and places. How extensive and lasting the consequences of human action will be depends on the historical circumstances of action, the state of technology, economic development, the self-consciousness of a people and the degree of social interdependence. Fighting a personal enemy with one’s fists in an agrarian society is one thing; doing the same with machine guns in a modern city is quite another. The failure of a country bank in the nineteenth century is one thing; the failure of Lehman Brothers in the early twenty-first century altogether something else. Likewise, the birth of a public is thoroughly historical because it depends on the common recognition by a significant number of members of society that certain practices—slavery, the unlimited private funding of elections

¹ See John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985 reprint; originally published by Henry Holt and Company in 1927), 15–16. I highly recommend this book as a good model of a critical, dialectical and progressive theory of the public and the state against many theories of the state that reify it in the interest of a particular ideology. Many contemporary theories, including those of John Rawls and Juergen Habermas, tend to reify the state in its constitution and dialectic.

² *Ibid.*, 16.

and the abuse of the state's power to enhance one's family interests, for instance—have extensive and lasting consequences that need prohibition and control by means of new policies, laws and structures, and on whether a significant number of citizens are willing to organize themselves into an active political group. This, in turn, depends on the level of education and self-consciousness of the people, the degree of solidarity they feel with one another and the chances of success should they get organized for social change, usually against resistance of the old public with vested interests in existing political conditions and structures. All these are historically variable. The same historicity applies to the kind of officials to be selected, the nature of new laws and structures to be instituted and the very form of government such as monarchy, parliamentary democracy, presidential system, that needs to be established in order to serve the genuine public interest of the nation and not private, partisan interests.

There is no “best” structure or state in the abstract apart from the consideration of actual historical conditions. As Dewey says,

the only statement which can be made is a purely formal one: the state is the organization of the public effected through officials for the protection of the interests shared by its members. But what the public may be, what the officials are, how adequately they perform their functions, are things we have to go to history to discover.³

The formation of the state and public space is a thoroughly historical, experimental process involving trial and error, discovery and making and remaking, always in need of vigilant scrutiny and careful investigation. What matters is how to make the process less blind, less accidental and more intelligent, precisely in the service of the ever-changing demand of the genuine public interest or the common good of society.

What we have to avoid is to reify and absolutize a particular ideology—whether capitalism or socialism—without considering the changing demands of history. Such reification of an ideology is precisely the tactic of particular interests to justify their hold on power under the pretense of ensuring the general good of the people. A shared critique of ideologies will be an essential part of progressive social change. The question should not be whether an institution is capitalist or socialist or in line with some other ideology but whether that institution really serves the pressing needs of the public under changing circumstances. This also requires an ongoing social analysis of the consequences of so many individual and group agents acting in the common space—especially in an increasingly

³ *Ibid.*, 33.

interdependent society—with regard to their impact on the common good. To be highlighted here is the imperative not to reify the state as an entity in itself apart from the people it is meant to embody and serve: the state is simply the way in which we organize ourselves in order to do together for one another what we cannot do by ourselves as individuals. Strictly speaking, it is not the state that protects our human rights, for example, but we in our organized solidarity use the means of the state to protect our human rights which we cannot do as individuals.⁴

These considerations should show that the public is not something that is simply given but something that comes into being when issues arise that have an extensive and enduring impact on society and that cannot be handled, except through the collective effort of society as a whole, i.e., politically. The public is the historical result of a complex social dialectic and depends on the scope and significance of issues; public issues will vary from society to society and from age to age, even within the same society. Any discussion of the public thus requires an analysis of the historical stage and conditions facing a particular society and the issues impacting that society as a whole. What is public and what is private cannot be discussed in an historical vacuum.

THE DIALECTIC OF PUBLIC SPACE IN A PLURALIST SOCIETY

What are some of the basic issues and challenges facing this dialectic of public space in the age of globalization? Globalization is the most significant phenomenon of the twenty-first century, and debates as to its ultimate significance have been ongoing for two decades. What is incontrovertible is that it now constitutes the context of all contexts for all significant human projects—individual or collective—as well as being the unavoidable horizon for all significant human thought. It is a complex process with economic and environmental aspects, political and military aspects, religious and cultural aspects and, finally, the human aspect, the production of over two hundred million migrant workers all over the world. I cannot go into each of these aspects here⁵ but shall only speak from the theological perspective,

⁴ See Anselm K. Min, *Dialectic of Salvation: Issues in Theology of Liberation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 58–68, for the imperative of ongoing social analysis of historical conditions and its application to theology, and 104–111, for the concepts of personal responsibility and personal sin and social responsibility and social sin.

⁵ There are so many books on globalization, but I would like to mention David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt & Jonathan Perraton (eds), *Global Transformations. Politics, Economics, and Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), as the most systematic analysis of globalization in its many aspects. I would also

which I define as the perspective of human dignity in its transcendence, and human solidarity as the historical condition of its realization. Dignity is due to all human beings because they are created in the image of God and destined for the life of communion with the Triune God. There is no human dignity without human solidarity because we cannot produce the historical, economic, political and cultural conditions that will protect and promote human dignity, except in collaboration and solidarity with one another. There is no human solidarity without the integrity of human dignity because only a mode of collaboration in solidarity that serves human dignity can preserve its moral justification. Any violation of human dignity results in the rejection of human solidarity, as any disruption of human solidarity results in the violation of human dignity. From this theological perspective, my chief concern is the impact of globalization on human dignity and human solidarity. What does globalization do to promote or destroy human dignity and human solidarity, and how?

From this perspective it is essential to focus on the potential of globalization for creating tensions and disruptions in the human community of nations, the chief source of violations of human dignity and human solidarity. In this regard it is crucial to note that globalization is a process that brings different nations, classes, ethnic groups, religions and cultures together in a common political space, and compels them to find a mode of living together with a minimum of justice and peace. Globalization produces a twofold antithetical dialectic—a pluralizing dialectic and a unifying dialectic—and requires both a pluralist sensitivity to the other and a sufficient unifying sense of solidarity among these others to make it possible for them to live together in the common space of one country, one region and one world. This twofold requirement is subject to the constant test of how to achieve a just and peaceful compromise on all issues that generate different publics and divide groups with their often stark pluralism of interests. Globalization is not an innocent process of mere differentiation but the painful process of adjusting and reconciling often irreconcilable differences. It is not merely an economic process that makes the entire world an integrated system of increasingly interconnected and interdependent actions, policies and rules, but a comprehensive process involving all major dimensions of human existence—political, military, economic, environmental, religious and cultural. Globalization not only brings regions, nations and cultures together in a common space but also all dimensions of human life as such.

note Ulrich Beck, *What Is Globalization?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000), and *World at Risk* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009), as a very insightful analysis of globalization from the perspective of risks it is creating and the kind of public sharing that perspective generated by globalization.

Most importantly, in a world where the agents are unequal in power, the process of global interdependence necessarily involves mutual conflicts. It generates the struggle for the hegemonic power to dominate and the will to resist that domination—a struggle all the more intense, dangerous and “risky” for all because it is fought with all the technological and economic resources available.⁶ The relation among nations is still ruled by the laws of the jungle, whereas in domestic relations we have with some success replaced the state of nature with the rule of law. This sort of global struggle for power in its economic, political and cultural forms is now increasingly reflected in the politics of different regions and nations of the world, including Asia.

It is the peculiarity of the state that whenever it does something, it does it in the name of the national, public, or common interest of the citizens; even the most corrupt government appeals to this interest for obvious reasons. It also does it with all the resources at its disposal: the power to make laws, monetary and fiscal power and the power to investigate, penalize tax, even kill its own people and go to war against other nations. It also always does it legally and therefore with justice because its own positive law is what constitutes justice. Because of the sheer magnitude of the material, financial, legal and moral resources invested in the state, the state has always been the arena of contending interest groups or publics.

In general, we can say that domestic struggles for power center around three issues. The first issue is the specification of the public interest to be pursued—not the theoretical but the practical definition of what is to the public interest to be pursued by the state in particular cases. Any policy adopted, say regarding tax rates, will make important differences in the way it benefits or harms different groups. The second issue is how political power is produced, distributed and consumed and with what consequences on different publics or constituencies. Is this process purely arbitrary, depending on the accidents of birth and status and monopolized by a certain privileged group, or is it determined in a process that is open to all in a way that is not just theoretically but also practically equal? The third issue is how to protect the integrity of the state as the ultimate guardian of the public interest, its powers, its resources and its moral ideals against the perennial temptation of private interests to exploit and monopolize them to the detriment of everyone else. This temptation seems to grow in direct proportion to the powers and resources at stake in a particular legislation and policy. The very preservation of our common humanity is at stake in how successful we are in effectively promoting the public interest. This struggle between public and private interests constitutes the political dialectic of all modern societies.

⁶ Beck, *World at Risk*, *ibid.*

THE ROLE OF RELIGIONS IN THE PUBLIC SPACE OF ASIA

What, then, are the challenges facing religions in humanizing the often brutal struggles and conflicts in the public spaces of Asia and promoting human dignity and human solidarity? I would like to highlight six of those challenges. These are challenges because they require significant and costly changes on the part of religions.

The first challenge to Asian religions is to overcome their common reluctance, bar a few exceptions, to be involved in critical politics in the sense of encouraging the faithful to participate in the struggle to produce political changes that will remove repressive laws and institutions—the “structures of sin—and to promote institutions that will better serve the common good of the people and to appreciate political action as the most effective contemporary form of practicing compassion, humaneness or charity.

Asian religions, like religions anywhere else, have always been involved in politics. Majority religions have been involved on the side of the status quo and the privileged, while minority religions have borne the brunt of discrimination, exclusion and often outright persecution. Today we need a different kind of political involvement, a self-conscious, self-critical involvement in the promotion of the public interest against all the “furies” (Marx) of private interests, so powerfully and ideologically manipulating the powers and resources of the state in their own interest, and exploiting and depriving the public of their resources, their moral ideals and their dignity and solidarity which the state is charged with protecting. This is what I would call critical politics, to be firmly distinguished from partisan politics, politics as power struggle, politics as the art of manipulation, all of which are politics of nihilism.

What prevents Asian religions from a positive engagement in critical politics is their mistaken distinction between what is religious and what is worldly, their tendency to confine the practice of compassion, humaneness and charity to the private realm of individual relations, and their consequent reluctance to accept the political in the sense of critical politics as the most effective means of practicing those properly religious virtues in contemporary society. They do not realize that what I can do as an individual to help my neighbor is heavily limited. I can give some of my money to the poor, even provide a scholarship to those too poor to go to school, go to the hospital to visit the sick, feel sorry for those sold into slavery as in the old days, or protest the injustice of an administrative decision. What the state can do, however, assuming it is properly organized and equipped, is vastly more. The state can provide public education, public health, social security and physical safety to everyone, abolish slavery and ensure equal treatment of all through just laws. It can eliminate poverty as such so that there will be no poor who have to beg for bare subsistence

and in the process suffer all the humiliations and indignities from fellow human beings. I cannot do any one of these things by myself alone. The state can do all of these on the national scale, as many nations are already doing. This is why I call the state the most effective means of practicing charity, compassion and humaneness. Only a government can admit and provide the basic needs of some 1.1 million refugees, as Germany did in 2015. No individual or group of individuals can do that by themselves. One might also say that the ultimate purpose of charity to the poor is precisely to eliminate the poor as such and thereby also the need to help the poor.

I do not deny that by the same token the state can be the most effective means of doing evil, as all the state-induced human disasters of the twentieth century attest to. This, however, is no argument for the abolition of the state as such but only for its constant, watchful improvement and humanization.

It is crucial to remember that it is not really the state as something independent of us as citizens that is doing all these things, as many of us tend to think; it is we ourselves who are doing those things to one another through the state, the official, institutional expression of our interdependence and solidarity. We are doing for one another through the state what we cannot do by our own isolated individual effort. When we practice charity through the state, we do not have the luxury of knowing what particular individuals we are helping. But, the purpose of charity is not to give ourselves the satisfaction of having done something for the neighbor but to help the neighbor for their own sake so they can stand on their own feet with a sense of dignity, without being beholden and indebted to someone else. Furthermore, the neighbor in need we are helping here is ultimately not someone simply out there but ourselves in our own need, which we cannot fulfil by our own effort, but only through interdependence and cooperation. Through the state we eliminate the very need to help poor individuals—the highest act of charity—and convert that charity into an act of our solidarity as human beings. In helping secure the basic human rights of all by creating a just government at the service of the public good we help one another secure our human dignity and, in the process, confirm our solidarity as human beings, regardless of our parochial identities as members of a particular class, region, status, religion and culture. We reach beyond ourselves to join the universal human family in the dignity we all share and in their solidarity that promotes that dignity.

In recent decades the debate on the role of religion in politics has largely been centered on the question of whether a religion may legitimately try to impose its own views on the public of how religions should enter the political debates, of whether religions may use their own confessional language and beliefs or should learn to put the content of their arguments in a language that is persuasive and intelligible to the public in general, regardless of their

religious affiliation. I cannot go into all of these issues. What is clear is that religions should meditate deeply on their own teachings regarding how we should behave towards one another and also learn to translate profoundly religious messages into terms that are intelligible and persuasive to the public as a whole. A religious group has as much right to join the public debate from its own perspective as any other secular group. At issue is not the legitimacy and right of every social group to express its views in the public square, but whether such expressions are intelligible and persuasive enough to move the public and produce a policy and legislative consensus. It would be a matter of political prudence to learn to express one's deepest spiritual convictions in terms that can also win the assent of the public.

It is the specific contribution of religions to share the fruit of their respective reflections on the ultimate meaning and authenticity of human life and to serve as institutional sources of critical discernment, capable of seeing through the many illusions, self-deceptions and sheer vanities underlying the prevailing assumptions and fashionable ideas of an entire society, especially under the dominance of capitalist materialism. Providing this sort of fundamental critique of society, of its many idols and self-evident truths, may be the most important contribution of religions to the dialectic of public space in contemporary societies.⁷

Once we accept the political as something properly religious, as a way of practicing charity, compassion and humaneness, a second challenge follows, namely that of cultivating civic virtues as properly religious virtues. Civic virtues are virtues of citizens as citizens, who recognize that their dignity as a human being can be maintained and promoted only through interdependence and cooperation, properly organized and institutionalized in the state. They are therefore in solidarity with other citizens in their shared concern for human dignity and their shared responsibility for creating state structures worthy of that dignity. The primary virtue of the citizen is this sense of solidarity with other citizens in creating the common conditions for preserving and promoting human dignity.

In the following I shall mention five aspects of this civic virtue of solidarity. The first is commitment to the public household and the public interest over and against private interests of groups with parochial identities, based on class, status, origin, religion, region, ethnicity and other marks of identity. The central problem in most Asian countries is also the lack of this sense of the public whose integrity must be respected and the all too

⁷ For a recent discussion of the role of religion in politics, see Francis Schuessler Fiorenza, "Faith and Political Engagement in a Pluralistic World," in Anselm K. Min (ed.), *The Task of Theology: Leading Theologians on the Most Compelling Questions for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2014), 93–118.

great willingness of social groups to exploit the organs and resources of the state in their own special interests. This leads to all sorts of government corruption and lamentable abuses of public power for the benefit of their identity groups, especially their families and clans.⁸

The second aspect of the civic virtue is the sense of shared responsibility for the destiny of the community and the willingness to contribute one's share to that destiny, not only by paying one's fair share of taxes and observing all legitimate laws, but also by educating oneself on the emerging issues of the day, by going to the polls on voting days to exercise one's rights and responsibilities and by cultivating critical habits of thought capable of seeing through ideological deceptions of so much political rhetoric.⁹ Asians are grossly deficient in this area because they tend to be either too family oriented to see the relevance of politics, too hierarchically minded to see themselves as responsible political agents, too other worldly to see any sacred value in politics, too moralistic to see politics as anything other than dirty, compromising and demeaning, too fatalistic to see any hope of change through political means or too privately oriented to take seriously the imperative of larger loyalties beyond the individual and familial.

The third aspect of the civic virtue of solidarity is the culture of egalitarian consciousness. To recognize other citizens as my equals or other groups as equals of my group in the matter of basic human dignity, human rights and participation in the determination of the community's common destiny is a most difficult demand of democracy and requires the overcoming of many habits rather endemic to Asian culture such as sexism, authoritarianism and the hierarchical sense of status, class and privilege. Egalitarianism is not something to be dismissed as a purely political idea; it is a virtue that requires the spiritual asceticism of genuine humility and self-emptying. It is the virtue of humility in its most universal, political application. Most importantly, it is the recognition of the fundamental ontological equality of all creatures as created by God out of nothing, of the equality of our own origin in nonbeing and of the equality of indebtedness to God for the gift of existence and all that implies.

The fourth aspect of civic virtue is pluralist sensibility. The state today consists of citizens from many different backgrounds and many different

⁸ I discuss the problem of transition from premodern to postmodern culture and nation building as the central challenge in Asia, where building a sense of the public as opposed to the private is so crucial, yet also always threatened by premodern tribal loyalties in my essay, "Towards a Theology of Citizenship as the Central Challenge in Asia," in *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41:2 (2004), 136–59.

⁹ As two outstanding examples of unmasking so much political rhetoric, especially of American imperialism, see David Swanson, *War Is a Lie* (Charlottesville, VA: David Swanson, 2010), and Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2006).

systems of identity and cannot operate on a stable basis without respect and appreciation of difference. Unlike traditional societies, today's modern and postmodern societies are societies of mutual strangers who do not belong to the same system of tribal, conventional, regional or religious identity. A willingness to accept these strangers as fellow citizens and to dialogue with them about the future of the community they share is an essential requirement of the citizen. In this regard, democracy again demands the difficult asceticism of denying ourselves along with our tribal selfishness and accepting those who are different into a solidarity of others.

The fifth and last aspect I would like to highlight is the culture of dialogue. Dialogue is the democratic alternative to violence, whether the violence of force or the violence of authority. Democracy seeks to resolve public issues not on the basis of force, wealth, position or some other extrinsic ground but on the basis of the intrinsic merit of ideas, for which public dialogue is essential. The culture of dialogue is a challenge to our inherent intellectual arrogance and dogmatism. Again, this culture of dialogue poses quite a difficulty and challenge for Asians, who are so used to the culture of authoritarian solutions.¹⁰

All five aspects of the civic virtue in a democracy show that true democracy as a political system requires a profound spirituality of its own; it requires the spirituality of commitment to the common good beyond one's own, care for the well-being of strangers as fellow citizens, the humble recognition of our equality before God, sensitivity to the other beyond the same and renunciation of intellectual arrogance. All of these require considerable self-denial and clearly more asceticism than does any traditional virtue. This is the kind of asceticism that religions are especially called upon to cultivate today: asceticism that is secular in form but profoundly religious and spiritual in content. Properly elaborated, I can argue that it contains the practical substance of most religions.

The third challenge to all Asian religions is to resist the temptation to exploit the organs of the public good to promote their own confessional interests by imposing their own strictly confessional beliefs on the public, using the state's resources to promote their own powers and/or to oppress their religious opponents. This challenge also needs to be highlighted. Given the history of many Asian religions, the temptation to abuse the authority of the state in their own confessional interests is especially great in Asia, and must be resisted

¹⁰ For a further elaboration of the civic virtue and civic solidarity, especially their theological significance, see Min, *op. cit.* (note 8); and "The Division and Reunification of a Nation: Theological Reflections on the Destiny of the Korean People," in Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Timothy S. Lee (eds), *Christianity in Korea* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 268-76.

as vigorously as the temptation is great. In most Asian countries, religions were at one time or another religions of the state. They enjoyed all the political privileges conferred by the state that are not easy to relinquish. Religions are also tempted to use the power of the state to impose their own beliefs on the rest of society through various forms of pressure, if not by force. Today, many societies are so internally divided along religious lines, as in much of South Asia for instance, and religions are under great pressure to use the power of the state as a weapon against their enemies. They should learn to welcome and appreciate the separation of religion and state in modern societies as a condition for peace in a pluralist society and act accordingly.

The fourth challenge to Asian religions is to mobilize their profound spiritual resources for transcending our usual, instinctive parochial identities based on the sameness of gender, ethnicity, religion, ideology and culture, the dominant causes of government corruption, injustice and oppression, and for expanding our sympathies to include all humanity in its differences. Spiritual resources for breaking through our endemic group self-interest and embracing the common, human good are in very short supply today, even though they are very much needed. One of the negative aspects of globalization is the globalization of the nihilistic culture of self-interest. The result is that increasingly freedom means only the freedom to pursue self-interest and equality only the equality of the right to pursue self-interest. Capitalism has no resources to restrain self-interest for the sake of the greater public interests. This is unfortunate because trans-individual solidarity is essential for the integrity of democracy, and the globalizing world increasingly requires cosmopolitan solidarity.¹¹ It is telling that many secular thinkers are beginning to recognize the inability of secular rationalist humanism, inherited from the European Enlightenment, to inspire and motivate people to transcend their self-interests and to affirm their trans-individual solidarity with fellow citizens and nowadays with all human beings in the world. Many of them, such as Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, Jean-Luc Nancy and Jürgen Habermas, are increasingly turning to the religious resources of Christianity for the ability to motivate people to transcend their individual and collective selfishness and accept their cosmopolitan solidarity with all humanity in a practically effective way.¹²

¹¹ For different interpretations of cosmopolitan solidarity, see Garrett Wallace Brown and David Held, *The Cosmopolitanism Reader* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), especially the essays by Ulrich Beck, David Held and Jürgen Habermas; and Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹² See Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2008), 105–11; Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan van Antwerpen (eds), *Rethinking Secularism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011); John

All major Asian religions are universalist religions and aim at all humanity as such, even though historically they have been necessarily associated with particular cultures and nations as all human ideas have been. They are necessarily universalist in that they deal with the ultimate fulfillment or failure of human beings as human beings, not as Chinese or Germans, men or women, kings or commoners. The ideals of humaneness, compassion and salvation pertain to all humanity and aim at the solidarity of all humans in both their successes and failures as humans. No race or religion is superior in this regard; all of humanity is equally guilty of failure as all of humanity has an equal chance of succeeding. These Asian religions are essentially universalist, cosmopolitan religions in their ultimate teachings, although they have been quite ethnocentric and nationalist in their historical practice. It is also to be admitted that the record of these religions in actually motivating their followers for cosmopolitan solidarity has not always been admirable; their successes have been limited to saintly or heroic individuals.

Today, all Asian religions are being challenged to examine their own spiritual depth, retrieve, develop and adapt for today their abundant resources for transcending our narrow and parochial self-interests, and to motivate their own followers and all other willing persons to act according to the compelling contemporary imperative of cosmopolitan solidarity, or our solidarity with all of creation, a “cosmotheandric” solidarity to use Raimon Panikkar’s term.¹³ Each religion should know what its own spiritual resources are. I can easily think of some of them without in any way denying their often irreducible differences. The idea of the interdependence of all things and the Buddha nature of all things in Buddhism; the supreme identity of Brahman and Atman and the unity of all life in Hinduism; the essential harmony of heaven and earth and the ideal of humaneness in Confucianism; the non-dualist approach in Buddhism and Daoism—these are just some examples. Contemporary Buddhism and Confucianism have been rethinking their respective traditions in response to the urgent imperatives of the globalizing world.¹⁴ Contemporary

D. Caputo, *St. Paul among the Philosophers* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

¹³ See Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, ed. Scott Eastham (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993).

¹⁴ To mention just a few examples, David R. Loy, *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2003), and *A Buddhist Faith: Enlightenment, Evolution, and Ethics in the Modern World* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2015); Stephen C. Angle, *Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012); Robin R. Wang (ed.), *Chinese Philosophy in an Era of Globalization* (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 2004); Tu Weiming and Daisaku Ikeda, *New Horizons in Eastern Humanism: Buddhism, Confucianism, and the Quest for Global Peace* (New York, NY: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

Christianity has been trying to retrieve the universalist elements of its own biblical and theological tradition and to proclaim the universalist message in the form of political theology, liberation theology, feminist theology and Catholic social teachings. My point here is that the contemporary challenge to all Asian religions is precisely to show themselves at their very best and most profoundly spiritual.¹⁵

The fifth challenge to Asian religions is to take on as their special responsibility the task of advocating and empowering the marginalized in the public debates about what is the most appropriate way of promoting the common good in the case of any particular public issue.¹⁶ It has been the historical responsibility of religions to take care of the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the abandoned and the socially marginalized in one way or another. As the modern state increasingly takes over these responsibilities from voluntary religious institutions, this particular role of religious institutions is decreasing. I think this decrease is to be welcomed. Relief and care are no longer left in the hands of the voluntary organizations; instead, they are the legal responsibility of the state. In other words, we are doing this to one another through the organ of the common good that we have established to express our civic solidarity. This does not mean that religions no longer have a public role. In most Asian countries the state's welfare role is still minimal and in great need of expansion. Therefore, religion continues to play a significant role. Moreover, given the vast human needs to be relieved, and given the nature of religion as an institutionalized symbol of love, compassion and humaneness, it will be a very appropriate, compelling role of religion to alleviate human suffering. Therefore, religion's new role is to advocate for the marginalized in the public space of politics; to become the voice of the voiceless; and to ensure that the well-being of the marginalized is not sacrificed or neglected in the cold calculations of special interest groups in the battle over the public interest in the case of particular legislation and policy. As a wonderful example, I would like to

¹⁵ In my own way I have tried to retrieve the resources of the most profound traditions of Christianity for a contemporary theology of universal human solidarity in my book, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2004). On the Catholic social doctrine on the common good and human solidarity, see Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004).

¹⁶ From the Christian perspective, I specially recommend National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington, DC: US Catholic Conference, 1986), and Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* [The Joy of the Gospel], at www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/document.

mention Network in Washington, DC, an organization of Catholic nuns that examines and evaluates major proposals for legislation and policy before Congress with regard to their impact on the poor and marginalized. This is the preferential option for the poor at its most concrete and effective.¹⁷

The sixth and last challenge I would like to highlight is to intensify dialogues with one another, both to remove any misunderstanding that has often been the source of hatred and persecution, and to promote collaboration in the common cause of reducing suffering, inhumanity and hatred. The first order of business in this regard must be the common confession of sins against one another in which all Asian religions have historically been involved: the Confucian persecution of Christians in China and Korea in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the Zen Buddhist legitimization of Japanese militarist imperialism against many Asian nations; the Buddhist persecution of Muslims in Thailand; the struggles between Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka; the Christian persecution of Muslims in the Philippines; the Hindu persecution of Christians and Muslims in India. Mutual persecution continues, even though the official separation of church and state significantly reduces the chances of bloody conflicts. An apology and the firm resolve not to repeat the atrocities of the past would be the most decent and religious thing for religions to do.

It goes without saying that it is crucial today to have a better understanding of other religions. In this regard, each religion can initiate programs to introduce its own followers to a more accurate understanding of other religions, especially as other religions understand themselves. This can be done by inviting representatives of other religions to explain their religions to one's own group or by holding instructional conferences in which representatives of different religions present their respective positions on a subject of common concern. Courses on other religions can become part of the curriculum in all institutions that prepare future ministers and leaders in the respective religions. There are so many ways of promoting mutual understanding.

Much has been discussed in recent decades about the what and how of interreligious dialogue. I have published extensively on this subject myself.¹⁸ There is no denying the compelling necessity of interreligious

¹⁷ I present a justification of the "preferential option for the poor" from the perspective of liberation theology in my book, *Dialectic of Salvation*, op. cit. (note 4), 53-58, and 70-75.

¹⁸ See my *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World*, op. cit. (note 15), 156-97; "The Trinity of Aquinas and the Triad of Zhu Xi: Some Comparative Reflections," in Anselm K. Min and Christoph Schwoebel (eds), *Word and Spirit: Renewing Christology and Pneumatology in a Globalizing World* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 1-11; "The Point of Dialogue: Response to James Fredericks on the Christian-Buddhist

dialogue today, but urgent as such dialogue is, it is also much more difficult to do it right than is ordinarily assumed. To understand even one's own religion thoroughly, in its history and depth, in its theology and spirituality, is itself a lifelong endeavor, and to understand another religion is, of course, far more difficult. I am not happy with many books on comparative philosophy and theology; they often do not go far enough because they fail to understand their own religion with historical adequacy, still more to understand the other religion with sufficient breadth and depth. Furthermore, dialogue, of which there are many different kinds, like the dialogue of theology, dialogue of spirituality and dialogue of praxis, depends on many conditions. Not all religions are equally ready for a genuine dialogue with other religions. Genuine dialogue requires a certain sense of equality among the participants, which means there cannot be a dialogue between an oppressor and an oppressed religion.

Dialogue has to struggle with the insuperable problem of different ultimate assumptions or horizons that refuse to be reduced. Every act of understanding occurs in light of certain assumptions, and differences in ultimate assumptions spell difficulties in understanding. What, then, do we do when we are confronted with ultimate irreducible differences? Do we simply part ways, or at least try to understand the other as well as possible under the circumstances and come to certain practical agreements on initiatives and projects in the promotion of the common good, and especially in the alleviation of suffering, hatred and inhumanity for many? In all of these, however, it is imperative to find a way to “love one another without understanding one another” (Panikkar).¹⁹ We cannot postpone loving members of other religions as fellow citizens and fellow human beings until we can understand and agree with them. Hard as this undoubtedly is, it is also what we are called upon to do with regard to all the citizens and human beings whom we do not really understand and whom we still have to love as all the major Asian religions dictate us to do. More imperative than interreligious dialogue is the imperative of loving them without understanding them. Loving is also, one might say, a condition of understanding. The pluralism of Asian societies in the age of globalization compels all religions to do to one another what is both most difficult and most profoundly religious: to love one another without understanding one another.

Dialogue,” in James L. Heft (ed.), *Catholicism and Interreligious Dialogue* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 145–52.

¹⁹ See my essay in “Loving without Understanding: Raimon Panikkar’s Ontological Pluralism,” in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 68 (2010), 59–75.

THE TRINITARIAN AND THE PUBLIC SPACE

Joas Adiprasetya

PROBLEMS IN THEOLOGIES OF RELIGIONS

Over the last few years, the intellectual discourse on religious diversity has undergone a highly interesting development with numerous theologians having taken a critical distance from the tripolar typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Not only do they deem the typology to be insufficient in dealing with the complexity of the problem, but they have also tried to redeem the situation by adding other alternatives, revising the typological structure, or simply abandoning it.¹ The basic objection to the classical typology is that it fails to create a clear and robust classification that does justice to very diverse positions among Christians toward other religions.

I propose to employ the Trinitarian concept of perichoresis as a theological category when dealing with religious diversity.² What I suggest is not that the typology should be fully abandoned, but that the Trinitarian idea of perichoresis could give more space to being a more radically exclusivist (Gavin D'Costa), a more radically inclusivist (S. Mark Heim), or even a more radically pluralist (Raimundo Panikkar) typology, while still maintaining the basic dialectics of Christian commitment and interfaith openness.

¹ Perry Schmidt-Leukel has surveyed the various criticisms and mapped them into eight major categories. See Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology-Clarified and Reaffirmed," in Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

² Joas Adiprasetya, *An Imaginative Glimpse: The Trinity and Multiple Religious Participations*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013).

My Trinitarian position can be seen as more radically exclusivist in the sense that it always begins with a tradition specific perspective. It is more radically inclusivist in the sense that the Trinitarian view of reality enables us to interpret all religious traditions as multiple relations to, or multiple participations in, the Triune communion. Finally, it is more radically pluralistic, since the diversity of religious ends are respected on their own terms without being “converted” into a singular language alien to them. While such an analysis might seem strange to those who always rigidly employ the classical typology, I would argue that my position demonstrates that the typology itself, if used rigidly, is not sufficient in dealing with the complexity of interreligious relationships.³

Without the Trinitarian perspective one cannot properly approach interreligious encounter because, as I will discuss later, the fundamental problem of the one and the many or unity and diversity can be found precisely in the perichoretic *koinonia* of the Triune God. My proposal is not without precedence as many theologians have proposed their own models using the Trinitarian lens (Raimundo Panikkar, S. Mark Heim, Gavin D’Costa, Amos Yong and others), although mine distinctively uses the particular idea of perichoresis as the main category.

The problem is that the majority of the proponents of the Trinitarian theologies of religions do not relate the “abstract” theological concept of the Triune God to the “concrete” interfaith conversation in the public sphere. They tend to discuss religious diversity merely as a theological or metaphysical problem and, in so doing, turn out to be an abstract discourse on, for example, the ultimate destiny of people of other faiths, or the possible salvific values of non-Christian religions. Therefore, the comparative theologian James Fredericks rejects any theology of religions as always having started with “a grand theory of religion in general that claims to account for all religions.”⁴ Instead, he believes that we must begin with “studying other religions on their own terms and then exploring their own Christian faith using what they have learned about the other religions.”⁵

³ My position seems to be consonant with Robinson B. James’s finding that in Tillich’s theology of religions we can find the three positions. See Robinson B. James, *Tillich and World Religions: Encountering Other Faiths Today* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003). It is also similar to the fifth objection in Schmidt-Leukel’s list, that is, that the typology is so coarse and abstract that it “does not do justice to the more complex and nuanced reality of real theologies.” Schmidt-Leukel then argues that this objection implies the possibility of simultaneously seeing other religions through the three positions. See Schmidt-Leukel, *op. cit.* (note 1), 16.

⁴ James L. Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 167.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

Thus, the most obvious difference between theologies of religions and comparative theologies is the methodology: the first begins with an abstract and general claim and then applies it to particular religions, while the second starts with the study of a particular religion and looks anew at the own religious tradition.

As much as I appreciate the proposal of comparative theologies, I would like to add two important comments. First, both methodologies seem to be too linear. We are made to choose between a linear process from-general-abstract-to-particular-religion on the one hand (as in theologies of religions) and a linear process from-a-particularity-to-another-particularity on the other (as in comparative theologies). Second, the comparativists fail explicitly to acknowledge the fact that they learn about other religious traditions as Christians. Thus, for example, when Francis X. Clooney suggests a form of “theology after Vedanta” to read Aquinas after his learning of Advaita-Vedanta, we must acknowledge that Aquinas has already influenced our tradition. So we must certainly read it as a “theology after Vedanta after Aquinas.”⁶ In other words, when we learn about another tradition we cannot fully leave our own religious tradition behind. The Christian stories that “haunt” us when we learn about other traditions will not let us forget the abstract and universal worldview that has taught us to see the whole universe from a specific perspective.

What I suggest here is a more modest way of approaching the issue. We do not need to choose whether we should begin with the abstract-general or the concrete-particular. Rather, we begin by holding both dimensions together and maintaining the tension between both dimensions along the way. In so doing, we can talk about the dialectic of unity and diversity, of the one and the many, both theologically and publicly. To do so, I would explore the notion of “space” as a loose, valuative category that links the Trinitarian inner-relationship and the public struggle with diversity toward a social unity.

THE TRINITARIAN SPACE: PERICHORESIS AND PARTICIPATION

In order to start the discussion I shall borrow Jürgen Moltmann’s idea of the Trinitarian space that maintains the place of creation simultaneously in and outside God. Using the cabbalistic notion of *zimzum* or self-contraction, Moltmann argues that God vacates space within Godself to make room for all creation. This divine action is not done by a singular God but by a

⁶ Francis X. Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology*, Suny Series, *Toward a Comparative Philosophy of Religions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

Triune God with the three persons working together in love and mutuality. In such a process, the Spirit fills the entire universe with life, bridging the gap between the Father's love for the Son and their love for the world. At the same time, God's kenotic act creates the universe through the Son, so that the Son becomes the *khora* or space for all creation to exist. Moltmann also maintains that God,

throws open a space for those he has created, a space which corresponds to his inner indwelling; he allows a world different from himself to exist before him, with him and *in him* So the space of creation is at once outside God and within him. Through his self-restriction, the triune God made his presence the dwelling for his creation.⁷

The result is imaginative and beautiful. The perichoretic relation among the Triune persons is now extended to the perichoretic relationship between God and creation. Each of the three divine persons not only makes space for the other in mutual love; they also open up their *koinonia* to be the dwelling space for creation. Thus the diversity in creation is justified in the inner diversity of the Triune God and the unity of creation is made possible because they are unified by and within the mutual indwelling of the three persons. In other words, creation is characterized by diversity because God is also multiple; creation is a unity because God is also a unity.

One fundamental problem here is the issue of univocality. Moltmann has been criticized by many theologians for having used the idea of "space," "person" and "perichoresis" for both divine and non-divine spheres literally.⁸ He says, "Just as the three Persons of the Trinity are 'one' in a wholly unique way, so, similarly, human beings are the *imago Trinitatis* in their personal fellowship with one another."⁹ The statement illustrates Moltmann's understanding that we can copy whatever we find in the Triune life to the non-divine life.

Although the critique is fully justified, I do not want to abandon the value of Moltmann's contribution completely. I would propose the following: first, we should still connect the idea of space within the Triune God and the space of creation metaphorically or, better, imaginatively. In so doing, we

⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 298–99.

⁸ For example Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 186; Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity," in *New Blackfriars* 81, no. 956 (2000), 444.

⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, The Gifford Lectures (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 241.

should treat the ideal perichoresis within Godself as the “grammar of faith” through which we engage with creation because of our faith in a Triune God, whom we perceive as persons-in-communion. Second, we should situate the imagination within the eschatological hope for a unifying moment for all creation within God’s Triune communion in the future.¹⁰ This is to say that the space of the Triune communion will finally become the space for all creation partaking in it. Combining the two proposals enables us to maintain the qualitative difference between God and creation as well as relating God and creation in a more imaginative way.

THE TRIUNE GOD

It is through this dual action of the Son and the Spirit that the perichoretic space of the Triune God is made available to all of creation. The Son and the Spirit as the two hands of God—to use St Irenaeus’s idea—“overflow” the whole creation with God’s love. The Son becomes the space within which all creation indwell in God’s communal life, while the Spirit exists as the permeable or porous membrane between God and creation so that all creatures can still live as other-than-God in the Triune life, while at the same time the Spirit can penetrate the whole creation through divine immanence.

THE SON

I was intrigued by the inscription in the monastery of Khora in Istanbul and by the icon of Christos Pantokrator, which refers to Christ as *he khora ton zonton* (the container of the living). Echoing what Paul says in Colossians 1:15–16, the inscription and the icon depict the Son as the space within which all differences of creation are united; this is possible since the Son is also present as the “other” to God the Father in the power of the Spirit.¹¹ Thus, in such an imaginative metaphor, we could understand Paul’s clause, “in Christ” (*en Christō*) more easily.

¹⁰ It is also Ted Peters’ proposal to modify the Rahner’s Rule—the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa—by accepting the first part and qualifying the second part eschatologically. See Peters, *op. cit.* (note 8), 178.

¹¹ John P. Manoussakis succinctly maintains that the Son in the Istanbul’s icon is “*par excellence* the *khora* that receives both humanity and creation in their entirety, but with no confusion, in His incarnate person.” John Panteleimon Manoussakis, *God after Metaphysics: A Theological Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 92.

THE SPIRIT

I imagine the Spirit as the porous membrane that becomes both the boundary and the connector between God in the Son and creation. While this membrane separates God from creation it is also porous, so that the relationship between God and creation is made possible. I would argue that both the Son and the Spirit function in the Triune economy as the principle of universality and particularity, unity and diversity, insofar as we have put both divine persons together.

Having settled the discursive environment above, I suggest that the classical idea of participation (*methexis*) is of great help. While the qualitative difference between God and creation is maintained, creation is still allowed to participate in the communion of the Triune God. The idea of participation makes it possible for creation to have communion with God as its ultimate goal. We frequently come across different understandings of the concept of participation in the West and the East. On the one hand, Western Christians strongly emphasize the difference between God and creation, often suggesting that the participation of creation occurs through copying what happens in the Triune communion in the life of the church. If the Triune communion implies equality, love and mutuality, then these values must also be present in the life of the church. On the other, Christians in the East understand participation in a more mystical sense. Thus, the participation in the Triune communion must be real. Creation is united in the divine communion. The distinction can easily be found in many ecumenical documents on the church. For instance, the latest document of the World Council of Churches (WCC), *The Church: Toward a Common Vision*, expresses both ideas.¹² The document employs the Western image claiming that the church is “a reflection of the communion of the Triune God” (§ 25); the authority of the church also “reflects the holiness of God” (§ 50); furthermore, in (§ 53) the document states “The quality of synodality or conciliarity reflects the mystery of the Trinitarian life of God, and the structures of the church express this quality so as to actualize the community’s life as a communion.” However, the document also uses the Eastern idea when it asserts that the church “is fundamentally a communion in the Triune God” (§ 23). Again, the church is “an effective sign and means (sometimes described by the word instrument) of the communion of human beings with one another through their communion in the Triune God” (§

¹² World Council of Churches, *The Church: Toward a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), at www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision

27). Thus, the two models demonstrate the tension in Christian theology with regard to the relationship between God and creation.

MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION

The above reflection on the perichoretic space and its possibility for creation's participation in the communion of the Triune God suggests that whatever relationship occurs between God and creation it must keep intact the qualitative difference between both, as well as the possibility for creation to partake in the Triune communion. The basic tension creates another tension within creation, that is, that all are created as particular and different beings but still as a unity. This is so, because we can find the principles of unity and diversity within Godself, particularly in the economy of the two hands of God: the Son and the Spirit. The Son becomes the wide space for creation to celebrate their unified differences; it is through the power of Spirit that creation receives life as a multiple unity.

How is it relevant to our discussion on the reality of multireligious traditions? I have proposed in my previous work that such an imagination enables us to glimpse multiple religious participation. Each religious tradition can partake in the communion of the Triune God in its own unique and particular way. The Buddhist way of participation must be different from the Christian way, but both take place in the Triune perichoresis. The multiplicity of participation is possible because of the multiplicity of dimensions of perichoresis.¹³ One particular way to participate can appear as a "No" to other religious traditions but can be a different, yet authentic, "Yes" to God, since it relates to a particular dimension of perichoresis. Thus, "the possibility of multiple 'Yeses'—which also implies the possibility of multiple 'Noes' from a particular perspective—reflects the superabundant excess of divine love and grace."¹⁴ Once again, multiple participation is made possible within the Son as the space for all creation, through the living and embracing power of the Spirit. In other words, the Son's "Yes" to the Father becomes the space for the "Yeses" of all religions. "At the same time, although affirmed by the Son's 'Yes,' the 'eses' of other religions must be seen as different from the Christian 'Yes.'"¹⁵

Employing such a model for understanding the plurality of religious traditions, I would posit that we have to come to a more radical pluralist position, in

¹³ I proposed at least four dimensions of perichoresis: unity of reality, *khora*, personal relation, and the possible to appropriate diverse religious traditions. See Adiprasetya, *op. cit.* (note 2), 165-73.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

which all religious traditions are invited to participate equally, yet differently, in the communion of the Triune God. It also offers a more radical, inclusivist position, in which all religious participation is embraced by and included in the Son as the participatory space. Finally, it provides a chance for us to be more radically exclusivist, since we can affirm that there is no life outside the Son as the living space for all creation in the power of the Spirit.

THE IMAGINATIVE TRINITARIAN SPACE FOR SOCIETY

I would now like to enter the discussion that has been avoided by many, namely the social implication of a Trinitarian or perichoretic theology of religions. I believe that the danger of a direct application of the abstract theological sphere to the concrete social sphere is that we are tempted to employ an idea univocally for both spheres, as I have discussed briefly above. However, I have also suggested two different ways of dealing with the issue. First, we can still directly apply the idea insofar as we put it in a more mystical and eschatological perspective. Second, we can draw some values from the abstract theological sphere and treat them imaginatively. Both ways, however, require a sort of perspectivism (Nietzsche) that encourages us to make clear that the understanding we propose is based on what we believe as Christians. Such a perspectival position prevents us from being absolutists and imposing our particular perspective as the only true position. However, at the same time, we cannot deny that our position is universal in the sense that it is how we see the entire reality from our own Christian point of view.

Based on this perspective any social hope that we offer to our pluralistic society must indeed come from our Christian faith. I believe this is what has been lacking in many social theologies dealing with the issue of religious plurality. Instead of viewing the social reality from their Christian tradition, many have employed some other allegedly neutral, objectivist, or non-theological theories of social plurality. This approach, which I reject, has certain advantages. For example, we are encouraged to take an interdisciplinary approach to address social issues. But, the disadvantage is also obvious: we hardly have a coherent view of all reality based on our particular perspectivism.

In contrast to the non-theological theories, I would argue that it is necessary that we use the Trinitarian lens to understand and interpret social issues, including the plurality of religions. The Trinity therefore becomes the *omnium gatherum*, a miscellaneous collection, within which we attempt to put all aspects of life and from which we construct our theological imagination. Of course, Miroslav Volf is correct when he warns us

about the impossibility of applying any term used for the Triune God to our social life. He says,

First, since ontically human beings are manifestly not divine and since noetically human notions of the Triune God do not correspond exactly to who the Triune God is, Trinitarian concepts such as “person,” “relation,” or “perichoresis” can be applied to human community only in an analogous rather than a univocal sense. As creatures, human beings can correspond to the uncreated God only in a *creaturely* way.¹⁶

However, I would also add that it is not only when we talk about “human community” that we should apply the Trinitarian principles “in a creaturely way,” but also when we talk about the Trinitarian community.

Thus, using this principle, we can limitedly—or creaturely—construct our social theologies in response to religious diversity in our societies. I would propose some preliminary thoughts on public space from the Trinitarian perspective. First, this discussion requires us to decide what valuative elements should be taken as fundamental and then to employ them as our “grammar of faith” in talking theologically about abstract theological and concrete social dimensions. For example, the values of love, equality, mutuality and freedom, which are fundamental in the Trinitarian idea of perichoresis, could and should also be our grammatical values in speaking in the public space where we meet the religious other and attempt to construct a better future for our communities.

Second, what is called the public space is in fact an imaginative space that exists in the quotidian or everyday space where people meet and interact with one another. There is no public space that is specifically interreligious in character without being related to other human dimensions. The public space is a space where gays and straights, rich and poor, men and women, and other identities meet and is not limited to the interreligious public space. Whatever identity we express in the meeting, we meet as human beings. Hauerwas expressed his insight beautifully, when asked about his theory of religious plurality.

I, however, apologized for being deficient of such theory, but asked, “How many Buddhists do you have here in Conway? Moreover, if you want to talk with them what good will a theory do you? I assume that if you want to talk with Buddhists, you would just go talk with them. You might begin by asking, for example, “What in the world are you guys doing in Conway?” I then suggested I suspected that

¹⁶ Miroslav Volf, “‘The Trinity Is Our Social Program:’ The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” in *Modern Theology* 14:3 (1998), 405.

the real challenge in Conway was not talking with Buddhists, but trying to talk with Christian fundamentalists. We should also ask whether we have anything interesting enough the Buddhist would even want to talk about with us.¹⁷

What Hauerwas is trying to say is that Christians are called to make it worthwhile to live in the public space and to treat the religious other humanely. In Hauerwas's words, our task is "to suggest why Christians, if we are to be Christians, owe it to ourselves and our neighbors to quit fudging our belief that God matters."¹⁸ I believe such a task indeed becomes the public face of our Trinitarian faith. We are called to be ordinary human beings, living in an ordinary community called by the church into open relationships with the others, expressing the ordinary love of the Triune God in the midst of extraordinary evil powers of hatred, injustice and discrimination. As such, our Trinitarian politics is a "politics of life," in which all religious traditions, including Christianity, are called to fight for the common good. In that sense, indeed, the theology of religions is the politics of religions, and vice versa.

Furthermore, we must understand that our participation in the communion of the Triune God is to be reflected in our everyday spirituality, in the sense that we see through new eyes that the public space in which we engage with our neighbors is indeed part of the living space of the Son in the power of the Spirit. This new perspective enables us to affirm that, whenever we participate in nurturing the common good in the public, we are indeed participating in the life of the Triune God. In such a spirituality, the distinction between the sacred and the profane, the extraordinary and the ordinary, will fade away. Each face of the other that we encounter, be it a Buddhist or a Muslim or an atheist, is the "inspired" face of God in the Son.¹⁹

¹⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God* (Malden, MA & Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 58–59.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁹ For an excellent work on quotidianity, the others, and the face of God, see Richard Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward a Micro-Eschatology," in John Panteleimon Manoussakis (ed.), *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND PUBLIC SPACE IN CHINA: A RECONSIDERATION OF THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF SALVATION¹

Lai Pan-chiu

INTRODUCTION

China is a religiously diverse society. Besides the indigenous religious traditions, including Confucianism and Daoism, the history of religions in China was enriched by many “foreign” religions including Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism and various branches of Christianity.² Some of these “foreign” religions interacted with the indigenous religious traditions and became indigenized to different degrees and in various ways. The most noticeable example is the mutual influence between Buddhism and Daoism. Furthermore, different elements of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism are integrated into Chinese popular religion(s). Some sectarian groups, e.g., I-Guan Tao (literally one-coherent-way), incorporate not only elements of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism but also Christianity and Islam into their religious expressions. Given this interesting religious diversity, it is understandable that there are many academic studies on the interaction of religions in China.³

This essay examines the interaction between religious diversity and Christian discourses on salvation in China. In addition to analyzing the ways in which the

¹ This research work published in this essay was supported by a grant gratefully received from the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong (project no.: CUHK14405214).

² See Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993).

³ Judith A. Berling, “Why Chinese Thought on Religious Diversity Is Important,” in Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Joachim Gentz (eds), *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 27–50.

Chinese Christian discourse on salvation has responded to challenges from other religions and the state's political ideology, this essay will reconsider how the Christian doctrine of salvation can be better articulated in the Chinese context.

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN CHINA AND THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

When Christianity first came to China it had to face challenges from various religions, including not only those which had come to China at more or less the same time, e.g., Manichaeism, but also the then prevalent religions, in particular Buddhism and Daoism. It is noteworthy that the missionaries of the Church of the East (misidentified as Nestorians) were allowed by the Empire to stay and conduct their missionary works in China. This was primarily because the Empire recognized the contributions made by some of its adherents to the Empire's military victory. In return, the church established by these missionaries, called *Jingjiao* (literally "luminous religion"), paid tribute to the Emperor in its religious texts and recognized the role played by the Emperor in the promulgation of this religion.⁴ In other words, whether *Jingjiao* could flourish and further enrich the religious diversity of China depended on the government's assessment of the potential and/or actual contributions of *Jingjiao* to the Empire, including its social and political well-being. In brief, the case of *Jingjiao* illustrates that in China, the Christian proclamation of salvation must be scrutinized not only from the religious and cultural but also from the social and political perspectives. This largely sociopolitical management of religious diversity is found not only in imperial China but also in the contemporary Communist government's handling of religions.

At present Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism are legally recognized by the Chinese government. Although Confucianism is not regarded as an institutional religion, some Chinese call for recognizing Confucianism as the state or civil religion of China.⁵ These proposals are reminiscent of the existence of the state cult in imperial China, as well as the status and function of Communism and/or the nationalism that Paul Tillich (1886–1965) considers as quasi-religions,⁶ namely civil religion(s) in China. The

⁴ See further Zeng Qingbao [=Chin Ken-pa], *Shen mo shi han yu shen xue?* [What is Sino-Theology?] (Xinbei ShiXīnběi Shì Xīnběi Shì: Taiwan Christian Literature Council, 2015), 101–36.

⁵ See Chen Ming, *Rujiao yu gongmin shehui* [Confucian Religion and Civil Society] (Beijing: Dongfeng chubanshe, 2013).

⁶ Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).

legalization of the five religions does not mean that there are no other religions in contemporary China. The political reality is such that religious diversity is largely controlled or regulated by the government.⁷ The state endeavors to control not only the number of religions, but also their expressions or exercise in the public sphere. Religious meetings are legally restricted to religious places, and are not allowed to be held in the public space. Religious education is forbidden in state schools, and there are no private schools or universities run by religious organizations. Recent incidents of demolishing a huge number of crosses and church buildings in Zhejiang province can be interpreted as the government's attempt to control the public display of Christianity.

The government's religious policy is characterized by its strategy of building a "united front" that aims to unite the majority in order to form an alliance to fight the enemies, who might then become the minority.⁸ When the government launches political propaganda associated with the slogan "building a harmonious society," the different religions are "encouraged" to emphasize their messages of harmony, the harmonious relationship among themselves and the way in which religion can positively contribute to establishing a harmonious society.⁹ Any discourse which may ignite or reinforce hostility among religions will be suppressed. From time to time, religious diversity is considered from the perspective of the policy or strategy employed by the state—no matter whether it is in terms of "harmonious society" or "cultural strategy."¹⁰

In this kind of atmosphere, the originally rather academic discourse concerning "religious ecology"¹¹ became politically charged and the discussion shifted to whether and how the growth of Christianity should and could be controlled in order to prevent its dominance and to preserve the equilibrium among religions.¹² It is important to note that although the government allows a certain degree of religious diversity, it tends to control and regulate these. Although the emphasis of the policy is on "harmony"

⁷ See Pitman B. Potter, "Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China," in Daniel L. Overmyer (ed.), *Religion in China Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11–31.

⁸ See Robert Weller, "Chinese Communist Thought and Practice on Religious Diversity," in op. cit. (note 3), 171–85.

⁹ For example, Han Bingfang et al, *Zong jiao zhi he, he zhi zong jiao: Zhongguo zong jiao zhi he xie chu yi* [Religions and the Construction of a Harmonious Society in China] (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2009).

¹⁰ For example, Zhuo Xinping, *Zhongguo zong jiao yu wen hua zhan lue* [Chinese Religious and Cultural Strategy] (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2013).

¹¹ See Philip Clart, "'Religious Ecology' as a New Model for the Study of Religious Diversity in China," in *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought*, op. cit. (note 3), 187–99.

¹² Pan-chiu Lai, "God of Life and Ecological Theology," in *Ecumenical Review* 65.1 (March 2013), 78–79.

or “equilibrium” among religions, in actual practice, the religions are not treated equally due to the strategic consideration in a given situation. This kind of regulated diversity or “hierarchical plurality” can be seen at national policy level and in the actual practice of local government.¹³

In light of the prominent role played by the government in religious affairs, China is similar to some other Asian countries¹⁴ and differs widely from the liberal Western nations.¹⁵ Civil society remains underdeveloped, especially if “civil society” refers to a sphere, independent from the government, that provides a platform for people of different positions freely to express their ideas and to reach a consensus based on rational discussion. In China, “public” opinion can be manipulated by the government through its control of the mass media and some religious organizations. Under these circumstances, it is understandable that China is easily omitted in academic discussions on the role of religion in global civil society.¹⁶ When considering issues related to religious diversity and the public sphere in China, we need to take into account the respective roles played by religion and the state, as well as their interaction.¹⁷

In light of the above it is understandable that contemporary Chinese Christian discourse on religious diversity was shaped not only by the theological and religious heritage, but also social and political factors.¹⁸ The various discourses are related to the Christian doctrine of salvation, but the role played by the doctrine of salvation in Chinese Christian discourse is quite different from that in Western Christian theology.

The doctrine of salvation plays a pivotal role in Western theological approaches to religious diversity. In the contemporary discussion on the theology of religions, the widely used typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, the dividing lines between the major positions or paradigms, are primarily based on the respective positions on salvation. Western theological discourse on other religions is dominated by theological judgments on the salvific status of “non-Christian” religions. Christian theology seems to pass judgment on the

¹³ See Liang Yongjia, “Hierarchical Plurality: State, Religion and Pluralism in Southwest China,” in Chiara Formichi (ed.), *Religious Pluralism, State and Society in Asia* (London: Routledge, 2014), 51–70.

¹⁴ See Formichi, *ibid.*

¹⁵ See Gavin D’Costa et al (eds), *Religion in a Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁶ For example Mark Juergensmeyer (ed.), *Global Religions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Mark Juergensmeyer (ed.), *Religion in Global Civil Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ For a detailed discussion, see Zhibin Xie, *Religious Diversity and Public Religion in China* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006).

¹⁸ Pan-chiu Lai, “Christian Discourses on Religious Diversity in Contemporary China,” in *op. cit.* (note 3), 215–30.

salvific validity or truth of other religions. However, in doing this, the Christian theologian adopts a particular and monolithic understanding of salvation and disregards the diverse understandings of salvation of other religions. This imperialistic attempt will meet certain challenges or resistance in the Chinese context because, in addition to the diversity among the religions' understandings of salvation, each religion may have a variable rather than a uniform understanding of salvation. Furthermore, Chinese religions have considerable experience in interreligious disputes and ranking different religions hierarchically according to their doctrinal profundity or spiritual attainment. This method of dealing with religious diversity is derived from the Chinese Buddhist practice of doctrinal classification (*pan jiao*), which originally aimed at handling the doctrinal as well as scriptural diversity within Buddhism, especially the Buddhist canon.¹⁹ Chinese religions thus have no difficulty to propose counter judgments on the salvific value or status of Christianity, which may occupy an inferior or even the lowest place in their hierarchies.

In China, the Christian doctrine of salvation in general and the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith in particular, as well as some other closely related doctrines, are being challenged by other religions in the public sphere. Many Chinese Christian discourses on salvation can be interpreted as the Chinese Christian theological response to the challenges in the context of religious diversity.

CHRISTIAN SALVATION AND THE CHINESE PUBLIC SPHERE

It is interesting to note that the language of "salvation" became rather popular in the public discourse in modern China, especially during the Republican period (1911–1949). At the time, many Chinese intellectuals felt the national crisis and endeavored to explore various ways of saving the nation. Some modern Chinese intellectuals deemed religions, particularly Christianity, to be irrelevant or even detrimental to the salvation of the nation. In response, some Chinese Christians attempted to interpret how the gospel may be relevant to the salvation of the nation.²⁰ After the introduction of the policy of openness and reform at end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, Christian salvation and its relevance to the prosperity of the nation once again attracted the attention of Chinese intellectuals. In sharp contrast to the vehement criti-

¹⁹ See Kristin Beise Kilblinger, *Buddhist Inclusivism: Attitudes towards Religious Others* (Aldershot, England/Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 44–68.

²⁰ For a brief survey of the Chinese Christian theological responses during the Republican period, see Wing-hung Lam, *Chinese Theology in Construction* (Pasadena, CA: W. Carey Library, 1983).

cism targeted at Christianity during the Republican period, many Chinese intellectuals, even after having received a Communist education for some years, became attracted to the Christian understanding of salvation. The best known representative of this group of Chinese intellectuals is probably Liu Xiaofeng, who was recognized as a representative of “cultural Christians” and the most influential promoter of Sino-Christian theology.²¹

Liu published his first book comparing the Western (primarily Christian) and Chinese (primarily Daoist) attitudes toward the world under the categories of “salvation” (*zheng jiu*) and “easy wandering” (*xiao yao*).²² Liu’s attitude towards traditional Chinese culture is radically different from the approach of indigenous theology adopted by many Chinese Christian theologians of previous generations. The approach of indigenous theology or theological indigenization usually aims to emphasize the similarities or compatibility between Christianity and Chinese culture, and to transform Christian theology by adopting traditional Chinese, especially Confucian, terminology. Liu, on the other hand, points to the stark contrast between the Chinese and Western (mainly Christian) attitudes to the world and/or human life. He also finds it necessary to uphold the Christian approach and to counter the traditional Chinese attitude. Even if this may involve many difficulties, one has to “bear the cross in an ascetic way.”²³ For Liu the most important problem is to overcome the nihilism that dominates contemporary Chinese intellectual ethos. Liu argues that while apparently Confucianism and Daoism have their own values, they reinforce rather than overcome nihilism.²⁴

Liu affirms the relevance, validity and even superiority of Christian salvation vis-à-vis Chinese religions, and presents Christian salvation as the only possible way of overcoming the cultural problem of contemporary China. In this sense, his position comes much closer to the exclusivist position.²⁵ However, it is important to note that Liu’s appreciation of the Christian understanding of salvation is motivated by his concern for the

²¹ For an analysis of this group of Chinese intellectuals, especially Liu Xiaofeng, see Fredrik Fällman, *Salvation and Modernity: Intellectuals and Faith in Contemporary China* (Lanham: University Press of America, revised edition 2008).

²² Liu Xiaofeng, *Zheng jiu yu xiao yao* [Salvation and Easy-Wandering] (Shanghai: Renmin Chu ban she, 1988).

²³ *Ibid.*, 528–29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 531–34.

²⁵ For a Chinese critical response to Liu’s proposal, see GaoXudong, *Zhong xi wen xue yu zhe xue zong jiao: jian ping Liu Xiaofeng yi ji du Jiaodui jiao dui Zhongguo ren de gui hua* [Chinese-Western Literature and Philosophical Religion: With a Critique of Liu Xiaofeng’s Converting the Chinese to Christianity] (Beijing: Beijing da xue chu ban she, 2004).

cultural problem of contemporary China, rather than the ultimate destiny of the individual soul after death.

Whereas Liu is uncompromising and attempts to counter mainstream Chinese culture, Bishop Ding Guangxun (also known as K. H. Ting, 1915–2012), the then leader of the official Three-Self Church in China, was more accommodating to the sociopolitical context of contemporary China, and advocated a more inclusive understanding of salvation. With his concept of the “cosmic Christ,” Ding affirmed that God’s grace and salvation can be found beyond the boundaries of the church and even beyond the religious realm. Affirming the universality of salvation might help the Chinese churches to recognize the value of works done by people of other religions and members of the Communist Party. If the Communist Party could be regarded as an agent for salvation, it would be rather natural to affirm that salvation includes political liberation. However, it might be politically incorrect to advocate political liberation after China had been liberated. Some theologians of the Three-Self Church thus attempted to promulgate and emphasize a theology of reconciliation instead of a theology of liberation in their interpretations of Christian salvation. However, as some theologians have noted, by emphasizing harmony at the expense of liberation and justice, a one-sided advocating for a theology of reconciliation, without being complemented by a theology of liberation, might justify the status quo as well as the political ideology behind the slogan of “building a harmonious society.” Instead of taking liberation and reconciliation as two contradictory theological models, a more adequate approach would take liberation and reconciliation as two complementary soteriological models.²⁶

The influence of the sociopolitical context on the Chinese Christian interpretation of salvation can be seen even more clearly in some leaders of the Three-Self Church’s suggestion to dilute (*dan hua*) the doctrine of justification. The assumption here is that the doctrine of justification by faith would adversely affect the solidarity between Chinese Christians and the majority of the Chinese people, because the doctrine might be seen as highlighting the difference between the identities of believers and non-believers as well as between their ultimate destinies—being saved or damned eternally. This rather negative proposal to dilute the doctrine of justification by faith betrays a dilemma or inadequacy in the theological thinking of the Three-Self Church. The doctrine of justification is a distinctive and central doctrine of Protestantism and therefore cannot be removed from the church’s belief system. The church leaders failed to come up with a positive and creative reinterpretation of the doctrine to emphasize the

²⁶ For a critique of the theology of reconciliation in Chinese context, see Pan-chiu Lai, *op. cit.* (note 12), 79–82.

solidarity rather than division between believers and non-believers. The proposal to dilute the doctrine of justification by faith became a very controversial issue within Christian circles. As one of its critics, I have argued that the doctrine needs to be properly understood rather than diluted or deleted. A contextual rereading of Romans (different from the “Lutheran” interpretation, which takes the doctrine of justification by faith as the key for the interpretation of Romans), and a reinterpretation of the doctrine through Tillich’s theology, including his clarification of “justification by grace through faith” and further elaboration on the justification of the doubter, might highlight the solidarity as well as equality of believers and non-believers under divine grace, rather than draw a sharp dividing line between Christians and non-Christians.²⁷

The Christian doctrine of salvation not only relates to the sociopolitical context but also to ecological concerns. I would suggest that the Chinese theological mainstream emphasizes salvation more than creation: other than the anthropocentric interpretation of creation, the doctrine of salvation is not only anthropocentric, but also rather individualistic and other-worldly. The doctrine of justification by faith seems to assume that only human beings can be saved because only they can have faith. All non-human creatures are thus excluded from salvation, although some Western theological traditions affirm the participation of nature in creation.²⁸ While Chinese culture may be able to provide certain resources to develop a more adequate Chinese Christian ecological theology,²⁹ the problem remains: how can the doctrine of justification by faith be positively related to ecological theology and/or practice? Referring to Tillich’s theology, I argue that the contributing factors behind environmental degradation include the economic system and the culture of consumerism, which reflects the deep-seated concupiscence to be overcome in the “New Being” manifested in Jesus Christ. The doctrine of justification by faith implies an unconditional acceptance, which relates to one’s being rather than having. A person who accepts divine acceptance can reconcile with themselves and give up the attempt to affirm their value through consumption. Although the doctrine of justification by faith does not directly address environmental issues, its

²⁷ Lai Pinchao (= Pan-chiu Lai), “Youtai ren de bu xin: *Luoma shu zhong de chu jing shen xue fan xing*” [Unbelief of the Jews: Contextual Theological Reflection in Romans], in Xu Yihua and Zhang Qingxiong (eds), *Jidu jiao xue shu, di 4 ji* [Christian Scholarship, vol. 4] (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji chu ban she, 2006), 39–57.

²⁸ See Pan-chiu Lai, “Paul Tillich and Ecological Theology,” in *The Journal of Religion* 79.2 (April 1999), 233–49.

²⁹ See Pan-chiu Lai, “Christian Ecological Theology in Dialogue with Confucianism,” in *Ching Feng* 41.3–4 (Sept.–Dec. 1998), 309–44.

proclamation and acceptance can indirectly contribute to the shaping of a more environmental-friendly culture.³⁰

The critique of the Christian doctrine of salvation in general, and the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith in particular, is targeted at its possible implications on the cultural, social, political and environmental spheres, rather than the doctrine itself. The theological challenge is more fundamental than merely to ascertain how to explore or elaborate the positive implications of the doctrine on various public issues but, rather, whether the Christian doctrine or concept of salvation needs to be reformulated, and how the place or centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith in the Christian system of beliefs should be understood.

SALVATION IN CHINESE RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY

Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism are considered integral parts of Chinese culture. While some Chinese Christians vehemently reject them as false religions or idolatries, others affirm their cultural and/or religious values as a preparation for the gospel.³¹ Based on the latter, some theologians have attempted to indigenize or contextualize the Christian doctrine of salvation by using expressions from Chinese culture, especially Confucianism.³² However, Chinese religions are not merely raw material, waiting for Christian theological exploration. Rather, representatives of Chinese religions critique Christian theology, including the doctrines of original sin, human nature and salvation. For instance, some Confucians criticize the Christian doctrine of salvation—especially the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith and the doctrine of original sin—which, according to their superficial interpretation rather than in-depth study, emphasize human sinfulness and the futility of moral cultivation, and thus contradict the Confucian understanding of human goodness and its emphasis on moral cultivation and relying on one's own efforts.

³⁰ Lai Pinchao (=Pan-chiu Lai), *Duo yuan, fen qi yu ren tong: shen xue yu wen hua de tan suo* [Plurality, Diversity and Identity: Explorations in Theology and Culture] (Xinbei, Taiwan: Xinbēi Shì Xīnbēi Shì: Taiwan Christian Literature Council/Graduate School of Religion, Chung Yuan Christian University, 2011), 277–98.

³¹ Pan-chiu Lai, “Chinese Religions: Negotiating Cultural and Religious Identities,” in Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (eds), *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 270–88.

³² For a recent example, see Jackson Wu, *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2012).

These criticisms have elicited many Christian theological responses. Notable is the recent attempt made by Paulos Huang (also known as Huang Baoluo). By systematically analyzing the Confucian understanding of the Christian doctrine of salvation, Huang found that modern Confucians are more open to Christian-Confucian dialogue than their pre-modern predecessors. Furthermore, he points out that there are significant differences between Confucianism and Christianity with regard to the object and means of salvation, etc.³³ Huang makes no attempt to defend the Christian position but, instead, based on his analysis of the similarities and differences between Christianity and Confucianism, he identifies four obstacles.

Theologically, the monistic unity between Heaven and humanity is one of the most important features which distinguishes Confucianism from Christianity. Spiritually, Christians should help the Chinese people understand that Christianity is not spiritual opium. Politically, the Chinese people should be sure that Christianity is not a disruptive element for turmoil. Ethically, the Chinese people need to know that the Christian concept of God does not reject but at the same time fulfills Confucian ethics.³⁴

In contrast to theological indigenization, Huang makes no suggestion as to how the Christian doctrine of salvation can be modified in order to indigenize it or to engage in dialogue with Confucianism. However, he notices that the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith may be only part, rather than the whole, of the Christian doctrine of salvation, which also includes sanctification.³⁵ Huang has certain reservations about the Orthodox doctrine of *theosis* or deification, and is more sympathetic to the Finnish interpretation of Luther's theology. Huang believes that this interpretation may be more adapted to integrating justification with sanctification on the one hand and preserving the distinction between Christ and Christians and between Christianity and Confucianism, on the other.³⁶

Alexander Chow (Cao Rongjin) is more sympathetic than Huang to the Orthodox understanding of *theosis*. Based on Justo L. González's typology of Christian thought, Chow conducts a survey on the three types of theology in China. He further argues that unlike the Latin/Western theologi-

³³ Paulos Huang, *Confronting Confucian Understandings of the Christian Doctrine of Salvation—A Systematic Theological Analysis of the Basic Problems in the Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (Helsinki: Department of Systematic Theology, University of Helsinki, 2006), 279–83.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 282.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 280.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 262–63.

cal tradition, which is dominant in Chinese Christian theology, Orthodox theology, which is associated with type C of González's typology, is more beneficial to the further development of Christian theology in contemporary China. What is particularly important is the Orthodox doctrine of deification, which is more compatible with the Confucian doctrine of the unity of heaven and humanity.³⁷

I have made a similar attempt. With reference to the soteriology of Gregory of Nyssa (335–394), I have illustrated the tradition of Christian humanism, which affirms the participation of the human effort in salvation, as well as human goodness, dignity, freedom, etc., and show that this tradition is compatible with Confucianism.³⁸ Similarly, I refer to the soteriology of Irenaeus (130–202) and Augustine (354–430), especially their understanding of how God shaped humanity with God's two hands—the Son and the Holy Spirit—to illustrate that the doctrine of deification, which exhibits significant similarities to Confucianism, not only in the theological tradition of the Orthodox church but, in a less explicit way, also in the Latin/Western theological tradition. This implies that the Western/Latin theological tradition, pioneered by Augustine, is not as incompatible with Confucianism as some Confucians have assumed.³⁹ In fact, I also query the validity of the stark contrast between self-power and other-power as some Confucians presume.⁴⁰

Huang, Chow and I share the view that the Christian doctrine of salvation does not necessarily contradict Confucianism. Much of the Confucian critique of Christianity is based on an inadequate understanding of Christian theology, and thus not entirely fair to Christianity. Much of it is focused on the Protestant understanding of salvation, especially the Lutheran doctrine of justification—no matter whether by faith or by grace alone.⁴¹ However, after a more thorough and/or comprehensive exploration of the Christian theological

³⁷ Alexander Chow, *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

³⁸ Pan-chiu Lai, "Christian Transformation of Greek Humanism and its Implications for Christian-Confucian Dialogue," in *Korea Journal of Systematic Theology* 22 (2008.12), 245–69.

³⁹ Pan-chiu Lai, "Shaping Humanity with Word and Spirit: Perspectives East, West and Neither-East-Nor-West," in Anselm K. Min and Christoph Schwöbel (eds), *Word and Spirit: Renewing Christology and Pneumatology in a Globalizing World* (Berlin & Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 131–49.

⁴⁰ Pan-chiu Lai, "Christian-Confucian Dialogue on Humanity: An Ecological Perspective," in *Studies in Inter-religious Dialogue* 14.2 (2004), 202–15.

⁴¹ See Arne Redse, *Justification by Grace Alone.* *Facing Confucian Self-Cultivation: The Christian Doctrine of Justification Contextualized to New Confucianism* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

tradition, including Orthodox theology, one may find that the Christian doctrine of salvation is not restricted to the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith and does not necessarily assume an Augustinian doctrine of original sin. Put more positively: there are theological trends or resources within Christianity that affirm the goodness of human nature, the unity between humanity and divinity, as well as the role of the human effort in salvation. The Christian affirmation of these ideas may show that Christianity and Confucianism are not as incompatible as some Confucians might have assumed.

These Chinese Christian responses to the Confucian critique do not deny the doctrine of justification by faith, but put it in a wider context, including that of other Christian understandings of salvation, e.g., the Orthodox understanding of salvation in terms of deification. At the same time, the attempt is being made to put the Augustinian doctrine of original sin in the context of the history of Christian thought in order to show that this doctrine might not represent Augustine's entire thought, not to mention the whole Christian theological tradition. In more positive terms, in responding to the Confucian critique, the Chinese Christian discourse attains a new level of ecumenical awareness by taking into account the theological diversity or richness within Christianity and the limitations of the (Protestant or Lutheran) theological tradition received from the Western missionaries.

In contrast to Liu's polemic and uncompromising attitude toward the Chinese religious tradition, the above mentioned Christian theological responses to Confucianism can be described as apologetic as well as dialogical. In addition to these, one of the Chinese Christian discourses on salvation takes a more dialogical and comparative approach to Chinese Buddhism, including the Mahayana Buddhist understanding of universal salvation.⁴²

Apart from these reactions to the challenges related to individual Chinese religions, there are also responses to those derived from Chinese religions as a whole. Daniel Overmyer, a scholar of Chinese religions, raised questions concerning whether and how Chinese religions are to be considered as part of the history of salvation from a Christian perspective.⁴³ In response to Overmyer, I have reflected on the Christian doctrine of salvation,⁴⁴ not only by referring to how some of the Greek fathers affirmed the involvement of Greek culture in the divine economy before the incarnation or the arrival of the Christian gospel, but also to Tillich's

⁴² Pan-chiu Lai, "Reconsidering the Christian Understanding of Universal Salvation in Mahayana Buddhist Perspective," in *Ching Feng*, n.s. 12 (2013), 19–42.

⁴³ See Daniel L. Overmyer, "Chinese Religions as Part of the History of Salvation: A Dialogue with Christianity," in *Ching Feng* 40.1 (March 1997), 1–14.

⁴⁴ Pan-chiu Lai, "Chinese Religions and the History of Salvation: A Theological Perspective," in *Ching Feng* 40.1 (March 1997), 15–40.

soteriology. I suggest that, corresponding to his understanding of life as a multidimensional unity, Tillich interprets salvation primarily in terms of healing and wholeness, which includes not only the physical and psychological dimensions, but also the sociopolitical dimension or the healing of broken relationships, as well as the spiritual dimension. This inclusive and multivalent understanding of salvation not only affirms the participation of Chinese religions in the history of salvation, it can also offer a better alternative to the monolithic understanding of salvation advocated by John Hick (1922–2012), who understands salvation mainly in terms of transformation from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness. In contrast to Hick, Tillich's understanding is more universalistic since it affirms the participation of nature in the process of the fall and salvation, rather than focusing on humankind. Furthermore, Hick's theory tends to assume that all world religions are equally valid ways to the same salvation. This may impose a monolithic understanding of salvation on various religions and disregards the differences among the religions' respective understanding of salvation(s). Tillich's understanding of salvation on the other hand allows for the different religions to have their own understanding of salvation that may correspond to different dimensions of life and have various emphases on these. According to this understanding, salvation is not a matter of all or nothing and it is possible for different religions to have different ends.⁴⁵

The problem of understanding salvation in a number of different ways is particularly acute in the Chinese context. In addition to the differences between the Buddhist, Confucian and Daoist understandings of salvation, Chinese popular religion(s) may make the case even more complicated. It is interesting to note that ancient Chinese religion is characterized by the "search for personal welfare,"⁴⁶ which is contrary to Hick's understanding of transformation from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness. This self-centeredness can also be found in Chinese popular/folk religion, which involves *feng-shui*, fortune telling and changing one's personal name in order to get better fortune in its practices. One might question whether Hick's theory of salvation, which is part of his criteriology for religions of the Axial Age, is applicable to or compatible with Chinese popular religion.⁴⁷ However, if Hick's theory covers the "world religions" that originated during the Axial Age, rather than all religions, then it does not matter if Chinese popular religion does not match the soteriological and/or ethical criteria proposed by Hick, especially if Chinese popular religion is

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 25–26.

⁴⁶ Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

⁴⁷ See Wai-Yip Wong, "Incompatibility between Chinese Folk Religion and John Hick's Criteriology," in *Journal of Comparative Scripture* 2 (2013), 153–92.

recognized as an independent religious tradition. The problem is that on the one hand Chinese popular religion(s) incorporated various elements of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism in its ethics and beliefs while, on the other, it also influenced Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism.⁴⁸ This can be seen in Daoism that includes not only Daoist philosophy, which understands salvation in terms of easy-wandering (*xiao yao*) or following the course of nature, but also Daoist religious practices, e.g., exorcism, Tai Chi, Qigong, fasting, interior alchemy, etc. aiming at longevity, good health and immortality. Similar trends can be found in popular Buddhism, which exhibits a certain syncretism between popular religion and Chinese Buddhism. Unlike Theravada Buddhism, which tends to understand salvation or liberation primarily in terms of nirvana, Chinese Buddhism, which includes worship of the Mahayana bodhisattvas, might long for salvation in terms of escaping from physical danger, good health, bearing off-spring (especially a male child), prosperity, longevity, etc. It is unclear whether the various Buddhist and Daoist understandings of salvation should be classified as self-centered or reality-centered.

These diverse ways of understanding salvation constitute a serious challenge to Hick's philosophical theory of religious pluralism. A multi-dimensional understanding of salvation can render the distinction between exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism employed in the Christian theology of religions untenable. It will be difficult to hold onto the exclusivist claim that no other religions can bring forth salvation. For example, it is difficult to deny that some other religions bring forth a sort of psychological healing to their adherents. Moreover, it will not be easy to justify the inclusivist claim that only Christianity has total salvation, while other religions have only some parts of it. This is so because there is considerable evidence indicating that sometimes other religions are more effective than Christianity in certain dimensions of healing. For example, in terms of bringing forth physical healing, the Daoist religion, with its practices of Chinese medicine, martial arts (including Tai Chi), Qi Qong, etc., is arguably be more effective than Christianity. In some other dimensions, e.g., political liberation, it is perhaps very difficult to demonstrate which religion is more effective than the others. More importantly, according to Tillich's understanding of life as a multi-dimensional unity, there is no hierarchical relation among the various dimensions. In fact, Tillich deliberately uses the metaphor of "dimensions" instead of "levels" in order to avoid a hierarchical understanding of the "levels" or "dimensions."⁴⁹ According to this understanding, even if Christianity can show that it is more effective in the "spiritual" dimension, this does not

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁴⁹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (London: SCM Press, 1978), 12-17.

mean that Christianity as a whole must be higher or better than the other religions, not to say the fulfillment of the others.

Furthermore, it will be hard to justify the pluralistic view that all religions are equally valid paths to salvation since different religions have relative strengths and weaknesses in different dimensions of salvation. This view of salvation also challenges the so-called “particularism” which, in its critique of the pluralist’s monolithic understanding of salvation, tends to stress the radical divergence and even incommensurability of the different ways of understanding salvation. The multi-dimensional view of salvation may challenge this and although the various religions’ understanding of the spiritual dimension of salvation may be quite different, there may be similarities in some other dimensions, e.g., physical healing. Although the various religions understand the concept of “human liberation” in different ways, it remains a usable concept for interreligious communication because there remains a certain commensurability in the understanding of it in different religions.⁵⁰ The rhetoric of particularism seems fully to respect the religions’ diverse understandings of salvation, while disregarding the complexity of the respective religions’ understanding of salvation as well as the overlap among the religions’ multivalent understanding of salvation. This can then adversely affect the comparison and dialogue among religions.⁵¹

What concerns us is not the challenge to Hick’s theory or the discussion on the theology of religions in Western academic circles, but the Chinese Christian discourses on salvation. The divergent understandings of salvation in the Chinese context of religious diversity may call for a reconsideration of the Christian doctrine of salvation, especially the workability and desirability of a multi-dimensional understanding of salvation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have seen that in order to address the different challenges what is needed is not a theory of salvation but, rather, various theological models of salvation. Given the metaphorical nature of theological language,⁵²

⁵⁰ William R. Burrows, “Commensurability and Ambiguity: Liberation as an Inter-religiously Usable Concept,” in Dan Cohn-Sherbok (ed.), *World Religions and Human Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 127–42.

⁵¹ For a critique of the position of particularism, see Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 146–96.

⁵² See Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: The Nature of Scientific and Religious Language* (London: SCM Press, 1974); Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

including the metaphorical nature of the Christian doctrine of salvation,⁵³ it is legitimate to affirm the plurality of soteriological models.⁵⁴ This is to acknowledge that the reality of salvation remains a mystery beyond the capture of one single theological model, and thus requires the complementary use of several soteriological models.⁵⁵ However, the articulation of a comprehensive understanding of multi-dimensional salvation remains an important task for Chinese Christian theology.

The multi-dimensional understanding of salvation mentioned above cannot only be found in Tillich, but also in the writings of other theologians. For example, in line with the Wesleyan theological tradition, John B. Cobb, Jr. also advocates for a holistic view of salvation, which includes various dimensions of life, particularly personal salvation as well as social justice.⁵⁶

The advantage of a multi-dimensional understanding of salvation is that it provides a more holistic understanding of salvation that may do justice to the richness of the meaning of salvation in the Bible as well as the salvific experiences of ordinary Christians, who might have recognized God's salvation, mainly through their experiences of physical healing, psychological healing, healing of broken relationships, etc.

In China, Christians are in the minority. As such they must work with people of other religions in order to fight for religious freedom and human rights. To this end, the best strategy is not to emphasize the uniqueness or incomparability of the Christian tradition or approach to the issue, but the possibility or basis for the cooperation with other religions on the public issues concerned.⁵⁷ With an articulated multi-dimensional view of salvation, Chinese Christianity might be able clearly to affirm that even though Christianity and other religions may have divergent ultimate religious ends, they share some "preliminary" goals, including relief from physical suffering or danger, bodily and psychological healing, political liberation, harmonious social relationship and the establishment of a civil society where human rights will be properly protected and they can freely exercise their religion in the public sphere.

⁵³ Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 27–52.

⁵⁴ John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), 26–52.

⁵⁵ See Barbour, *op. cit.* (note 52), 152–55.

⁵⁶ Pan-chiu Lai, "Inter-religious Dialogue and Social Justice: Cobb's Wesleyan Process Theology in East Asian Perspective," in *Asia Journal of Theology* 25.1 (April 2011), 82–102.

⁵⁷ Pan-chiu Lai, "Human Rights and Christian–Confucian Dialogue," in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 23.2 (2013), 133–49.

LUTHERAN THEOLOGY BETWEEN EXCLUSIVISM AND OPENNESS: RECONSIDERING THE CLASSICAL LUTHERAN DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN “CREATION” AND “SALVATION”

Notto R. Thelle

CREATION AND SALVATION—TWO DIFFERENT CONCERNS?

My theme is an invitation to reflect on the tension between Lutheran openness to other religions with regard to the involvement in the public (secular) space on the one hand—relief work, healing, culture, education, diakonia, peace, justice, environment, politics—and, on the other, a much more reluctant or even exclusivist attitude when it comes to spiritual issues related to the ultimate questions of salvation. The involvement in the world is primarily related to the first article of faith (God as Creator), while salvation is primarily related to the second article of faith (Christ as savior), emphasized with strong exclusivist *solus/sola* (alone/only) expressions such as “Christ alone,” “Scripture alone,” “grace alone” and “faith alone.” The challenge before us is not the Christocentric position, common to most churches and a vital element in the Lutheran confession but, rather, the problem that arises when creation and salvation appear to be isolated as two separate aspects of God’s involvement in the world.

While I will comment on the “alones” in light of the critical context in which they were formulated, my main focus in the following will be to question the validity of the separation between creation and salvation, and to search for other options in Lutheran theology—also inspired by the wider oikoumene and other religions—for bridging the gap.

APPROACHING THE THEME

Since theological reflection is always done from a specific place or position, I shall start with a few brief comments regarding my own background and approach to the theme.

MISSIONARY CONVERSIONS

I was born at Tao Fong Shan in Hong Kong, in 1941. My father was Karl Ludvig Reichelt's closest associate in his work among Buddhist monks from the early beginnings in 1922 in Nanjing until Reichelt's death at Tao Fong Shan in 1952. I have memories of Buddhist monks coming from all over China with the fragrance of incense clinging to their robes. They greeted us with deep bows and clasped hands. They had brands on their shaven heads as a sign that they had cut their ties to the world and were now wandering in search of the truth.

Reichelt was deeply fascinated by Buddhism and felt a genuine spiritual friendship and closeness to anyone who was seeking the *Dao* (Way). He expected that in the future the best in Buddhism would be integrated as a "brilliant jewel" into the great sanctuary of Christ.¹ He wanted to create a "Christian monastery for Buddhist monks," an open court for dialogue and the sharing of spirituality. At the same time, he wanted to convert the monks and this led to some inherent tensions in his missionary work.²

"He had gone out to change the East and was returning himself a changed man," wrote an American observer about the generation of missionaries who came to China around 1900.³ Reichelt was one of the converted missionaries who had come to the Far East with a burning passion for preaching the Christian message but, in the process, discovered that the East had spoken its message to him. In the Far East, these missionaries represented a universal religion; they wanted to change the society to which they had committed their lives. At home, they changed people's attitude by bringing a new breadth of vision and helping them to appreciate the greatness and worth of the civilizations of the Far East. Many Chinese church leaders at that time also woke up to a much more positive affirmation of their Chinese

¹ Karl Ludvig Reichelt, *Kinas religioner* [China's Religions] (Stavanger: Det Norske Missionssselskaps forlag, 1913), 160, 165.

² For a thorough analysis of Reichelt's work and strategies, see my articles, "A Christian Monastery for Buddhist Monks 1: Karl Ludvig Reichelt' Sacred Mountains," in *Ching Feng* (New Series), 6 (2005), 1-35; "A Christian Monastery for Buddhist Monks 2: Buddhist Rhetoric in Christian Liturgies," in *Ching Feng* (New Series) 6 (2005), 131-77.

³ Earl H. Cressy, "Converting the Missionary," in *Asia: Journal of the American Asiatic Association* 19 (1919), 553-56.

background. This type of openness toward Buddhism and other religions is a part of my spiritual inheritance.⁴

LUTHERAN CONTRIBUTIONS

I am grateful for my Lutheran heritage, even though I recognize considerable limitations in the specific Norwegian brand of pietistic Lutheranism. A basic part of Lutheran identity is the will to reform—*semper reformandum*—to be prepared for encountering new challenges and to be willing to redefine what it means to be church, to be a Christian, to be a human being in this world. I was happy and inspired when I discovered that the aspect of conversion is commented on in the document “The Mission of the Church in Multi-Faith Contexts,” which speaks openly about the need for continuous transformation. “In interfaith dialogue our eyes may be opened, we ourselves may be ‘converted’...” The encounter with others may transform our “understanding and appreciation of God’s grace and presence in human society.”⁵

From 1986 onward I was involved in the LWF study project on interfaith issues participating at a number of international conferences. The first meeting was held in Geneva in 1986, where the theme was religious pluralism with special regard to the Lutheran heritage.⁶ The concern was not only to motivate and prepare Lutheran theologians and church leaders to involve themselves in dialogue and to deal seriously with pluralism. A major theme or sub-theme was to search for specific Lutheran contributions to interfaith dialogue. Can we offer insights that are unique to our tradition?

LUTHERAN “YES” AND “NO” TO OTHER RELIGIONS

One of the characteristics of the Lutheran tradition is its understanding of the two kingdoms, the secular and the spiritual. The secular world is

⁴ Moreover, for sixteen years I was involved in research and interfaith dialogue, working as associate director of the National Council of Churches’ Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto. Buddhism was the main focus of study and dialogue, but also other Eastern religions, Shinto and numerous new faiths. Returning to Norway in 1985, and serving for twenty years as a professor of ecumenics and missiology at the University of Oslo, I could pursue interfaith dialogue through teaching and theological reflection.

⁵ The Lutheran World Federation, *For the Healing of the World: Assembly Study Book for the LWF Tenth Assembly, Winnipeg, Canada 2003* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation 2002), 167.

⁶ J. Paul Rajashekar (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and Lutheran Theology*, LWF Report 23/24 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1988).

the arena for God's activity, and every Christian is expected to serve God through their active involvement in society. While there are certain weaknesses in such a concept, the positive affirmation that secular society is the place where one is expected to serve God—and not primarily such spiritual arenas as monastic life and specific religious practices—has created an openness toward the wholehearted involvement in the public (secular) space. A corresponding openness toward God's revelation in creation has enabled Lutherans to cooperate with other religions in the public space and to recognize that God may be known among people of other faiths.

First, the obvious biblical basis for this expectation is that God, being the creator, can somehow be known through God's creation. God has not let Godself without testimony, as Paul proclaims according to Acts (14:17). God spread humankind all over the face of the world “so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’” (Acts 17:27f.). What is known of God is open to how we perceive God, ever since the creation of the world: God's invisible attributes, eternal power and divine nature (Rom 1:20). Paul also writes about the Law that is written in the hearts of humankind (Rom 2:15). Even though the last two statements are formulated in a critical evaluation of pagan worship (idolatry), they express a surprising openness to the potential knowledge of God.

Against this background it is not surprising that some twentieth-century Lutheran theologians were convinced of God's revelation in creation (*Schöpfungsoffenbarung*) or original revelation (*Uroffenbarung*), to use Paul Althaus's expressions. The American theologian Carl E. Braaten followed Althaus's theology to a large extent, while Paul Tillich wrote about a general revelation in the human experience of “being grasped by an ultimate concern.”

Religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of life.⁷

Carl Heinz Ratschow argues that “the first mover in all religions is God's irresistibility,”⁸ and distinguishes between God's saving acts (*Heilshandeln*) and God's work in this world (*Welthandeln*), where the divine mystery “shines through.” Wolfhart Pannenberg seems to accept that God's saving

⁷ Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 4.

⁸ Carl Heinz Ratschow, “Die Religionen und das Christentum,” in *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 9 (1967), 105.

acts also happen through (secular) history, but argues that this activity is open and ambiguous and only finds its final form at the end of history.⁹

The above-mentioned theologians—and many others—are in various ways quite open to other religions: Althaus suggests that when people encounter God in Christ, they do not meet God as a stranger; Tillich’s concept of “being grasped” is a passive notion, an expression of undeserved grace; Ratschow expects that the divine mystery “shines through”; and Pannenberg argues that God’s saving acts may happen through secular history. Even Carl E. Braaten accepts that we should be free to “waffle somewhere between reverent speculation and silent agnosticism”¹⁰ concerning the question how God is working “within the religions to orient them to the future salvation revealed in Christ.”¹¹ I agree with him that it must be possible to maintain the Christian understanding that the ultimate meaning of history is revealed in Jesus Christ, and that the universality of Christ “is something that is being worked out through the interaction of the religions and will be established for all eyes to see only at the end of history.”¹²

The solution is probably not to abandon the “alones” of the Lutheran Reformation, but to interpret them in a wider context than the conflicts of the early sixteenth century. The commitment to “God in Christ” should be combined with an open ear to the insights gained by dialogue with other religions and ideologies, giving them a meaningful place in God’s work in the world. The main obstacle in this process is probably not the “alones” of Lutheranism, but the sharp distinction between “creation” and “salvation,” and the tendency to relate justification by faith one-sidedly to Christ’s propitiatory suffering and death on the cross.

CONFLICT AND CRISIS SHAPING IDENTITY

Lutheran theology was formulated in a time of crisis. The main challenge was the medieval church with its traditions and aberrations, its enormous power, hierarchies and traditions and need to reform. Luther was one of

⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Erwägungen zu einer Theologie der Religionsgeschichte,” in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 252–95. For a general review of Lutheran and Reformed positions, see Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the Other Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 98–108; and Knitter’s *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 33–42.

¹⁰ Carl E. Braaten, “Lutheran Theology and Religious Pluralism,” in Rajashekar, *op. cit.* (note 6), 125.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

many reform-minded people who wanted change, and it began with an invitation to dispute the indulgences in 1517.

In such times of crisis and conflict, weapons are drawn, positions become more uncompromising and formulations sharper. Luther's challenge was to find a position that enabled him to encounter a church with an overwhelming authority: political and religious power, a well-established power of definition with councils, papal bulls, hierarchies and traditions. He needed an absolute authority and chose Scripture alone. He needed formulations with which he could stand and fall: justification by faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone. Added to this were Luther's personality and his spiritual experiences. Theology is to an astonishing degree influenced by the biographies and personal crises of those who formulate it.

The Lutheran position was a classical expression of a contextual response, a basic insight that still nurtures our faith, the great gift of the Reformation to the universal church. At the same time, we must realize that now, five hundred years later, we live in a different context with other types of challenges to theology, and we have to face new contexts with new theological reflection.

One of the new contexts is religious pluralism. Religions are not just out there somewhere, and not only challenges for non-Western churches, but also within Western communities. For Luther and his allies other religions were not the main challenge and they had no theology of religion—at least no acceptable theology. We have to accept what Luther said about the Jews as a deplorable fact and come to terms with it. What he said about Islam, about which he actually had some positive things to say, is not really relevant. At the time, Islam was threatening Europe and that is not a good point of departure for our contemporary encounter with Islam.¹³

Even though Luther chose Scripture as his authority in order to encounter the church's overwhelming authority, it is obvious that his reading of the Scripture depended on his context. His criticism of the abuses of the church, not least regarding the understanding of penance and grace, forced him to concentrate on justification by faith as the article by which the church stands and falls. If the central question is, How can I get a gracious God? then the reading of Scripture will be influenced by that. The dominant answer was the concentration on a forensic understanding

¹³ Apart from the openness for revelation in creation and the exclusivist "alones," one might add the pragmatic solution to confessional struggles in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—*cuius regio eius religio* (whose realm, his religion). A problematic side effect of the Lutheran "alones" is the one-sided tendency to use "justification by faith" as the main key to evaluate other religions, which has generally been devalued as "justification by works."

of justification: God is the judge who for Christ's sake does not judge the sinner, but acquits the guilty. As a result, Lutheran soteriology has one-sidedly been connected with the second article of faith, with less of an awareness of the first and third articles.

The critical context of the reformers meant that a number of other theological themes were not paid much attention. A major part of the great classical tradition, common to both the Eastern and Western churches, was not up for discussion. Luther was concerned about the individual in their relationship to God (*coram Deo*) and, to some extent, to society (*coram hominibus*). Other issues that had to be dealt with were questions of ministry, the sacraments, church order, worship, monasticism, political authorities, church education, social unrest and social order. We have to ask ourselves whether the concentration on these themes meant that Lutheran theology was less prepared for the encounter with new contexts. Neither cosmology, the relationship to "nature" or creation (humankind *coram natura* or *coram creatione*), nor the relationship to other religions (*coram religionibus*) was an urgent theme as they are today.¹⁴ There is certainly a great potential in Luther's writings for theological reflection that goes beyond the central concerns of the Reformation. We have to search for other aspects of Luther's theology and the Lutheran tradition, or reformulate some of the reformatory insights in order to deal with our present context.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

I have no ambition to deliver a definitive answer to the tension—or contradiction—between the exclusivism of the Lutheran emphasis on *solus/sola* in relation to "salvation" and the spiritual realm, and its relative openness to other religions when it comes to awareness of God in God's "creation" and the secular realm. I will limit myself to one direction where we might search for new inspiration.

CREATION THEOLOGY

The most fruitful area for further research would perhaps be to investigate the potential in Lutheran creation theology: a Trinitarian understanding of God's presence in the world, where Christ's mission and the Holy Spirit's work are totally integrated in creation theology. If heaven and earth are God's creation it must imply that the entire creation is touched by God's

¹⁴ I realize that such Latin concepts as *natura* and *religio* do not necessarily have the same meaning as in our time, but I hope the point is clear enough.

presence. Just as artists sign their works, we may expect creatures to have traces of God’s signature. If humankind is created in God’s image, then this implies a basic relationship to God in our deepest humanity. Moreover, if the world is created in Christ, for Christ and to Christ, as Paul argues, it must mean that there is also Christ’s signature in all created things. If the Spirit is God’s creative and life-giving breath, then we may believe that the Spirit blows through all of creation. The work of the Spirit is not only to guide, enlighten and sanctify, but to be the agent of God’s creative presence in creation. *Veni Creator Spiritus*.

With such a “high Christology” the revelation in Jesus Christ is related to what was “in the beginning,” as we read in 1 John 1:1–3. Jesus’ incarnation, life and work, his death and resurrection are manifestations of what was already given in God’s act of creation in the beginning.

From a different perspective—one might call it a “low Christology” based on the stories of the gospels—it makes sense to see Jesus as the Creator’s presence in the world. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said, “My Father is still working, and I also am working” (Jn 5:17). God’s “work” is to create. I believe Jesus’ life and work to make sense in creation. When he “saved” people he was doing the Creator’s work: he restored that which was broken; healed the sick; gave new life to the downtrodden; forgave sinners; brought justice to the poor and dignity to the marginalized. Such works of creation also meant restoring the community for those who were “inside,” for the inside community was also in need of salvation in order to be whole. His suffering, death and resurrection may also be understood from the perspective of creation theology.

CREATION THEOLOGY IS MORE THAN AN AFFIRMATION OF THE WORLD

In traditional Norwegian Lutheran preaching and reflection, the world was affirmed as God’s creation, expressed in the first article of faith. But both society and creation were somehow reduced to a mere stage for the real drama: the individual and God, the salvation of the soul and reaching heaven. The first article of faith faded into the background and existed only in the pious rhetoric.

Most of us would agree that Lutheran creation theology is much more than a “yes” to the created order and call to service in the secular world. With Luther’s sensibility for God’s good creation it would be strange if he had not had important things to say about the divine presence in all created things. Even his *Small Catechism*, written with the farmer’s life in mind, gives an intimate image of the Creator who bestows all gifts through the created world. *The Large Catechism* is more detailed: God sustains life with God’s gifts through God’s creatures. Creatures are the hands, channels

and means through which God bestows all blessings. God gives milk to the mother's breast to be given to the child, grains and all kinds of fruit for our nourishment. Luther is not concerned about the "then" of creation, but the "now" of creation. Both creation and salvation are undeserved. God is certainly exalted, but comes to us in things. To get to know God is to bow down to what we regard as the lowest things.¹⁵

My colleagues have suggested that rather than looking at one text, one has to search for fragments, often in surprising contexts. One example is the description of God's creative power in *The Bondage of the Will*. "God is everywhere and fills all things,"¹⁶ Luther writes, and exemplifies this with dungeons and the sewer. God is even present in the thimble or the beer barrel. God is no less present in the hole of a beetle than in heaven.¹⁷ It sounds panentheistic. Furthermore, in his ethics, Luther says that the neighbor's need is God's call to us. God calls us into the public square through our neighbor. In God we live, move and have our being.

If we take such perspectives seriously, it is difficult to see the created world only as the secondary stage for the real drama, which deals with salvation, heaven and God's otherworldly kingdom. It must mean that this world is the very stage where God is present, restoring, renewing and saving in God's creative presence.

SALVATION TODAY

What we need today is a deeper reflection about the meaning of salvation and we are challenged to bridge the gap between "salvation" and "creation."

In the Bible salvation is not necessarily a "religious" word in the sense that it is only concerned with spiritual matters. Salvation is about life as being vulnerable and threatened. A savior is a rescuer for one in need, a helper who comes at the right moment. It may be a judge who resists bribes and pressure and, against all expectations, lets the poor have their right. A savior is the witness who speaks when others are forced to be quiet; the leader who grasps power when the people are about to be destroyed by the enemy; the rescuer of those in distress; the advocate who helps innocent people out of jail; the friend who is present when a prisoner is released. Salvation is to act on behalf of those who are burdened by debt; the shar-

¹⁵ Svein Aage Christoffersen, Trond Skard Dokka, Trygve Wyller, *Tegn og fortolkning. Teologiske perspektiver på etikk, natur og historie* [Sign and Interpretation: Theological Perspectives on Ethics, Nature and History] (Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal, 1996).

¹⁶ Martin Luther, "The Bondage of the Will [1526]," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 33 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1972), 47.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

ing of food with the hungry; the saving of a victim of violence. Salvation is showing hospitality to the refugee; giving land to the landless; healing the sick; caring for the weak. Salvation is when the community has room for the rejected; comfort reaches those in despair; acts and words restore the dignity of the despised; words of truth help people to realize their sins; and words of forgiveness are spoken to those who have trespassed.

When Jesus told Zacchaeus that “salvation” had come to his house, it did not mean that he would go to heaven, but that God had restored what was broken in his life: injustice; broken relationships; sin and shame; loneliness; anxiety and meaninglessness. It was not only he himself who was “saved,” but his house, and even those he had oppressed and squeezed for money.

Luther’s one-sided understanding of salvation as justification by faith, based on his reading of Paul, was a liberating message in order to oppose the belief in salvation by works. However, somehow it tends to limit salvation to the individual relationship to God (*coram Deo*) and relate it one-sidedly to the second article of faith. The central theme of Jesus’ message according to the gospels, however, was not justification by faith, but a much broader range of saving acts manifested and proclaimed with the coming kingdom of God. This kingdom is not a specific geographical place or region but, rather, a situation or a state that comes into being there where God rules and saves by restoring and renewing things: a new world; a new community; a new creation. Jesus saved people by doing his Father’s work and thus restored the broken creation. He certainly expected a future kingdom in the world to come, but salvation was anticipated in the numerous manifestations of the recreation and restoration of broken relations, suffering and destruction.

THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

For the first Christians the death of Jesus was an incomprehensible mystery, and the entire New Testament may be read as their attempt to understand the meaning of his death. Various metaphors are used in the New Testament to interpret the cross: ransom; sacrificial expiation; struggle against death and evil powers; the shepherd who protects the sheep with his life; the friend who gives his life for others; the witness who dies for the truth; the servant who carries the sickness of others; the grain of wheat that dies in order to bear a rich harvest; and several others. With the Lutheran emphasis on salvation as justification by faith alone, understood as a forensic attribution of forgiveness, one is easily stuck with a one-sided emphasis on one of the above-mentioned metaphors: the cross as an act of atonement. The result is a Good Friday theology, concentrated on suffering and substitution. In a more popular and vulgarized form one may hear from

preachers: “Jesus came to die on the cross. It happened on Good Friday. What happened before was not so important.”

From Luther’s perspective it was important that the cross was God the Father’s act “in Jesus Christ,” but the concentration on substitution and expiation tended to relate salvation only to the second article of faith. One side effect is the numerous distorted images of Jesus’ suffering and death that reduce the church’s central mystery to an absurd teaching of a God who cannot love before having pacified God’s wrath by seeing God’s own Son being tortured and crucified. Such distortions have, of course, never been intended by any sane theology, but indicate how problematic it is to stick to one set of metaphors for understanding the mystery of the cross.¹⁸

A number of Lutheran theologians have contributed to a renewed reflection on the cross and the understanding of God that is expressed in the death of Jesus: Moltmann’s theology of the “crucified God,” Kazoh Kitamori’s “theology of the pain of God,” Bonhoeffer’s descriptions of a God who gains power in the world by abandoning power. The real experience of transcendence is, according to Bonhoeffer, Jesus’ radical “being-for-others” in the midst of the world, and our participation in this “being-for-others.” Similar tendencies are expressed in various forms of liberation theology, where the cross is the very symbol of God’s identification with the down-trodden, the “crucified people.”

A beautiful expression of such a theology of the cross is found in a hymn by the Swedish priest and poet Olov Hartman (1906–1982). With ingenious simplicity he uses the Christ hymn in the Epistle to the Philippians to describe God’s who, what and where. God’s who—God’s deepest essence—we know from Jesus’ choice of dishonor and poverty. God’s what—the victory and highness—is expressed in the debasement on the cross. God’s where is among the suffering and doomed. Only from this perspective does the confession that “Christ is Lord” attain its full meaning, sounding as a song of praise from both the saints and the condemned, from everything that lives and breathes.

A PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

As I conclude my reflections, I discover that the Lutheran “alones” do not disturb me so much. They are exclusive in the sense that they were for-

¹⁸ The distortions are not only seen among critics of Christianity, but even in the rhetoric of faithful believers. In my studies of Buddhist-Christian relations in Japan, there is from the sixteenth century until the present a consistent tendency to regard the teaching of the cross as an absurd and abhorrent idea of a God who cannot love unless his wrath is propitiated by seeing pain and punishment.

mulated in a time of crisis when it was necessary to establish an absolute authority: Scripture alone against an all-powerful church; God’s radical grace and justification by faith alone against justification by works; commitment to Christ alone against distorted images of God, Christ being the ultimate image of God.

The real concern is to overcome the separation between creation and salvation: taking seriously the biblical understanding that God saves by creating and restoring; seeing Jesus as the Creator’s presence in the world and the Christ event as a manifestation of what was “in the beginning”; using the wealth of Lutheran insights into God’s creative presence in the world to reach beyond the unbiblical separation of salvation and creation; opening up for our present contexts and challenges—including the wisdom and experiences of other religions—as material for reformulating our commitment to God who was “in Christ.”

A CHRISTIAN MANDALA OF “GOD IN CHRIST”?

My final remark may seem somewhat abrupt, since I have hitherto avoided making direct use of insights from other religions and have not prepared any bridges for using such insights. Nonetheless, I would like to introduce one set of ideas from Buddhist theologies of religion, which offers a different type of imagination concerning other religions.

Buddhism—in this case Mahayana—has not really been interested in a theology of religions, but has a number of ideas and principles about the relationship between various Buddhist schools and traditions. The discussions among Buddhist schools or sects about the relationship between absolute truth (represented by their own specific tradition) and secondary truths or heretical views come close to a theology of religion. On the one hand, Buddhism seems to be almost limitless in its tolerance, accepting all sorts of religious expressions. On the other, it may be quite ruthless in its rejection of any teaching that hinders awakening. In other words: openness and exclusivism, tolerance and critique.

I will limit myself to one visual expression of such ideas, depicted in some Buddhist mandalas, in this case the classical “diamond” and “womb” mandalas from the esoteric tradition.

In the center of the mandala, sitting on an open lotus, one would find the Buddha, who in one specific tradition is regarded as the manifestation of the absolute truth, the original essence.

On the eight petals of the lotus one would find other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas representing various Buddhist virtues and ideals, such as wisdom, compassion, endurance, ascetic virtues and healing power. They

are all related to the center, but are secondary expressions or “trace manifestations” of the central essence. Outside this central image one would find different types of circles and squares with other Bodhisattvas and divinities, often from the Indian pantheon or indigenous mythologies, who are generally regarded as protectors of the Buddhist dharma. And, finally, far out on the periphery, there are obscure powers and even demonic figures. According to Buddhist thought, all things are interrelated in an endless net of relations. Even the most obscure figures far out in the periphery are somehow related to the center.

The mandala is not merely a graphic description of the cosmos, but has a practical use in spiritual guidance. It is impossible for most people to begin in the center, for very few are prepared for the ultimate. But one may be allotted one figure in the mandala whose virtues one may acquire by identifying oneself with it—through visualization, worship, mantras, movements and positions. One has not reached the center, but is still related to the center and is moving towards it. Applied to a theology of religion this type of imagination comes quite close to some forms of inclusivism in Christian theology.

Is it possible to develop a corresponding Christian mandala? It may invite us to use more visual expressions than our wordy expositions. One challenge is the Buddhist rejection of the dualism that has characterized Christian thinking, with its absolute division between good and evil, divine and demonic, God and Satan, salvation and perdition. In Buddhism such dualism is impossible, since all things are somehow interrelated. Non-Buddhist powers and divinities do not have to be demonized or excluded, but are allotted a place in a great cosmos where they may be transformed and drawn towards the center.

In actual fact, we already have Christian mandalas, not only in Orthodox iconography but also in traditional Western churches. Many sanctuaries are like a mandala: a great cosmos where the altar piece and other adornments and art works are visual expressions of the mystery of faith, concentrated on one point, the revelation in Jesus Christ. The central scene may depict the birth of Christ, the last supper, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, or other images of the creation and other biblical motives, patriarchs, prophets and kings, angels and heavenly creatures. Further out in the sanctuary, one might find important persons and happenings in the life of the church or nation. In some churches you may also find pagan saints and sages included in the Christian mandala. On the periphery one might find as carvings in gargoyles, beams and eaves in old churches, demonic shapes to protect against evil. Everything that is decisive in the entire cosmos—heaven and earth, time and eternity—is potentially described in the sanctuary.

My question is whether we might open the perspective even more and include all the elements of reality: religions, ideologies, political powers and authorities, all ideas and powers, peoples and nations, the entire history and the created world—at least in principle.

If I were an artist, I could have created such a mandala with a very definite center: a visualization of the mystery of faith as I have described above. Around this center not only the Christian history (salvation history) would evolve, but also other religions with their prophets and teachers and teachings, philosophies and ideologies, gathered around corresponding centers of commitment. All peoples and their historical experiences should be included. Elements of these would be close to the center of the Christian faith, perhaps sharing some of it or moving towards it. Other element would be far from our center or moving away from it, being even in opposition to it. But nothing would be without some sort of connection, untouched or cut away.

The church has to a great extent demonized “alien gods” and been cautious about opening up for unfamiliar conceptions. Perhaps Buddhist modes of thoughts can inspire and challenge us to think greater and more dynamically inclusive than has traditionally been the case. The mandala that I have sketched is vulnerable to critique, but might still function as a visual expression of a universal vision: the God we know in Jesus Christ is present in God’s creation; in God we live and move and have our being; God is not far away from any of us, as Paul says. In his hymnal passages Paul describes how all things—*ta panta*—will give honor to God who ultimately will be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). Olov Hartman’s above-mentioned interpretation of the Christ hymn from Philippians 2 is a beautiful expression of such a vision. If that is realized, I am sure everything will seem radically different from what we have ever imagined.

This should not be a triumphalistic mandala, but a humble and frank attempt to describe how things are seen from the perspective of our confession to God in Christ, the Creator who saves the world, making all things new. This being our vision, we should at the same time allow others to describe their mandalas with their centers of devotion and then see what happens when they become involved in one another.

THE HOLY SPIRIT, SPIRITS AND SPIRITUALITY: SPIRIT-FILLED GUIDELINES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE, LOVING DIALOGUE¹

Kristin Johnston Largen

INTRODUCTION

In his book on the Holy Spirit, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen says two things in the opening paragraph of his chapter on “The Spirit in Twentieth-Century Interpretations.” He writes first, “the pneumatologies of the twentieth century and the beginning of the third millennium reflect the diversity and plurality characteristic of all contemporary theologues.”² Then, a little further in the paragraph, he writes, “There is also a widespread hunger for the Holy Spirit and spiritual experiences among Christian churches and believers.”³ In the USA, we are experiencing both of these things simultaneously—and, in many situations, jointly; and therefore, it is these twin concerns that shape the thrust of my paper: first, religious pluralism and the accompanying pluralistic understandings of “spirit”; and, second, the spiritually hungry—specifically those who self-identify as “spiritual but not religious.”

Of course, they are quite different phenomena: the kaleidoscopic manifestations of some form of “spirit” in a wide variety of different religious

¹ A different version of this paper was published in *Seminary Ridge Review* 18:2 (Spring 2016), the journal of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg.

² Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Holy Spirit: A Guide to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 74.

³ *Ibid.*

beliefs and practices; and the longing for some kind of “spiritual” connection with a higher and greater power, a deepened “spiritual life.” However, in my view, they demand a similar—if not identical—response from Christian theology: an articulation and understanding of the work and presence of the Holy Spirit that makes possible new ways of thinking, new relationships and, ultimately, mutual transformation. Here, I hope to lay out one such response. By way of contextualization, I begin with two case-studies, the first of which speaks to the diversity of the concept of “spirit,” and the second of which speaks to the hunger for a deeper personal spiritual life.

“THE SPIRIT CATCHES YOU AND YOU FALL DOWN”

In the USA, one place where differing religious understandings of “spirit” sometimes come to the fore is the doctor’s office. In her book *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Anne Fadiman tells the story of a young Hmong girl who was brought to the hospital in Fresno, California, diagnosed with epilepsy and given treatment accordingly. The family, however, had their own diagnosis: *qaug dab peg* (kow da pay), which means “the spirit catches you and you fall down.” And, in their view, the treatment was more ambiguous. Of course, the Hmong community recognizes that this condition is something serious and possibly dangerous—it often signals that the spirit has become separated from the body and needs to be coaxed back.

However, they also believe that this illness is a mark of spiritual distinction, a sign that someone has “the power to perceive things other people cannot see,” and a superior ability to enter into a spiritual trance and journey into the unseen.⁴ In short, it often indicates a call to becoming a shaman. As you might imagine, the girl’s parents were not in full agreement with her doctors—either about the diagnosis or about the treatment; and the result was a tragedy. I continue to wonder if a more creative articulation of the Holy Spirit might helpfully bridge the gap in these difficult situations.

THE “SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS”

The second “case-study” concerns the rapidly rising number of “church-divesting” individuals in the USA. The 2015 Pew Report on the “Changing Religious Landscape in the United States” indicates that “the Christian share

⁴ Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 21.

of the US population is declining, while the number of US adults who do not identify with any organized religion is growing.”⁵ Of particular notice here, is that of those who have left the organized church, thirty percent still say that religion is either “very” or “somewhat” important to them.⁶ The typical name for these people is “spiritual but not religious” (SBNRs). The term is used to indicate the fact that while they do not affiliate with any specific church, they believe in some divine power and have a sense of themselves as connected to that power.

One of the most important books written on this in recent years is Linda Mercandante’s *Belief without Borders*, her attempt to survey the beliefs of the SBNRs using interviews with them, rather than studies about them. There are many aspects of this phenomenon that are interesting, but for me it is the use of the word “spirituality” that is most relevant. Mercandante notes how before the twentieth century, “what people today call ‘spirituality’ was often called ‘piety.’”⁷ And, significantly, spirituality went “hand in hand” with religion, “designating a variety of practices that fostered faith, devotion and connection with God.”⁸ In short, spirituality was seen as an aspect of religion, not divorced from it. In our current context, the two are increasingly being opposed, often with spirituality touted as something “purer” or “truer,” or “more authentic” than religion, which can be characterized as hypocritical, rigid and unfeeling. Yet, a precise definition of “spiritual” can be hard to come by, and proves both illusive and deeply subjective. For example, spirituality often refers to “the invisible or deeper world” vs. religion as “mundane, material reality.” Another way of opposing spirituality and religion is with the categories “heart felt” vs. “head knowledge.”

What seems very clear is that for many people in this category, “spirituality” is seen as something very individualistic, concerned primarily with the self—and, significantly, this is viewed as positive. Mercandante writes that the “detraditioning” that happens with those who reject traditional religion creates a vacuum with the “revoking of religious authority in favor of personal decision.”⁹ Into the vacuum steps a new ethos, which includes “an impersonalization of transcendence, a sacralization of the self, a focus on therapeutic rather than civic goals, and a self-needs orientation to community and commitment.”¹⁰ Again, here too, I ask myself how

⁵ www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Linda Mercandante, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 231.

¹⁰ Ibid.

a fresh, creative articulation of the Holy Spirit might speak meaningfully to those in this group.

A FRESH ARTICULATION OF A CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

With these twin concerns in mind, I now move to the constructive portion of my argument, laying out a doctrine of the Holy Spirit that begins to respond to the need for theological flexibility and creativity, while at the same time retaining theological fidelity and consistency. To do this, I want to offer three characteristics of the Holy Spirit that can help Christians as they seek to interpret different spiritual experiences and also different religions; three characteristics that provide a strong foundation from which to make a Christian exploration of and engagement with different understandings of “spirits” and spirituality. These three characteristics are Trinitarian, “troubling” and tangible. After a brief word of theological grounding, I describe each of these characteristics in turn.

OPENNESS AND FLEXIBILITY ARE A GOOD THING

One of the fundamental beliefs that shapes all that follows is this: I believe the plurality of interpretations of Spirit and spirituality—this diversity and even this challenge to traditional Christian understandings of the Holy Spirit—is a good thing. Fundamentally, I think it is an opportunity for Christians to see God in a new way, to experience God’s love and grace in new forms and to have our relationships across boundaries of nation, creed, ethnicity and age strengthened and deepened. We do not have to raise the drawbridge and dispatch the sentinels. We can be optimistic, open and enthusiastic even, about what God is doing among us, what God has in store for us and how amazing God really is in all of God’s miraculous works.

Particularly in the context of interreligious dialogue, a fresh articulation of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit is quite helpful. As Roger Haight writes, “[...] the doctrine of the Spirit and Spirit-language can help us thread the narrow passage between the traditional demands of faith and a new respect for the autonomous value of other religious traditions.”¹¹ And, to be clear, this is not only for the sake of the other. Haight goes on to say, “[...] the

¹¹ Roger Haight, SJ, “Holy Spirit and the Religions,” in David H. Jensen (ed.), *The Lord and Giver of Life: Perspectives on Constructive Pneumatology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 56.

Spirit is at work abroad in the religions. Therefore, dialogue with other religions can influence the church: the church can learn new things and be changed by other religions because of the Spirit.”¹²

One of the best articulations of this attitude can be found in the World Council of Churches’ document, “Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding.” There, the authors write,

The Holy Spirit helps us to live out Christ’s openness to others. The person of the Holy Spirit moved and still moves over the face of the earth, to create, nurture, sustain, to challenge, renew and transform. We confess that the activity of the Spirit passes beyond our definitions, descriptions, and limitations in the manner of the wind that “blows where it wills” (Jn 3:8). Our hope and expectancy are rooted in our belief that the “economy” of the Spirit relates to the whole creation. We discern the Spirit of God moving in ways that we cannot predict [...].

We believe that this encompassing work of the Holy Spirit is also present in the life and traditions of peoples of living faith. People have at all times and in all places responded to the presence and activity of God among them, and have given their witness to their encounters with the living God [...]. This ministry of witness among our neighbors of other faiths must presuppose an “affirmation of what God has done and is doing among them.” (CWME, San Antonio, 1989)¹³

This belief, and this affirmation, undergird all that follows.

TRINITARIAN

Perhaps the first thing that needs to be emphasized in any Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit is that, for Christians, the Holy Spirit is not a free agent. By that, I mean that the Holy Spirit is not just “any” spirit; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God the Father. What this means further is that the Holy Spirit never works alone; instead, the three persons of the Triune God always and everywhere work together—all works of God are works of all three persons.

Gregory of Nyssa says it this way: “Every operation which extends from God to the creation [...] has its origin from the Father, and proceeds

¹² *Ibid.*, 59.

¹³ The World Council of Churches, “Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding,” paras. 32f., at www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/ix-other-study-processes/religious-plurality-and-christian-self-understanding.

through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴ This was true in creation, when God the Father brought the universe into existence through the Word and the Spirit; this was true in the crucifixion, when God the Father suffered the death of God the Son while God the Spirit bound them together in dynamic love; and it will be true in the consummation, when God the Son will come in fullness and truth, through the power of God the Spirit, to return all things to God the Father. The church has confessed this reality early on and following Augustine affirmed that “*opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*”; that is, “the works of the Trinity outwardly are indivisible.”¹⁵ Roger Haight notes that Aquinas emphasized the same point, arguing that “when God acts outside of God’s self, the whole or essential Godhead acts, not a single ‘person’.”¹⁶

Part of the challenge involved in understanding and appreciating this reality is the word “person,” which has been used to translate both the Latin *persona*, which comes from Tertullian,¹⁷ as well as the Greek *hypostaseis*, which comes from the Cappadocians.¹⁸ The problem, exacerbated by the Enlightenment, is that “person” suggests an independent individual; and when we apply this concept from human life to the divine life, we tend to envision three discrete, separate divine beings wandering around, each of whom can go their own way, leaving the other two behind, as it were. One of the main problems with this theological construction is that it invites a high degree of ambiguity in trying to experience and evaluate the work of the Spirit in the world. Without the intrinsic connection to God the Father and God the Son, who is to say where and how the Holy Spirit is at work? All Christians can do is shrug their shoulders and say, “The Spirit blows where she wills.” That may well be true, but in and of itself, it is not sufficient: we can and should say more.

One of the most important benefits that comes with an emphasis on the Trinitarian character of the Holy Spirit is that it allows us helpfully to “test the spirits” where they appear. Sometimes I think Christians feel a little helpless in the face of what seem to be spiritual manifestations that they do not understand; this helplessness then can lead to theological

¹⁴ As quoted in William C. Placher, *The Triune God: An Essay in Postliberal Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 146–47.

¹⁵ Kärkkäinen, op. cit. (note 2), 61.

¹⁶ Haight, op. cit. (note 11), 63.

¹⁷ “There are in God ‘three persons (*personae*) who are ‘of one substance’ (*unius substantiae*),” as quoted in Robert Jenson, “The Triune God,” in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds), *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2011), 122.

¹⁸ “One being (*ousia*) of God in three hypostases (*hypostaseis*),” as quoted in Jenson, *ibid.*, 135.

paralysis—the inability to say anything, or make any concrete judgement or reflection. In my view, this is both an abdication of responsibility and also an erroneous assumption. The fact is that Christians do have a basis on which to engage and even judge purported activity of the Holy Spirit, and to stand against the manifestation of evil spirits, including structural powers and principalities.

Certainly, I recognize that the whole idea of “testing the spirits” has its own inherent challenges. As Kirsteen Kim points out, are we trying to discern the work of one Spirit, or distinguish among many spirits; and, in doing so, whose criteria are we using? However, she also emphasizes that,

[...] for the Christian, the criteria for discernment of the Spirit cannot be other than christological. What defines Christians as Christians is that they understand the Spirit of God to be the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who is revealed in the Bible. This is the only criterion for discernment on which Christians can agree.¹⁹

If Christ said that he came that we might have life, and life abundant, and if, indeed, Scripture bears witness to the Holy Spirit as the agent of that life, then Christians safely can assert that whatever is contrary to that life, whatever is death-dealing, whatever isolates and violates, is not the work of the Holy Spirit. Sallie McFague writes that “Like a mother bird tucking the new life under her own body and anxiously protecting it, God sustains and renews us, *no matter what* [...]. This is the basis of our hope: the world is created, loved, and kept by God.”²⁰ Only a Trinitarian understanding of the Holy Spirit makes such a judgement possible.

TROUBLING

The second characteristic of the Holy Spirit is “troubling” and, at first glance, this might seem a suspicious word to use in the context of the Holy Spirit—after all, it sounds pretty negative: who wants trouble? Do we really want a doctrine of the Holy Spirit that includes the bringing of “trouble” to God’s people? However, I stand by the word, just not in the sense it is often used—that is, as something problematic or negative. Instead, I want to think about “troubling” in its biblical context—specifically the troubling

¹⁹ Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 167.

²⁰ Sallie McFague, “The Dearest Freshness Deep Down Things,” in Jensen, *op. cit* (note 11), 115, 123.

of the waters: the Spirit stirring up what is still, and bringing life to what is lifeless.

In fact, there are three specific places in Scripture where we see the Spirit “troubling” the waters. The first instance comes in the very first words of the Bible, where we read that “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” Commenting on this passage, one Old Testament scholar writes that in the “hovering” or “sweeping” [or I would say, “troubling”] of the Holy Spirit, “God is present and active.” The verb suggests an

ever-changing velocity and direction, and because God is involved this movement is purposeful. This use of the language of movement rather than static categories [...] suggests creative activity in this verse, a bringing of something new out of a chaotic situation.²¹

The second example, which certainly is theologically related to the first, is the story of the Israelites’ escape from Egypt, when, in Miriam’s account of the Red Sea crossing, God drove back the waters with “a blast of [God’s] nostrils” (Ex 15:8). In this formative event for the Hebrew people, this mighty breath from God troubled the still waters of the sea, forcefully stirring them up and making a way where there had been no way before. This event not only saved the Hebrews from annihilation, but in some sense, created them as God’s people.

Finally, and most specifically, is the story of the healing of the paralytic, which takes place in Bethsaida, by pools of water that are “stirred up”—by God or by an angel—and imbued with healing power. This is the same “troubling” of the water that the African American Christian community sings about in the old spiritual, “God’s gonna trouble the water”: the same “troubling” that many Christian communities look for as proof of the presence of the Holy Spirit in baptism.

In this light, we see how “troubling” actually is another way of describing the work of the Holy Spirit in creation. In addition to these examples of God working through the troubling of water, we might also think of the “troubling” that occurs in the stirring of seeds underground and the disturbance of the soil as the sprouts burst through; the tremors and the tearing that accompanies all birth pains; and the watery bursting forth from an egg or a womb that accompanies all forms of new life. In this context, I

²¹ Bruce Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence Fretheim and David Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd edition (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 42.

also am reminded of the “troubling” of the dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision, as they trembled and shook, coming together and receiving the breath of life.

The creative work of the Holy Spirit, which is one of the signature activities of God’s Spirit in the world, always “troubles” the status quo, because it inaugurates something new and it requires change: a letting go of the past and an embracing of the future, which often is not pleasant. Humans characteristically do not like change; even when the current situation is not working so well, we often cling to it, simply out of familiarity. The Holy Spirit does not allow for such safe conventions; and I would venture to say that we all have experienced the “troubling” of the Holy Spirit blowing through our organized life plans, calling us to new, challenging ventures. What we know for sure about the Holy Spirit is that she is not safe, she is not boring and she is not easy. Jürgen Moltmann also emphasizes this point. He recognizes that human beings are often afraid of freedom—afraid of the costs, the responsibilities, the lack of security. Being free, he notes, often means “living dangerously”—yet this is exactly the life to which the Holy Spirit calls us and makes possible for us.²²

The importance of this characteristic in the particular context I described above is the reminder that the church does not know everything about the Holy Spirit, and always has something new to learn as the Spirit continues to reveal novel aspects of God’s creative work and will every day. As Ellen Davis notes, “whenever we pick up the Bible, read it, put it down, and say, ‘That’s just what I thought’, we probably are in trouble.”²³ What is true about reading Scripture is also true about reading other religions’ scriptures, and talking with others outside the Christian tradition. The Spirit of God cannot be limited to what the Bible tells us. Amy Plantinga Pauw writes that “The universal edge of the Spirit’s work cuts against the church’s perennial attempts to cage the Spirit, restricting its role to granting a seal of divine approval to the church’s established structures and teachings.”²⁴

At the same time, the church has a word to offer to those outside the church; for example, to those who are simply seeking some sort of “spiritual” reinforcement for their own self-understanding or plan for self-growth. I would say the same thing to that population: if your understanding of “spirituality” and the spiritual life completely harmonizes with what you already think about yourself, about others and about your vocation in the world, perhaps you need the “troubling” of the Holy Spirit in your life, too.

²² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: a Universal Affirmation*, transl. by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 103–105.

²³ As quoted by Amy Plantinga Pauw, in “The Holy Spirit and Scripture,” in Jensen, *op. cit.* (note 11), 38.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

TANGIBLE

To my mind, the final characteristic is one of the most important: the tangible, physical character of the Holy Spirit and the physical evidence we have of her work and presence. Simply put, the Spirit is not antithetical to matter and the physical world but, instead, always works in and through bodies to accomplish the divine will. David Jensen says it best when he declares bluntly, the “Holy Spirit seeks bodies.”²⁵

This, too, often runs counter to Christian understanding, and again, language is part of the problem. Jürgen Moltmann makes clear that Western Christians must be particularly careful in their use of “spirit,” in light of the spirit/body dichotomy we have inherited from Greek philosophy. He writes,

The Greek word πνεύμα, the Latin *spiritus*, and the Germanic *Geist*/ghost were always conceived as antitheses to matter and body. They mean something immaterial. Whether we are talking Greek, Latin, German or English, by the Spirit of God we then mean something disembodied, supersensory and supernatural. But if we talk in Hebrew about Yahweh’s *ruach*, we are saying: God is a tempest, a storm, a force in body and soul, humanity and nature.²⁶

Jensen emphasizes the same point: “From the very outset, Spirit is not ensconced in heaven, but seeks others on earth, in the flesh.”²⁷

This has important ramifications not only for pure physicality, but for sexuality as well. Jensen does not avoid these considerations, but faces them head on, arguing that “the Spirit embraces sexuality.”²⁸ I am particularly gratified by Jensen’s emphasis of this point, because sexuality is another aspect of physical existence that is often—and often pointedly—set in opposition to the spirit and spiritual things. Speaking about Mary and Jesus’ birth in particular, Jensen writes, “Holy Spirit does not avoid the body, but enters the body of a young woman who bears within her womb the life of the world. Sexuality is not avoided here, but is claimed and blessed by God [...]. In the incarnation, and in Mary, Spirit rests on sexual bodies.”²⁹

Another place in Scripture where Jensen sees evidence of this subversive work of the Spirit is in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch,

²⁵ David Jensen, “Discerning the Spirit: A Historical Introduction,” in Jensen, *op. cit* (note 11), 1.

²⁶ Moltmann, *op. cit.* (note 22), 40.

²⁷ Jensen, *op. cit.* (note 11), 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

a cultural outsider whose very body is an icon of gender subversion. Spirit manifests a queer presence here, blessing a body that does not conform to conventional sexual expectations. Spirit here proves boundary-breaker [...]. In the strange movement of Spirit's grace, even Gentiles and eunuchs are welcome.³⁰

Here we see the Holy Spirit not only embracing bodies, but also “troubling” traditional cultural understandings about them—and their role in religious life.

This point has particular relevance for the “Spiritual but Not Religious” in the USA. The assumption that there is some generalized “spirit” floating around in the ether with whom one can have an entirely interiorized, individualized relationship is ruled out by a Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit. Among the serious problems with this interpretation of “spirit” are first, the complete reliance this creates on one's own interpretation and experience of spiritual presence; second, the disconnect this creates between the life of the spirit and the life of the world; and third, the assumption it promotes that “spirituality” is an entirely individualized aspect of life that neither requires, nor even values, community—“life together.”

In the Lutheran tradition we have one of the strongest affirmations of the tangible character of the Holy Spirit in Luther's emphasis on Word and sacrament, in terms of God's use of them to be in relationship to us. Looking at the Smalcald Articles, for example, we see one of Luther's most vehement assertions in this regard. After discussing the different ways in which God conveys the gospel to us, Luther writes,

In these matters, which concern the spoken, external Word, it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one [God's] Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before [...] we must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of [God's] external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and sacrament is of the devil.³¹

Here Luther argues against the “enthusiasts,” who believed that they could interpret and discern the work of the divine Spirit on the basis of their own understanding and wisdom, without any external manifestation of the Spirit's presence. He goes on to cite the example of Moses and the burning bush; John leaping in Elizabeth's womb at the sound of Mary's voice; and the Old Testament prophets receiving the Spirit through the Word.³²

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

³¹ Martin Luther, “The Smalcald Articles,” in Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 323.

³² *Ibid.*

While in our twenty-first-century global context we might desire to reinterpret the degree of rigidity of Luther's understanding, the point he is safeguarding remains important to highlight still today: the significance of the visible, tangible manifestations of the Spirit's work and presence; not just a vague, intangible feeling that rests more on our sense of what God thinks and wants than on God's own self-revelation.

This also reminds us of the importance of discerning the Spirit in community, rather than simply on one's own. Without a doubt, the Christian witness testifies to the work of the Holy Spirit in community; thus, the idea of an exclusively personalized relationship between an individual and the Holy Spirit is unthinkable from a Christian perspective. Certainly, the Holy Spirit reveals herself in and relates to individuals, but not exclusively for their own sake. Instead, this revelation occurs for the sake of the community and the sake of the world; and this is particularly true in the church: "A central role of the Spirit in Christian community is to bind believers to God and to each other in loving union."³³

This relates to the last point I want to make in this context, and that is the understanding of the Holy Spirit as love. One of the most important designations of the Holy Spirit through the centuries in the church is the Spirit as love—Aquinas even wrote that "love" is the proper name of the Holy Spirit;³⁴ and the metaphor of God the Spirit as the bond of love between the lover, God the Father, and the beloved, God the Son, is also well known. What requires clarification here is a proper Christian understanding of love. In popular usage, love often is described as a feeling—either romantic or otherwise—that I have for another person, or something else. That is, it is primarily an emotional, internal experience that may or may not have any outward expression. However, in a Christian context, love means something quite different.

For Christians, love has less to do with my personal, individual disposition toward someone, and much more to do with how I treat her—how I act toward her. That is, Christian love is not about feeling warm and fuzzy, but about actions of justice and mercy. When Christians describe the Holy Spirit as love, they are not talking about a little cherub flying around and shooting darts into hearts to make us "feel good" about other people. Instead, the Holy Spirit inspires works of love in us; she motivates and moves us to compassionate action: to healing and feeding, to visiting and listening, to helping and holding. As the power of love in the world the Holy Spirit inspires bodies to engage other bodies, such that love is manifest among people, nations and all beings.

³³ Plantinga Pauw, *op. cit.* (note 23), 28.

³⁴ As noted Kärkkäinen, *op. cit.* (note 2), 41.

This relates to the work of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation as well. It is the Holy Spirit that makes real and tangible the gift of salvation made possible by Jesus Christ. And, so, in a doctrine of the Holy Spirit we see, too, how redemption is not a metaphorical or disembodied idea, but rather a concrete reality that affects all of who we are—that affects the whole world. Moltmann says it this way: “We shall not be redeemed *from* this earth, so that we could give it up. We shall be redeemed *with* it. We shall not be redeemed *from* the body. We shall be made eternally alive *with* the body.”³⁵ That is the work of the Holy Spirit—love made manifest in our lives.

CONCLUSION

In his *Confessions*, Augustine has a famous reflection that he begins with a question directed to God: “But what do I love when I love you?” The beautiful answer he gives is that in loving the whole world—a light, a sound, a perfume and an embrace—he is, at the same time, loving God. Loving creation and loving the world are not two different things, but two forms of the same love. It is the Holy Spirit that makes this love possible; and it is the Spirit that connects these two expressions of love: a Trinitarian, troubling and tangible Spirit, working always in the world to bring us new images, new understanding and new revelations of the One God.

Moltmann also offers an answer to Augustine’s question, and it is with his answer that I conclude. “But what do I love when I love God?”

When I love God I love the beauty of bodies, the rhythm of movements, the shining of eyes, the embraces, the feelings, the scents, the sounds of all this protean creation. When I love you, my God, I want to embrace it all, for I love you with all my senses in the creations of your love. In all the things that encounter me, you are waiting for me. For a long time I looked for you within myself, and crept into the shell of my soul, protecting myself with an armour of unapproachability. But you were outside—outside myself—and enticed me out of the narrowness of my heart in the broad place of love for life. So I came out of myself and found my soul in my senses, and my own self in others. The experience of God deepens the experiences of life. It does not reduce them, for it awakens the unconditional Yes to life. The more I love God the more gladly I exist. The more immediately and wholly I exist, the more I sense the living God, the inexhaustible well of life, and life’s eternity.³⁶

³⁵ Moltmann, *op. cit.* (note 22), 74.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

DISCERNING HONG KONG REALITIES

THE “POST”-UMBRELLA MOVEMENT, HONG KONG IDENTITY AND CHRISTIANS

Kung Lap-yan

If the Umbrella Movement is seen only as an occupy movement, we can say that it ended when the police cleared all the occupied areas on 15 December 2014. And if the verdict on its success or failure is exclusively based on whether it has changed the position of the Chinese government’s National People’s Congress Standing Committee on the issue of the election of Hong Kong’s next Chief Executive, we can consider that the movement has failed.

As a movement however, the Umbrella Movement should be evaluated on its continuity in Hong Kong’s everyday life. In fact, the activists who initiated “Occupy Central with Love and Peace” (hereafter, Occupy Central) consider that the movement is itself a process of conscientization.¹ In this sense, the end of the seventy-nine days of occupation and their failure to change the Chinese authorities’ minds are simply the end of the first chapter and the subsequent chapters are still being written. That is why this article uses the word “post”: it refers to the fact that the spirit of the Occupy Central movement continued after December 2014. In the following, I will reflect on this spirit of the movement rather than the events happening after the occupation. My short article identifies a significant theme of the “Post”-Umbrella Movement, that is, a Hong Kong identity and its relevance to Christian identity.

¹ Occupy Central is initiated by Kin-Man Chan (an associate professor of the department of sociology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong), Yiu-Ming Chu (a retired Baptist minister) and Benny Tai (a Christian, and an associate professor of the faculty of law at the University of Hong Kong).

REVISITING THE UMBRELLA MOVEMENT²

The emergence of the Umbrella Movement was both, intentional and accidental; intentional because it continues the spirit and form of Occupy Central, albeit with its own soul and character. The Central is the financial center of the city and Occupy Central is a civil disobedience campaign aimed at arousing people's consciousness that they are the subjects of Hong Kong's history and that they are putting pressure on the Chinese authorities to honor their promise to implement universal suffrage in the 2017 election of Hong Kong's Chief Executive. Occupy Central was officially launched in March 2013. It not only introduced the idea of occupation, but also pioneered the practice of deliberate democracy and laid the foundation for the Umbrella Movement.

The Umbrella Movement was an accident for its launch was unplanned. It is loosely organized and its strategy differs from that of Occupy Central. Occupy Central was implemented at 1:40 a.m. on 28 September 2014 in response to the request of students who had started a class boycott and had gathered in Tamar Park, located in Admiralty next to the central government offices, the Office of the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council complex. The police used tear gas to clear the protestors, who did not follow the call of the Occupy Central leaders to disperse. Since then, the movement has distanced itself from the Occupy Central's original architects' plan. It has become a movement led by students and other protestors; the area occupied was extended to two other locations, namely, Causeway Bay and Mong Kok. Due to its accidental nature, it is loosely organized and lacks a mechanism to deal with conflicts between the protestors; no one is authorized to negotiate with the government or to determine the movement's strategy. "No one else can represent me" is one of its popular slogans.

The Umbrella Movement is the name adopted by the Western media in lieu of that of "Umbrella Revolution" originally chosen by the protestors. The word revolution could have been used by the Chinese government as an excuse to condemn the movement as an attempt to overthrow it. In fact, most protestors at that time had no intention of calling for the Chinese Communist Party's overthrow or for the independence of Hong Kong. What they wanted was that the Chinese authorities reexamine their 31 August 2014 decision about the election of the Chief Executive of Hong Kong. This was a very humble and peaceful appeal.

² See Lap-Yan Kung, "The Umbrella Movement and Kairos: The Church's Theological Encounter with a Political Movement," in J. K. H. Tse and J. Y. Tan (eds), *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement* (New York: Palgrave, 2016).

The umbrella is symbolic for the protestors who use umbrellas to protect themselves against the pepper spray used by the police. Once the umbrella had become the icon and even a totem, it provided the protestors with a clear identity and meaning. However, the original word, revolution, energized and consolidated the aims of and the friendship among the protestors. More importantly, the government registered the fact that they were being confronted by a direct challenge from the people.

HONG KONG: NO LONGER A BORROWED PLACE ON BORROWED TIME

During the 1980s and 1990s, almost ten percent of Hong Kong’s population emigrated due to anxiety caused by the 4 June 1989 Tiananmen Square incident in Beijing and by the issue of 1997, the year that the Chinese government was due to resume sovereignty over Hong Kong. The series of protests and demonstrations in China in the spring of 1989 culminated on the night of June 3–4 with a government crackdown on the Tiananmen demonstrators.

It was not that the remaining ninety percent did not want to leave Hong Kong, but rather that many of them were simply not qualified for emigration. The huge number of emigrants indicated that, first, the people of Hong Kong did not believe in the Chinese Communist government; second, that they did not believe that they could bargain with the Chinese authorities; and third, that Hong Kong was felt to be a “borrowed place [living on] borrowed time”³ and that its people lacked a strong sense of belonging. Today, Hongkongese are still suspicious of the Chinese Communist government. Despite this, they have changed their feelings about and relationship to Hong Kong since the mid-2000s. This is due partly to the emergence of discussion about localism and a Hong Kong identity amongst the new generation, which carries less of an historical burden, and partly to the serious “Chinese-zation” of Hong Kong’s everyday life since the 2000s.⁴

One significant indicator of the rise of localism and a Hongkongese identity is how the 4 June Tiananmen Square incident is understood. Each year on 4 June a candlelight vigil and memorial service are organized. They are attended by between 40,000 and 180,000 people. The vigil and service present two fundamental appeals. First, the Chinese authorities are asked to change their judgment of Tiananmen as a revolutionary and

³ This is the term used by Richard Hughes to describe Hong Kong in the late 1960s. See *Borrowed Time, Borrowed Space: Hong Kong and its Many Faces*, 2nd revised edition (London: Andre Deutsch, 1976).

⁴ Law Wing Sang, “The Hong Kong Localism: Its Past, Present and Future” (in Chinese), at www.inmediahk.net/node/1032059.

anti-government movement to that of a patriotic democratic movement. Second, they demand an end to one-party rule and the establishment of democracy in China. Obviously, these two appeals are very China-oriented and indicate that the organizers still hold the political view that Hong Kong is part of China. But, in 2013, some people challenged the organizers of the vigil and memorial service by holding a separate memorial service on the same day at the same time. They questioned the relevance of the 4 June Tiananmen Square incident to Hong Kong and argued that they were concerned about the incident because it was a violation of human rights and not because they were Chinese. In 2014, the idea of localism was more explicitly expressed in this alternative Tiananmen memorial service, which attracted 7,000 people as compared to the few hundred participants in 2013. In 2016, the Hong Kong Federation of Students quitted from being a member of the memorial organizer and did not participate the memorial service. Furthermore, some universities' students union have expressed that the issue of Tiananmen Square Incident would no longer be their concern, not only because the people of Hong Kong have no special responsibility for building up a democratic China, but also the people of Hong Kong should focus on the democratic development in the city.

According to a survey on the identity of the people of Hong Kong conducted by the Public Opinion Program of the University of Hong Kong,⁵ those who consider themselves as Hongkongese numbered 35 percent in 1997; 34 percent in 2013; and 40 percent in 2015. The 18–29 age group numbered 44 percent in 1997 and 55 percent in 2015. Those who consider themselves as Chinese represented 18 percent in 1997, 21 percent in 2013 and 18 percent in 2015. Apart from the category of Hongkongese and Chinese, there are two more categories, namely, Hongkongese in China and Chinese in Hong Kong. The 2015 survey noted that 27 percent identified themselves as Hongkongese in China, while 13 percent identified themselves as Chinese in Hong Kong. The total of Hongkongese in Hong Kong plus those in China in 2015 was over 60 percent and the identification of the 18–29 age group with Hong Kong continues to grow.

This survey has several implications. First, the Chinese government is inclined to interpret these figures as a sign of a growing Hong Kong separatism that it will not tolerate. Whether it will adopt a more rigid or a more flexible policy in Hong Kong remains uncertain. Second, no matter how localism is interpreted, the issue will be a significant theme in the coming years, and how the Hong Kong government responds to it will play a significant role in the future. Third, due to the rise of localism, Hong

⁵ www.hkupop.hku.hk/english/popexpress/ethnic/index.html.

Kong is no longer seen as a “borrowed place and [living on] borrowed time.” Rather, the people of Hong Kong see it as their home.

In what way are the rise of Hong Kong localism and a Hong Kong identity related to the Umbrella Movement? Most importantly, the Umbrella Movement is the people’s response to the Chinese government’s failure to honor its promise to introduce full democracy to Hong Kong. It is a process of conscientization. The people of Hong Kong are aware that a democratic government is necessary for a fair and just society. They demand more participation in the governance of Hong Kong.

Furthermore, most previous protests did not strongly challenge the government because they were careful to respect law and order. The Umbrella Movement does not damage shops. It causes inconvenience to the public and the movement protestors more consciously challenge law and order. It argues that the people have the right to violate the law when the law is unjust and it is prepared to accept the consequence of its actions.

Umbrella Movement slogans such as “Our fate is in our own hands,” “Hongkongese save our own Hong Kong,” and “We have a responsibility in this confused era” indicate the consolidation and spread of a very strong sense of belonging to Hong Kong.

During the Umbrella Movement, some protestors have initiated an “Occupy and Shop Local” campaign. It encourages the public to shop at neighborhood shops in Mong Kok as a way to resist the growing spread of chain stores backed by large businesses. This suggests that the protestors have a dream and a vision for Hong Kong.

The Umbrella Movement is not the sole reason for the emergence of a Hongkongese identity, the seventy-nine days of occupation provided a very existential experience for the protestors and other Hongkongese. It encouraged them to reexamine questions of law and order, to assume responsibility for the future of Hong Kong and to dream about what that future might be.

LOCALISM AT THE CROSSROADS

Localism is not something new in the history of Hong Kong, but it has its own focus in different stages of history. Simin Davoudi and Ali Madanipour explain that there are five different meanings of localism.⁶ From an economic perspective, localism is seen as a localization process, reversing the trend of globalization by discriminating in favor of the local. From a political per-

⁶ Simin Davoudi & Ali Madanipour (eds), *Reconsidering Localism* (London: Routledge, 2015), 1-7.

spective, localism denotes the decentralized and grassroots forms of power. Localism is often equated with democratization and as such is one of the most frequently rehearsed rationales for decentralization and for making the state accountable to people. From a social perspective, localism conjures up images of the community, which itself is a contested concept with multiple meanings. From a spatial perspective, localism refers to small geographical scale down to neighborhoods. From an environmental perspective, localism is seen as a path to sustainability. Localism in Hong Kong is more understood as resistance to the intentional penetration of Chinese influence on everyday Hong Kong life. Thus, localism here is primarily a political rather than a cultural issue.

In Hong Kong, localism is basically about the locals first. There are four possible meanings of political localism in Hong Kong. First, it is about the independence of Hong Kong. No matter if this is possible or not, the question has aroused some kind of public discussion. Second, it accepts the framework of “one country, two systems” (this is how the political relationship between China and Hong Kong is officially defined), but strives for the implementation of democracy in Hong Kong. Third, it is self-determination. The people of Hong Kong should have the right to decide what there is and what kind of political system they opt for. Fourth, it is a proposal turning Hong Kong into a city-state in order to preserve and flourish the civilized status quo of Hong Kong. The city-state is still under China’s sovereignty, but enjoys a high degree of autonomy. I have no problem with these four models of political localism, but my concern is whether there is a tendency for political localism to become too narrow and exclusive.

First, localism is about who the Hongkongese are. The people of Hong Kong are still understood in the light of what the Chinese are. In other words, the Chinese define the Hongkongese, who still do not define their own identity. More importantly, this kind of understanding easily falls into dualism and creates imagined enemies. In fact, who the Hongkongese are is a question that requires the people of Hong Kong to engage in in-depth enquiry into their culture and history instead of focusing on criticism and complaints about the Chinese government

Second, Hong Kong is an immigrant society. From 1997 to 2015, more than ten percent of the population of Hong Kong came from China. In other words, the Hongkongese are obliged to include those who claim to be either Hongkongese, Chinese, Chinese in Hong Kong, Hongkongese in China and other ethnic groups in Hong Kong. It is not appropriate to define Hong Kong identity as being based on language, birthplace, culture and political affiliation. Unfortunately, some people have a very narrow view of who the Hongkongese are. This kind of definition does not help to build a Hong Kong identity but creates a boundary leading to exclusivism, opposition and even chauvinism.

Third, since the issues of localism and a Hongkongese identity are political rather than cultural, the discussion is a very sensitive one. For instance, those supporting the independence of Hong Kong may be condemned as separatists (the issue of Tibet and Taiwan is a matter of separatism in the eyes of the Chinese government), while those supporting “one country, two systems” may be condemned as traitors of Hong Kong interests. The danger that the people of Hong Kong face is that political ideology takes precedence over open and rational discussion and that this further tears people apart.

I consider that Hong Kong should be an inclusive and pluralistic society with its own goals. These should embrace the concerns of all the people living in Hong Kong instead of a powerful few.

Considering the ambiguities of the search for a Hongkongese identity, we will now reflect on its relevance to a Christian identity.

ECUMENISM: UNIVERSALITY AND PARTICULARITY

Though many Hong Kong churches are silent with regard to the Umbrella Movement, they are not absent from it.⁷ Hong Kong’s churches cannot ignore the search for a Hongkongese identity or the interest in localism. Theologically speaking, the church does not have the choice to leave the place where it is sent. No matter how dark and confused that place may be, the church must be there in solidarity with the people to witness to the righteousness and salvation of God’s kingdom. The church is never about a building or an institution. Rather, it is the gathering of the followers of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the basic task of the church is to nurture Christians to embrace the above ecclesiological view and to live it out imaginatively and courageously. So, what does it mean to be the church in, of and for Hong Kong?

The struggle for identity is always an issue for Christians, challenging them to maintain the distinctiveness of their Christian identity without losing their social relevance and vice versa. Chinese Christians should never forget the accusation made by intellectuals in the 1920s that “When there is one more Christian, there is one less Chinese.” We may question the narrow view of the Chinese implied in the accusation, but it is right to criticize Christian indifference to society. One of the criticisms heard about the church’s relationship to the Umbrella Movement is that the church is too distant from earthly life. However, we should be aware that when the

⁷ Shun Hing Chan, “The Protestant Community and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong,” in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 16:3 (2015), 380–95.

church is too driven by society, it can simply become a nongovernmental organization. How is the church to be incarnated into people's everyday life? How does the church share the fate and destiny of the people of Hong Kong?

I consider that the theological idea and practice of ecumenism, embracing both universality and particularity, can help the church to take part in the current discussion about Hongkongese identity and localism. In short, the ecumenicity of the church says that Christ not only brings salvation to individuals but also creates a community. The church is this community characterized by unity, no matter where the churches are and how different their liturgical lives may be.

The differences among churches are a matter of form, not of kind. However, the unity of the church is not homogeneity but rather diversity in unity, unity in diversity. The unity of the church does not dismiss its particularity, while this particularity is not in opposition to the unity of the church. Rather the universality and particularity of the church represents a creative tension that allows it to live and blossom. Its ecumenicity liberates churches from slavery to denomination and demands that the church embody itself into the everyday life of the people. In addition, the church's ecumenicity is not confined to churches; indeed, it is a symbol of God's will for the unity of all creation (Jn 16-17; Eph 4:3-4). The Spirit of God who is operative in creating and sustaining life in creation and human beings, and in creating new life in the believers, is the same Spirit operative in the church and moving the world and the church toward the final consummation. Wolfhart Pannenberg writes,

The Christian ecumenical movement cannot accomplish this mission without at the same time creating a model for the compatibility of unity and multiplicity in relation to other religions and in the political world as well.⁸

He further believes,

If Christians succeed in solving the problems of their own pluralism, they may be able to produce a model of combining pluralism and the widest moral unity which will also be valid for political life.⁹

The church with all its importance in the economy of God in the world is never an end in itself but always serves higher purposes: God's future rule in the arrival of God's kingdom. It is Christ's presence that brings

⁸ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 165.

⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 38.

creation into unity, not political ideology, race or religion. What has this theological theme to do with political life in Hong Kong?

Politically speaking, it could be said that universality in the Hong Kong context is represented by the one country of the “one country, two systems” policy, while particularity is the “two systems” half of this policy. Without a sense of ecumenism, the “one country” tends to be understood as its supremacy from which, and only from which, the meaning of the two systems can be derived. This is exactly the view of the Chinese government, which does not admit that the meaning of “one country” can also come from the two systems. For me, this is a fake ecumenicity, not only because it does not allow the freedom of particularity, but also because it considers that ecumenicity is achieved by political power and domination.

Localism in terms of particularity emphasizes distinctiveness, but should not see itself as ultimate self-sufficiency. In this sense, there is nothing wrong with articulating and developing a Hongkongese identity. I am not proposing that the Hongkongese universality is that of the one country of “one country, two systems,” but rather refers to the well-being of humankind, the vision of God’s kingdom. This is why I have no problems with the four different political interpretations of localism mentioned above, provided that they are not against humankind.

Because of ecumenicity, our society should promote a healthy discussion about different political views, encourage cooperation among different political parties and transcend political ideologies. Since the deliberate influence of the Chinese government in Hong Kong is too powerful, the church here should have the courage to identify itself with local needs and concerns, speak out in support of localism and be a participant in the formation of a Hongkongese identity. Hong Kong’s church should not be afraid of taking a “political” position, for this is the way of being the church in, of and for Hong Kong. The church need not agree with all the proposals made by localism. Instead, it can contribute something different to the discussion on the formation of a Hongkongese identity, such as the concepts of reconciliation, dialogue and love.

Apart from the above interpretation of the universality and particularity of ecumenicity, I would suggest that they can be understood in terms of center and margin. Geographically, Hong Kong is definitely not at the center but on the margins, for it is far away from Beijing. Beijing is hardly able to control every detail in Hong Kong. But at the same time, the marginality of Hong Kong allows it to develop connections not only with the center but also with others.

Being on the margin also affects one’s perspective. The perspective of people standing at the center is different from that of people present on the margins. In this sense, Hong Kong should insist on the validity of

its own perspective on its development instead of accommodating itself to the perspective of the center. What I intend to say is that Hong Kong has more space than its people commonly think it has.

CONCLUSION

I have argued in another article that the Umbrella Movement is a *Kairos*, a time of opportunity and of misfortune. This is especially true in terms of the search for identity. The rise of localism and the formation of a Hongkongese identity have changed Hong Kong from being a “borrowed place and time” to one to which the people of Hong Kong feel they belong. Paradoxically, becoming exclusive and an ideological war among the people of Hong Kong are also possibilities. This paper considers that the experience of the ecumenical spirit of the church could and would bring new insights and practice to the struggle for Hong Kong identity, provided that the church is aware of the correlation between the unity of the church and the unity of humankind.

PUBLIC SPACE AND ISLAMIC PIETY: SPATIAL POLITICS, MADRASAH AND ETHNIC MUSLIM MINORITY IN HONG KONG

Ho Wai-yip

THE MADRASAH: PUBLIC ISLAMIC SPACE IN HONG KONG¹

The Islamic educational institution, the madrasah, has been an important public religious space for transmitting religious knowledge and shaping the identity of the global Muslim community (*ummah*) for centuries. The transnational linkages of the madrasah in the Asian context are becoming more significant,² especially in the fields of youth studies, education, child development, inter-ethnic relations and regional security. The role of the madrasah, which is one of the most important educational, political and transnational institutions in Islamic history and in the current Muslim world, is therefore one of the key research topics of global Islamic stud-

¹ The author would like to express his gratitude for the financial support for this research received from the General Research Fund, Research Grants Council of Hong Kong (GRF 2013/2014 HKIEd 842513). In addition, without the generosity of local madrasahs in hosting our visits and issuing interview invitations, this research would not have been possible. I would also like to thank our Muslim friends and, finally, I would like to thank He Jiajun Martin, Chan Oi Ting Yolanda and Ng Wing Fung Matthew for their research assistance and coordination throughout the research process.

² Farish A. Noor, Yoginder Sikand and Martin Van Bruinessen (eds), *The Madrasa in Asia: Political Activism and Transnational Linkages* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

ies.³ Beyond the hot spots of terrorism in the Middle East and in the West, new findings have been released on madrasah education and its reform in Singapore, Indonesia, India⁴ and Northwest China.⁵ Discussions about madrasahs pay more attention to the compatibility between modern and madrasah education, the role of Islamic education in a plural society, the bridging role of madrasahs to the mainstream non-Muslim majority and issues of gender and discrimination than to their possible relations to *Jihadist* studies.⁶ However, although they have not yet been addressed in Hong Kong's twenty-nine madrasahs, similar issues may at some point arise here.

Rather, the academic literature and recent research on Hong Kong's ethnic and Muslim minorities mainly focus on education and learning

³ Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Q. Zaman (eds), *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2007); Robert W. Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims: the Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009).

⁴ Sarfaroz Niyozov and Nadeem Memon, "Islamic Education and Islamization: Evolution of Themes, Continuities and New Directions," in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 31, no. 1 (2011), 5–30; Yoginder Sikand, "Bridging deen and duniya: the 'modernization' of Islamic education in India," in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2009), 237–47; Charlene Tan, "The Reform Agenda for Madrasah Education in Singapore," *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* 3, no. 2 (2009), 67–80; Charlene Tan and Diwi Binti Abbas, "The 'Teach Less, Learn More' Initiative in Singapore: New Pedagogies for Islamic Religious Schools?," in *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy* 6, no. 1 (2009), 25–39.

⁵ Jackie Armijo, "Islamic Education in China: Rebuilding Communities and Expanding Local and International Networks," in *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (2006), 15–24; Maria Jaschok, *History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam* (Surrey: Curzon, 2000); Maria Jaschok and Vicky Hau Ming Chan, "Education, Gender and Islam in China: The Place of Religious Education in Challenging and Sustaining 'Undisputed Traditions' among Chinese Muslim Women," in *International Journal of Educational Development* 29, no. 5 (2009), 487–94.

⁶ Charlene Tan, *Islamic Education and Indoctrination: The Case in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2011); Charlene Tan, "Maximising the Overlapping Area: Multiculturalism and a Muslim Identity for Madrasahs in Singapore," in *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 30, no. 1 (2009), 41–48; Charlene Tan, "The Teaching of Religious Knowledge in a Plural Society: The Case for Singapore," in *International Review of Education* 54 (2008), 175–91; Intan Azura Mokhtar, "Madrasahs in Singapore: Bridging Between their Roles, Relevance and Resources," in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2010), 111–25; Jaddon Park and Sarfaroz Niyozov, "Madrasa Education in South Asia and Southeast Asia: Current Issues and Debates," in *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 28, no. 4 (2008), 323–51; Matsumoto Masumi and Shimbo Atsuko, "Islamic Education in China: Triple Discrimination and the Challenge of Hui Women's Madrasahs," in Keiko Sakurai and Fariba Adelkhah (eds), *The Moral Economy of the Madrasa: Islam and Education Today* (London: Routledge, 2011), 103–29.

the Chinese language,⁷ social issues such as the linguistic and cultural traditions contributing to underachievement,⁸ problems of acculturation, adaptation and domestic violence,⁹ cultural insensitivity towards ethnic minorities,¹⁰ emotional and behavior needs¹¹ and other current challenges such as unemployment and social discrimination.¹² Although mainstream Hong Kong society recognizes that the subjects of these current academic debates are real and important, the Muslim minority's religious worldview with its emphasis on spirituality and the growing needs of Islamic education and learning the Qur'an are hardly considered. The values of religious piety, individual morality and the honor of becoming *Hafiz* (Muslims who can completely memorize and recite the whole Qur'an) are extremely important to Muslim families in Hong Kong. But these values have been undermined and neglected. In the context of secular Hong Kong's growing Muslim population, this paper argues that the mushrooming of madrasahs is a reflection of Muslims' attempts to defend Islamic piety and preserve their identity and religious heritage.

⁷ Linda Tsung and Ken Cruickshank (eds), *Teaching and Learning Chinese in Global Contexts: Multimodality and Literacy in the New Media Age* (London: Continuum, 2011); Paul O'Connor, *Islam in Hong Kong: Muslims and Everyday Life in China's World City* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012).

⁸ Linda Tsung and Fang Gao, "What Accounts for the Underachievement of South Asians in Hong Kong: The Voice of Pakistani and Nepalese Parents," in *Educational Research* 54, no. 1 (2012), 51–63.

⁹ Kareen NingLianChing Tonsing, "A Study of Acculturation and Adaptation of South Asians in Hong Kong," in *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2010), 189–99; Jenny Chingkhannem Tonsing, "A Study of Domestic Violence among the South Asians in Hong Kong," in *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2010), 367–76.

¹⁰ Ming-Tak Hue, "The Challenges of Making School Guidance Culturally Responsive: Narratives of Pastoral Needs of Ethnic Minority Students in Hong Kong Secondary Schools," in *Educational Studies* 36, no. 4 (2010), 357–69; Hok Bun Ku, "Body, Dress and Cultural Exclusion: Experiences of Pakistani Women in 'Global' Hong Kong," in *Asian Ethnicity* 7, no. 3 (2006), 285–302.

¹¹ Vivian Heung, "Recognizing the Emotional and Behavioral Needs of Ethnic Minority Students in Hong Kong," in *Preventing School Failure* 50, no. 2 (2006), 29–36.

¹² Dominic Lee and Michelle Li, "Being Young and a Minority: A Study of the Challenges Encountered by Young Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong," in *Journal of Youth Studies* 14, no. 2 (2011), 42–53; H.B. Ku et al., *A Research Report on the Life Experiences of Pakistanis in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Center for Social Policy Studies, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 2003); K. Loper, "Race and Equality: A Study of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong's Education System" (Occasional Paper at Centre for Comparative and Public Law, The University of Hong Kong, no. 12, 2004).

MADRASAHS AND MUSLIM MINORITY YOUTH IN HONG KONG

As is the case in the Middle East and other Muslim-majority countries, the Hong Kong madrasah is an Islamic institution where the Special Administrative Region's Muslim minority youth can study the Qur'an and where Muslim religious clergy (*ulema*) can be trained. Under the Hong Kong government's system of integrated education for ethnic minorities, Muslim students receive modern education in conventional schools like other Hong Kong students during the day-time and study the Muslim faith, worship and the Qur'an in madrasahs in the evenings. The Hong Kong government has attempted to integrate students with different ethnic backgrounds within the same schools. Is such a policy feasible? Some primary and secondary schools have a substantial population of Muslim youths. Do their teachers encounter difficulties in teaching them together with other Hong Kong students and, if so, how do they handle these challenges? Are there educational institutions that provide Muslim students with religious education that allow them to learn the basic tenets of Islam and recite the Qur'an?

Although Hong Kong Muslims are free to practice their religion peacefully, limited resources have created other problems for the community. In a report in the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), journalist Charley Lanyon has reported on the lack of Islamic facilities as a serious problem confronting Hong Kong's growing Muslim population. The entire Muslim community is currently served by only five official mosques, some scattered small prayer halls and informal madrasahs. These facilities cannot meet the demand of the growing Muslim population.

Singapore, for instance, has six full-time and twenty-seven part-time madrasahs to accommodate the needs of its Muslim community.¹³ These institutions provide religious and Islamic education and teach the Arabic language to primary, secondary and pre-university students aged seven to eighteen years of age. Singapore's government has provided more institutions and opportunities for Muslims to learn and practice their religion than Hong Kong. With only one mosque in Kowloon's Tsim Sha Tsui and four others located on Hong Kong Island (Wan Chai, Mid-level, Stanley and Chai Wan), the Hong Kong government seems unprepared to promote Islamic finance or to cater to the growing number of Muslim tourists. This deficiency reveals that city planning policies related to the religious needs

¹³ "Madrasahs Administration," last modified 2011, at www.muis.gov.sg/cms/services/Madrasahs.aspx?id=204.

of Muslim minorities in the post-colonial period differs from that applied during the colonial period.¹⁴

One mosque cannot accommodate the growing Muslim community in Kowloon and the New Territories. Without future plans to build new mosques there, Pakistani Muslims began to lease and combine small flats in order to house congregational prayer and Qur'anic learning; these places were called "housques."¹⁵ Most madrasahs in Hong Kong are located in Kowloon and the northwestern part of the New Territories. These locations are usually in the low-income and inexpensive areas, possibly because the sponsoring bodies could only afford the rent and the operating costs in such neighborhoods. The move of many Muslims and madrasahs to northwestern Hong Kong can be attributed to the absence of mosques in these areas.

GROWTH OF MUSLIM ETHNIC MINORITIES IN HONG KONG

The *Hong Kong Year Book* statistics indicate that Hong Kong's Muslim population has tended to grow over the past century. In 2011, the Muslim population reached 220,000, comprising 3.11 percent of its entire population (7.0716 million).¹⁶ This demographic shift and population trend oblige Hong Kong society to respond with new scenarios in urban planning, cultural policy and educational strategies.

Year	1900	1963	1971	1981	1991	1999	2009	2011
Muslims Percentage	0.3	0.14	0.25	0.6	0.8	1.1	3.14	3.11

Percentage of Muslim Population (1900 to 2011) in the Hong Kong Yearbook

The largest groups within the current Muslim population comprise 120,000 Indonesians (54.5 percent) and 30,000 Chinese (13.6 percent). The remainder are non-Chinese citizens born in Hong Kong, including Pakistanis, Indians,

¹⁴ Wai-Yip Ho, "A Historical Analysis of Islamic Community Development in Hong Kong: Struggle for Recognition in the Post-Colonial Era," in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 21, no. 2 (2001), 63–77; Wai-Yip Ho, "Contested Mosques in Hong Kong," in *ISIM Newspaper*, 10:14 (2002).

¹⁵ Andrea Fenn, "'Housques': HK's home-based Mosques," in *China Daily*, 25 May 2010.

¹⁶ "Hong Kong: The Facts," in *Hong Kong Yearbook* (Hong Kong: Information Services Department, 2011), at www.yearbook.gov.hk/2011/en/pdf/Facts.pdf.

Nepalese, Malaysians and other nationalities.¹⁷ The Pakistani population has increased rapidly from 11,017 in 2001 to 18,042 in 2011.¹⁸ In contrast to the age group patterns of other nationalities, 8,106 Pakistanis (46.98 percent) are below nineteen years old¹⁹ and most of these young people are probably involved in learning processes.

Contrary to popular belief that ethnic minorities are just a small group of temporary residents, they in fact now comprise permanent and growing communities concentrated in the northwestern part of the New Territories (Yuen Long: 2,344; Kwai Tsing: 2,335 and Tuen Muen: 1,311) and Kowloon (Yau Tsim Mong: 2,412).²⁰ The Hong Kong Educational Bureau has observed that non-Chinese students are now a majority in conventional day-time schools. Teachers and school principals are thus encountering certain challenges in handling students with different ethnic backgrounds, languages and religious practices.

Given that the majority of their students are Pakistanis and thus Muslims, the Caritas Tuen Mun Marden Foundation Secondary Schools was designated as a participant in the voluntary school-based support program for non-Chinese-speaking students. In our interviews with the principal and vice-principals, they stated that 170 Muslim students comprise 37.8 percent of their total student population (450 students in S1 to S6) and that they are already receiving Muslim students' requests for prayer time within school hours and permission to stay home during religious festivals (e.g., *Hajj*). How to follow the school curriculum without offending the Muslim students' rising religious feelings becomes a new challenge for many frontline Chinese educators. Although Muslim minorities are already an inseparable part of Hong Kong society, few people are aware of their rising aspirations for religious education and wish to practice Muslim religious rituals.

¹⁷ "Religion and Custom," in *Hong Kong Yearbook* (Hong Kong: Information Services Department, 2011), at www.yearbook.gov.hk/2011/en/pdf/E18.pdf.

¹⁸ "2011 Population Census: Population by Ethnicity," at www.census2011.gov.hk/en/main-table/A104.html.

¹⁹ "2011 Population Census: Population by Sex, Age Group and Nationality," at www.census2011.gov.hk/en/main-table/A114.html.

²⁰ "2011 Population Census: Population by District Council District, Nationality and Duration of Residence," at www.census2011.gov.hk/en/main-table/A208.html.

MUSLIM PARENTS' PERCEPTION: MADRASAH AS AN EMBODIMENT OF ISLAMIC PIETY

Despite the promising prospect of Islamic financial development and the increase in the Muslim population, one special challenge faced by the Muslim community in Hong Kong is finding a large enough space for prayer, learning the basics of Islam and reciting the Qur'an. Many Muslims are "desperate for larger and better equipped mosques and [troubled by] the scarcity of Islamic educational options."²¹ Muslim parents like Kashif Akhtar, a Pakistani who moved to Hong Kong with his family fifteen years ago, are considering moving to nearby countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore for better Islamic education opportunities for their children.²² Ishaque Sarker, a Bangladeshi Muslim resident in Hong Kong, reported to SCMP that, "my dream is to have an Islamic school here."²³ The overcrowding of the mosques has brought inconveniences to many Muslim families: more than 300 people attend prayers in a private mosque in Yau Ma Tei and people are forced to pray in the guest house because of limited space.²⁴

Muslim parents consider the scarcity of Islamic educational institutions as a principal factor in their decision to emigrate from Hong Kong to Malaysia, Indonesia or even Singapore. In Hong Kong, luxury flats rented by expatriates are the most expensive in the world and property prices are so high that homes are hardly affordable for local Hong Kong residents. With the number of Muslims soaring and the increasing scarcity of physical space, Imam Tayaib Qasmi, the Sheikh of the Khatme Nubuwa Movement referred to the pressing need to accommodate Muslim youth for prayer and reciting the Qur'an:

If there is land like that of the Kowloon Mosque in Tsim Shau Tsui, I don't know whether ten mosques are enough [...]. Now we have too many Muslims, too many Muslim children [...] we worry about the Muslim children. We open some madrasahs as Qur'anic schools for them to learn the Qur'an and some basic Islam.²⁵

Unwilling to wait for the government to grant them land on which to build mosques or schools and without hope of building in Kowloon and the

²¹ Charley Lanyon, "Free to Keep the Faith," in *South China Morning Post*, 23 September 2012.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "The House of Islam," TV program (In Chinese), Hong Kong: Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB), 2011.

New Territories in the foreseeable future, Pakistani Muslim parents have come up with a creative solution to their predicament in recent years: the creation of housques in Kowloon and the New Territories, as mentioned above. This development has been remarkably fast and such housques are scattered around many parts of Hong Kong. According to the Islamic Union of Hong Kong, there were already 29 housque-style madrasahs in Hong Kong by August 2010.

As mentioned above, without showing resistance to the daytime secular education, ethnic Muslim students recite and memorize the Qur'an in a madrasah in the evenings. For young ethnic Muslims who have grown up under Chinese rule, learning the Qur'an is essential if they are to preserve their religious traditions and heritage. In general, Hong Kong's madrasahs are tolerated and not viewed as breeding grounds for terrorism. According to the author's fieldwork observation and interviews with local nongovernmental organizations, madrasahs also enjoy good neighborhood relationships with the Chinese community. Such nongovernmental organizations and Chinese schoolteachers reach out to the madrasahs to introduce their Chinese and academic tuition programs, but have little understanding of the Muslim community's devotion to the Islamic scriptures.

CONCLUSION: MADRASAH AS PUBLIC RELIGIOUS SPACE COUNTERING ATHEISM

In a television documentary which reported on the status of Islam in Hong Kong,²⁶ Hameed Jalal praised the Special Region as one of the top five countries where Muslims are happily accommodated. Such a friendly social environment is not really visible in the institutional culture of Hong Kong society however. The Muslim community has not been granted a public holiday to celebrate any major Muslim festival like Eid Al-Fitr or Eid Al-Adha. Although Hong Kong Muslims are free to practice their religion peacefully and even praise the government for its lack of institutional discrimination, limited resources have created other problems for the community. The Muslim-to-mosque ratio in Hong Kong is catastrophic. While there is one church for every 700 Christians, one mosque is supposed to accommodate 18,000 Muslims. In 2001, the Hong Kong SAR government granted land to the United Muslims Association to build a mosque and Islamic center in Sheung Shui. However, this was grossly inadequate: it would be the only mosque in the New Territories where most of the ethnic Muslims (mainly Pakistani families) reside. Despite financial support by the Kingdom of

²⁶ Ibid.

Saudi Arabia and the Qatar charity of Doha, the pace of the construction was further delayed by the untimely death in 2009 of Mohamed Alli Din, the project organizer. Consequently, there is no definite date as to when it will be finalized due also to a subsequent Din family dispute about the project plus community objections and financial complications.²⁷ Without a clear blueprint for building a new mosque in Hong Kong, a locally-born Pakistani university student explained why she immerses herself in a local madrasah:

Interviewer: Then on Saturdays and Sundays, you still have the madrasah class?

Interviewee: Yes. Sometimes they have the day off on Sundays as well. If you believe in our religion [...] because Hong Kong is mostly dominated by an atheist society. They don't have any religion to follow, no religious practice. I mean they have nothing else but just academics. When they look at people from different communities who practice their religion, they think that it is a waste of time [...].

Considering the ethnic Muslim community in the context of the lack of Islamic facilities, this paper suggests that the rising number of Hong Kong-style madrasahs (housques) enables new generations of Muslims to practice Islamic piety and preserve their own identity and heritage in resistance against the secular aura of Hong Kong society.

²⁷ Lok-Yin Law, "Hong Kong Citizens; Understanding of Islam: The Case of the Sheung Shui Mosque Development Project," in *Asian Anthropology* 14, no. 1 (2015), 55–66; also Ho, *op. cit.* (note 14).

JESUS, CREATIVITY AND NUCLEAR POWER: A POST-FUKUSHIMA READING OF GORDON KAUFMAN'S CHRISTOLOGY FROM A HONG KONG PERSPECTIVE

MOK Kie Man Bryan

The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster was the most serious nuclear accident in human history besides the Chernobyl disaster. After the disaster, the risk of nuclear power has become a key issue for reflection among Christian leaders and scholars. Some Japanese theologians in particular direct their theological criticism against the concealment of the truth about the potential danger of nuclear power. For example, Kumiko Kato contends that the Japanese authorities have paid little attention to the risk of nuclear leakage due to their own political agenda. He then cites the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11 as a parable of the Japanese authorities' hegemony and stresses the presence of "a multiplication of languages" in nuclear policy.¹ Yuki Shimada also focuses on the theme of truth telling, but has taken a slightly different approach. By interpreting Dietrich Bonhoeffer's relational understanding of truth, he urges the decision makers to be truly responsible to others, particularly to the locals who live near the nuclear plant, the engineers working inside the Fukushima plant as well as to the generation to come.²

While articulating the importance of truth telling in the issue of nuclear power, Kato and Shimada have not yet touched on a core question: what is

¹ Kumiko Kato, "Reading the Bible after Fukushima," in Solange Lefebvre and Marie-Theres Wacker (eds), *Water Marks Our Life* (London: SCM Press, 2012), 103-104.

² Yuki Shimada, "Truth and Truth-Telling in Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reconsidered after 3.11 and 'Fukushima,'" in *Theology Today* 71, no. 1 (2014), 130-31.

wrong, theologically speaking, with the human use of nuclear power? A pastoral letter issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan points out that the main problem revealed by the Fukushima disaster is that humans have made a fetish of science and technology without knowing their own limits. On this basis, the bishops call for the immediate abolition of nuclear power plants and appeal for a simple lifestyle which corresponds to the gospel.³ Bishop Paul Otsuka further states that there is no technological system that can ensure the safety of nuclear power. Human inventiveness, which is given by God, is limited and imperfect.⁴ In brief, these Japanese bishops regard human overconfidence in their controlling power over nature as the underlying problem of nuclear technology. The core problem of nuclear power is the overestimation and misuse of human creativity. To rectify this problem, it is necessary to acknowledge our own limitations and thus to regulate our creativity, so that our world can be a more humane dwelling place for different life forms.

My paper will follow this line of thought and deal with the following question, What kind of response can Christian theology provide in answer to what the Fukushima disaster has revealed? I will investigate the concept of creativity through the lens of Jesus' life by drawing inspiration from Gordon Kaufman's Christology. In particular, this paper argues that the image/story of Jesus is a powerful symbol, capable of dispelling the perilous myth that humans are able to domesticate the unpredictability involved in the generation of nuclear energy. If this thesis stands, Christians are obliged to join hands with others in anti-nuclear campaigns. And this does not only apply to the Japanese, who suffer directly from the Fukushima disaster; it is also the responsibility of all Asians, including those who live in Hong Kong, who are surrounded by a handful of nuclear reactors.

FRAGILITY OF NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY

As stated above, the core problem of nuclear power is the fragility of its technology and its tendency to cover up the potential catastrophic consequences of this fragility. Some environmentalists, however, support nuclear

³ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, "Abolish Nuclear Plants Immediately: Facing the Tragedy of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant Disaster," published 8 November 2011, at www.cbcj.catholic.jp/eng/edoc/111108.htm.

⁴ Joshua J. McElwee, "Nearing Hiroshima Day, Japanese bishop calls for discernment on nuclear energy," National Catholic Reporter, 4 August 2011, quoted in Seán McDonagh, *Fukushima: The Death Knell for Nuclear Energy?* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2012), 150.

power because they believe it is the only available alternative to fossil-fuel power, the culprit of global climate change.⁵ While nuclear power may relieve global warming, their enormous confidence in the latest nuclear technologies is misplaced. Accounts of some anti-nuclear scientists illustrate the vulnerability of nuclear technology.

Nuclear power is generated from the energy released by the fission reactions of uranium. These reactions produce immense energy—a single gram of uranium can generate the same amount of energy as eight kilos of fossil fuels.⁶ Utilizing nuclear fission to generate power does display human creativity. However, this kind of creativity has been strongly criticized by another group of scientists. By showing the contradiction between the radiation doses promised by the nuclear industry and its own proposed standard of permissible doses, John Gofman forcefully argued that nuclear promoters have indeed concealed the truth about radiation doses. According to his estimate, even if there were no major accidents and the containment of cesium-137 reached 99.99 percent, the expansion of nuclear electric power production would still cause a large number of cancer fatalities, leukemia and genetic disorders.⁷ Helen Caldicott condemns nuclear technology as humanity's own worst enemy because it increases the risk of cancer and genetic disease, and threatens life with extinction in the long run.⁸ Here, the core argument of Gofman and Caldicott is clear: humans can never fully manage the risk of nuclear technology; nor can they bear the catastrophic consequences of even a “tiny” error.

The shocking Fukushima disaster was a tragic demonstration of this point of view. Unlike Chernobyl, the Fukushima Daiichi Power Station is located in a technologically advanced country. Nevertheless, as Kristin

⁵ See, for example, James Lovelock, “Nuclear Power Is the Only Green Solution,” in *The Independent*, 24 May 2004, at www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/james-lovelock-nuclear-power-is-the-only-green-solution-6169341.html; Patrick Moore, “Going Nuclear,” in *The Washington Post*, 16 April 2006, at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/14/AR2006041401209.html; David J. C. MacKay, *Sustainable Energy—Without the Hot Air* (Cambridge: UIT Cambridge, 2009), 168; Barry W. Brook and Corey J. A. Bradshaw, “Key Role for Nuclear Energy in Global Biodiversity Conservation,” in *Conservation Biology* 29, no. 3 (June 2015), 703, 706.

⁶ MacKay, *op. cit.* (note 5), 161. See also Jonathan Scurlock, “Nuclear Energy: An Introductory Primer,” in Beth Edmondson and Stuart Levy (eds), *Climate Change and Order: The End of Prosperity and Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 9.

⁷ John W. Gofman, *Radiation and Human Health* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1981), 530–34, 550–52.

⁸ Helen Caldicott, *Nuclear Madness: What You Can Do*, revised edition (New York: Norton, 1994), 13, 29–31, 63–64.

Shrader-Frechette suggests, the Fukushima disaster proves that even in such a highly developed country, a massive commercial reactor catastrophe can occur.⁹ Behind the veil of safety and high technology are “human errors in design, operations, maintenance and emergency response.”¹⁰ Furthermore, the Fukushima disaster was not the only nuclear accident to have occurred in Japan and it is not, therefore, a unique case.¹¹ As a result, we can no longer trust the myth of nuclear safety; another Fukushima disaster, which has created up to 700,000 refugees and persisting radioactive contamination with almost permanent economic, environmental and health effects, is absolutely unthinkable.¹² Therefore, given the vulnerability of nuclear power and its horrific destructiveness, both Shrader-Frechette and Sovacool assert that renewable energy is definitely a better choice in both theory and practice.¹³

CREATIVITY TRANSMUTING INTO DESTRUCTIVENESS

Nuclear energy is simultaneously creative and destructive. On the one hand, producing, as it can, vast amounts of energy with few inputs, it is a manifestation of human creativity. But, on the other, it can slip out of control and go wild in an unimaginable way. Nonetheless, we cannot simply enumerate the pros and cons of nuclear power and leave the discussion open-ended; the Fukushima disaster has shown that our creativity will irreversibly transmute into long-lasting destructiveness when it goes wrong. In other words, the bright side of nuclear energy will be overwhelmed by its dark side.

Nuclear proponents suggest that in so far as it can effectively mitigate global climate change, nuclear energy’s potential dangers are acceptable when coupled with adequate risk management. This stance echoes the recommendations of the 1966 International Commission on Radiological Protection:

Any exposure to radiation is assumed to entail a risk of deleterious effects. However, unless man [sic!] wishes to dispense with activities involving exposures

⁹ Kristin Shrader-Frechette, *What Will Work: Fighting Climate Change with Renewable Energy, Not Nuclear Power*, Environmental Ethics and Science Policy Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 113.

¹⁰ Benjamin K. Sovacool, *Contesting the Future of Nuclear Power: A Critical Global Assessment of Atomic Energy* (Singapore; Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific, 2011), 282.

¹¹ Martin Cohen, *The Doomsday Machine: The High Price of Nuclear Energy, the World’s Most Dangerous Fuel* (New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 69.

¹² Shrader-Frechette, op. cit. (note 9), 110–17; Sovacool, op. cit. (note 10), 284–87.

¹³ Shrader-Frechette, op. cit. (note 9), 188–211; Sovacool, op. cit. (note 10), 287. See also McDonagh, op. cit. (note 4), 128–40.

to ionizing radiations, he must recognize that there is a degree of risk and must limit the radiation dose to a level at which the assured risk is deemed to be acceptable to the individual and to society in view of the benefits derived from such activities.¹⁴

The core problem is that this stance assumes the controllability of nuclear power. Its ethical implication is clear: potential danger, which is presumably under human control, is acceptable, given that it promises a brighter future.

But what kind of future is nuclear power actually leading us to? In my view, the above utilitarian point of view demonstrates both the hubris of human creativity and ignorance of the destructiveness it hides. Advocates of nuclear energy always link this technology with progress, modernity and different sorts of technical fantasy and try to sketch a hopeful blueprint of the future.¹⁵ But in fact, it will only make our society more reliant on technical specialists and research breakthroughs.¹⁶ In other words, the promises made by nuclear technology are more an illusion than a reality. Indeed, the Fukushima disaster has come before the actualization of the promise of nuclear technology. In a word, our creativity has resulted in destructiveness rather than beatitude.

This destructiveness resulting from our own creativity shows that risk is very often something humans cannot manage. In an essay in response to the Fukushima disaster, José Luís Garcia and Helena Mateus Jerónimo (with reference to Jacques Ellul) have reflected deeply on this. The Fukushima disaster, they contend, proved that the vulnerability of our creativity can never “be overcome by scientific knowledge to predict and technological power to control events.”¹⁷ The modern concept of risk, on the other hand, is an admission of this vulnerability with the hope that this vulnerability can be put under human control.¹⁸ This risk management mindset assumes that “scientific rationality, probabilistic calculation and the technological approach are sufficient to confront its [nuclear power’s] danger.”¹⁹ But Garcia

¹⁴ International Commission on Radiological Protections, “Recommendations of the International Commission on Radiological Protections,” in *ICRP Publication 9* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1966), para 34, at ani.sagepub.com/content/suppl/2013/06/25/os-9.1.DC1/P_009_1966_Recommendations_of_the_ICRP_rev0.pdf.

¹⁵ Sovacool, *op. cit.* (note 10), 259.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 268–69.

¹⁷ José Luís Garcia and Helena Mateus Jerónimo, “Fukushima: A Tsunami of Technological Order,” in Helena Mateus Jerónimo, José Luís Garcia, and Carl Mitcham (eds), *Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society in the 21st Century* (New York: Springer, 2013), 134.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

and Jerónimo assert that this assumption is not applicable to nuclear power as it is a superior and uncontrollable power. Due to its inherent complexity, a small error or simple intervention can lead to the ruin of the whole system, with deadly and far-reaching consequences.²⁰ The Fukushima disaster is an actualization of this vulnerability of nuclear technology and thus it is, as Garcia and Jerónimo argue, “not just a disaster for Japan, but for the technological order.”²¹ Moreover, it leads not only to the collapse of the technological order, but also wrecks other systems which support life through a chain reaction. Garcia and Jerónimo conclude their insightful reflection in this way:

[T]he occurrence of small or large-scale accidents [...] counters the idea that everything is under control, based largely on a faith in technological effectiveness. Not only do we fail to eliminate uncertainty, but technological order actually brings us contingencies that resemble [...] the old uncertainties generated by natural forces. Occupied as we are with the calculation of risk, we fail to take uncertainty as a given. Accepting uncertainty means taking seriously the principle of precaution in the regulation of technology.²²

The hubris that we can control our own creativity and the attempt to tame uncertainty has cost Japanese society and human technology dearly. Therefore, it is time for us to accept the limitations brought by uncertainty and regulate our own creativity accordingly lest it result in another devastating catastrophe. The Fukushima disaster reminds humanity that self-restraint is more prudent and responsible than risk management.

JESUS AS THE NORM OF HUMAN CREATIVITY

The above ethical argument of Garcia and Jerónimo to a large extent echoes the theological reflection of the Japanese bishops. The theme is clear: the assumption that humans are able to manage their creativity is dangerously wrong and must be replaced by a spirituality of self-restraint and self-regulation. Here I will further develop this theme with reference to Gordon Kaufman’s Christology.

In fact, this theme was suggested by some Christian theologians long before the Fukushima disaster. In a report of an ecumenical hearing on nuclear energy in 1975, it was argued that the choice of nuclear energy implied the affirmation of human ability to master its awesome power. It

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

²² *Ibid.*, 143.

went on to challenge this excessive faith and to question how humans can cope properly with their creativity.²³

This question was picked up again by Peter Sedgwick at a post-Chernobyl conference. On the basis of the Hebraic wisdom tradition, he contends that the human vocation is to preserve the created order and transform the material into the moral and spiritual. A key question for him is whether nuclear technology will help or hinder this process of transformation. While containing a transformative aspect, nuclear power, if it results in the destruction of environment, will benefit nothing but only violate the human vocation of sustaining the created world.²⁴ Nuclear science can be seen as an attempt to make use of God-given creativity, but it will be extremely dangerous if there is no restraint. Nuclear science and technology have created the delusion that we can manage and inaugurate our own future with sophisticated planning.²⁵ Here, theology must critically examine this pseudo-planning and constructively propose a vision of true planning which, according to Sedgwick, takes caring for the fragile and sensitive world as its mission.²⁶ We have a share in constructing a more humane world. We should remember that fragility and sensitivity are a part of our created order, and they must be preserved in our planning.

How then can Christian theology contribute to this vocation? In particular, what kind of perspective can Jesus Christ offer to human society with respect to the choice of energy sources? Kaufman's Christology, I suggest, can shed light on these questions. According to Kaufman, Jesus is normative not because of his divine personhood, but because he, as a fully human being, has provided a profound image which "measure[s] and judge[s] our own humanness and humaneness."²⁷ In particular, the image/story of Jesus has embodied self-giving *agape* love and thus Jesus, with his self-sacrificing life and death, has become a defining paradigm of what is good for humans.²⁸ In brief, for Kaufman, Jesus' self-giving life is the norm that regulates our human reasoning, desires and activities.

²³ John Francis and Paul Abrecht, "Ecumenical Hearing on Nuclear Energy," in John Francis and Paul Abrecht (eds), *Facing up to Nuclear Power: A Contribution to the Debate on the Risks and Potentialities of the Large-Scale Use of Nuclear Energy* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1976), 198–200.

²⁴ Peter Sedgwick, "Nuclear energy and the transformation of creation: A theological comment," in Kristin Shrader-Frechette (ed.) *Nuclear energy and ethics* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1991), 211–13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 214–16.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁷ Gordon D. Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 32.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 33, 35, 47, 114.

Kaufman's Christological perspective is grounded on his conception of the universe. The universe, according to him, is the "structured whole" of all that is, and is thus the overarching context of our lives.²⁹ It is neither an unchanging structure nor an endless cycle of repeated patterns, but consists of a serendipitous process in which creativity—new things coming into being—happens through time.³⁰ In this worldview, God is conceived as the origin or the foundation of this creative process.³¹ Kaufman argues that God, in our postmodern conception, is not the omnipotent creator but the serendipitous creativity, the very force which has been at work throughout the cosmic process and mysteriously bringing new and novel realities into being.³² This creativity God is both humanizing and relativizing: humanizing in terms of its bringing into being of values and meanings, and relativizing in terms of being the ultimate point of reference and thus calling all human projects into question.³³ In short, God is the serendipitous creativity that has been driving the world forward all along, and is simultaneously the source and the measure of human values.

Creativity, according to Kaufman, is also an important human attribute. It enables us to transform the natural order into increasingly complex socio-cultural worlds.³⁴ On the one hand, as a member of the community of living creatures, humans are interconnected and interdependent with other forms of life. But, on the other, humans are self-conscious historical beings who have been creatively producing a socio-cultural form of existence.³⁵ This creativity comes partly from humans themselves and partly from the creativity-God.³⁶ Therefore, while human creativity is free, it is simultaneously bound to the creativity-God. This entails responsibility. Humans, as historical, agential and creative beings, are free to act, yet every one of their acts has an effect on the well-being of other beings as well as the whole living structure. Therefore, humans must be responsible and accountable to their own projects.³⁷ Put differently, we have to keep checking whether our acts will do good or evil to the web of life.³⁸ At this point, Kaufman emphasizes that real freedom is found within the interconnectedness of

²⁹ Gordon D. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), 113–14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 259.

³¹ Gordon D. Kaufman, *In the Beginning ... Creativity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 42, 53.

³² *Ibid.*, 55–56.

³³ *Ibid.*, 46, 60.

³⁴ Kaufman, *op. cit.* (note 27), 74–75.

³⁵ Kaufman, *op. cit.* (note 29), 109; (note 27), 64.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 76–78.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

world processes. Furthermore, freedom never means that humans can do whatever they like, but reminds us that we can and should restrain our own actions for the sake of others' well-being.³⁹ As such, freedom in fact indicates our ability to transform our very selves by opting for new and different possibilities in a self-reflexive way.⁴⁰ Therefore, we should regulate our creativity for the sake of the well-being of the whole universe and its overall process, of which we are an inalienable part.

But how can we regulate our creativity? What is its normative paradigm? As mentioned, Kaufman regards the self-giving life of Jesus as a defining paradigm of all human acts and projects. Since the creativity-God "is present in and with our own human creativity," we are able to orientate our project with the trajectories of the world process, which is indeed God's manifestation. Therefore, we have everything we need in order to hope for "a more humane and ecologically sustainable world."⁴¹ The image and story of Jesus provides the key to actualize this hope, for it calls us to live according to the self-giving life of Jesus. Speaking in contemporary ecological terms, Kaufman says that this life is "a life devoted to protecting and enhancing the environment that sustains humans and many other species here on planet Earth."⁴² Here, the image and story of Jesus is the embodiment of the creativity-God in human history, and it has been driving historical development creatively.⁴³ Moreover, it also qualifies the creativity-God so that it can become a concrete guide of human lives.⁴⁴

Then, given the current situation, what kind of vision can the image/story of Jesus give us so that we can strive towards a more sustainable future? Kaufman contends that we must follow Jesus' radical self-giving life.⁴⁵ What humans need, he suggests, is a profound worldwide conversion that radically reorders all aspects of our ways of living so that we can "live together with some kind of lasting peace and justice" and deal with the ecological crisis through international cooperation.⁴⁶ As this conversion involves changes in deep-lying patterns, it cannot be accomplished without imaginative creativity and its transforming power.⁴⁷ Therefore, it must be religious in nature, for creativity is God and God is creativity and our human creativity originates in God.⁴⁸ In other words, our human

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 86–87.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴³ Kaufman, *op. cit.* (note 27), 16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 105–106.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 106–107.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

creativity needs the guidance of the creativity-God. But the creativity-God is too vague and ambiguous for human understanding. So the image/story of Jesus is essential as the norm of our human creativity.

Concerning the content of this norm, Kaufman claims that Jesus has called for a self-sacrificing love that takes the needs of others as preferential.⁴⁹ This self-giving vision has been enacted by Jesus' own life and death and can creatively transform destructive human practices as well as radically alter human ordinary norms and values. This vision should be embraced and celebrated not only by Christians but also by the whole of humanity for the sake of a more humane world, a world where the well-being of every individual is respected.⁵⁰

The Fukushima disaster has shown that our human creativity in nuclear technology can and actually has become sheer destruction. In the past, human beings confidently believed that we were creative enough to manage the risk of nuclear power, and this hubris grew even stronger after the Chernobyl disaster. Now, the Fukushima disaster not only disrupts the life and livelihood of the Japanese, but also causes inestimable pollution to the marine ecosystem of the Pacific Ocean. Shall we continue to misuse our creativity in order to satisfy our unlimited energy consumption, or shall we recognize the limitations of human creativity? In light of Kaufman's Christology, we should take the self-giving image/story of Jesus as the norm of our human lifestyle. It means, on the one hand, that we should recognize the finitude of human creativity and humbly confess that the creativity God is the ultimate point of reference of our creativity. On the other hand, it means that we need to follow the life of Jesus and use our creativity with regard to the well-being of our neighbors and live with them peacefully. This theological insight in turn echoes the voice of anti-nuclear scientists who advocate the development of renewable energy and a simple lifestyle.⁵¹

A LOCAL VOICE FOR RESTRAINING HUMAN CREATIVITY

The Fukushima disaster is just one example which demonstrates the destructiveness caused by human neglect of our responsibility properly to regulate our own creativity. Because of the fallout, over 250,000 residents had to evacuate the region.⁵² The amount of cesium-137 in soils forty kilometers away from

⁴⁹ Ibid., 111.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 112–14; see also Gordon Kaufmann, *Theology for a Nuclear Age* (Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 59.

⁵¹ See Caldicott, op. cit. (note 8), 245–47; Shrader-Frechette, op. cit. (note 9), 188–211; Sovacool, op. cit. (note 10), 217–38.

⁵² Sovacool, op. cit. (note 10), 277.

the plant was found to be 2,200 times above the normal level.⁵³ Furthermore, the abnormal radiation level in Tokyo has threatened the health of more than 30 million people.⁵⁴ Eventually, the area within twenty kilometers from the plant was designated as an exclusion zone unsuitable for human habitation.⁵⁵ The Pacific Ocean was also contaminated due to the release of contaminated water.⁵⁶ Until now, there is no sign of an end to this leakage. Creativity has turned into sheer destructiveness due to human irresponsibility and arrogance.

The Fukushima disaster has also led to serious mental disorders. According to Timothy To, a Hong Kong counselor who voluntarily provided counseling services to radiation victims, his organization has come across more than 2,000 cases of suicide attempts due to hopelessness or post-traumatic stress disorder.⁵⁷ He recalled that many buildings had survived intact after the earthquake, but all the former inhabitants had gone.⁵⁸ Towns which were once beautiful have been ruined. Returnees continue to live in the haze of radiation without hope, forgotten and left behind by others. In some ways, this psychological sequela is more horrible than the physical damages caused by the disaster.

The Fukushima disaster is not just a concern for the Japanese but for all Asians. According to the World Nuclear Association, the use of nuclear power is growing significantly, with 123 reactors currently in operation, 41 under construction and 93 planned.⁵⁹ The Fukushima disaster has exposed the corruption and inability of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO),⁶⁰ and it is thus quite reasonable to doubt the safety of nuclear reactors in other Asian countries.

Although there is no nuclear reactor within Hong Kong's territory, six are operating at the Daya Bay Nuclear Station some fifty kilometers away from Hong Kong.⁶¹ In the 1980s, around one million Hong Kong residents signed a declaration against the construction of the nuclear station. But the

⁵³ McDonagh, op. cit. (note 4), 28; Sovacool (cf. note 10), 279.

⁵⁴ Sovacool, op. cit. (note 10), 278.

⁵⁵ *Piao* [Gone with the Wind], episode 13, section 1, 2:47-3:04, aired 10 May 2015, HKTV online TV program (in Cantonese).

⁵⁶ McDonagh, op. cit. (note 4), 27.

⁵⁷ *Piao* [Gone with the Wind], episode 14, section 1, 1:54-2:15, aired 17 May 2015, HKTV online TV program (in Cantonese).

⁵⁸ *Piao* [Gone with the Wind], episode 13, section 2, 4:27-5:04, aired 10 May 2015, HKTV online TV program (in Cantonese).

⁵⁹ "Asia's Nuclear Energy Growth," in *World Nuclear Association*, at www.world-nuclear.org/info/Country-Profiles/Others/Asia-s-Nuclear-Energy-Growth/.

⁶⁰ See Cohen, op. cit. (note 11), 69-71; Sovacool, op. cit. (note 10), 287-88.

⁶¹ Ip Chu Ching, "Daya Wan yingbian jihua wubuy ushi" [The Daya Bay Contingency Plan is of no Help], in *Hong Kong In-media*, published 10 January 2014, at www.inmediahk.net/node/1020091.

failure of this protest has strengthened the sense of powerlessness among the people of Hong Kong. Recently, the web novel *Lost on a Red Mini Bus to Taipo* (later adapted for the screen by Fruit Chan as *The Midnight After*), that satirically imagines a post-apocalyptic Hong Kong after the fictional fallout of the Daya Bay Nuclear Station, has brought this issue up again.⁶² This fiction reminds us that the shadow of large-scale nuclear disaster has never stopped haunting Hong Kong. In fact, our situation could be much worse than that of the Japanese. If nuclear fallout really happened in Daya Bay, there is literally no place to which seven million Hong Kong inhabitants could evacuate. Hong Kong's people can always fall victim to creativity-turned-destructiveness caused by undisciplined human creativity, although certainly not of their own choice. This reality compels us to join hands with the Japanese and other fellow Asians to fight against nuclear power in solidarity with them.

Kaufman's Christology implies that Christians have the duty to say no to nuclear power. For the self-giving story/image of Jesus urges us to strive for the well-being of all and to humanize the world. In addition, the population of Hong Kong also faces the threat and possibility of nuclear disaster. Thus, Hong Kong Christians must lay bare the perilous myth that humans are creative enough to domesticate the unpredictability involved in nuclear technology. For our own sake as well as that of the wider community in Asia and the world, we must stand up against nuclear power because it is, employing Kaufman's terms, a concrete manifestation of human transgression of creativity. As Christians, we are in charge of providing "a vision of the overall character and shape that human life must assume if it is to find salvation."⁶³ By reading Kaufman's Christology in light of a post-Fukushima perspective, I suggest that this vision is one in which we humans will exercise our creativity humbly for the sake of the whole universe and will restrain our power in order to achieve a sustainable lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

Nuclear power is a creative human innovation in the sense that it can generate a large amount of energy with less fuel. However, nuclear proponents have overlooked the fragility of nuclear technology and have overestimated human creativity. The Fukushima disaster is a tragic demonstration of how deadly human creativity can be when it gets out of control. In the face of this creativity-turned-destructiveness, we need to repent of our energy

⁶² Mr. Pizza, *Naye lingchen, wo zuoshang le Wangjiao kaiwang Dabu de hongvan* [Lost on a red mini bus to Taipo] (Hong Kong: Sun Effort Ltd., 2012–2013).

⁶³ Kaufman, *op. cit.* (note 50), 61.

overconsumption and our arrogance about human creativity, and to live in accordance with the creativity revealed in the self-giving life of Jesus. In light of Kaufman's Christology, the image/story of Jesus is the norm of our human creativity. The current development of nuclear power tells us that humans continue to go beyond the limits of their own creativity and this trend is especially obvious in Asia. The destructiveness caused by erroneous human creativity that occurred in Fukushima can happen in other places and Hong Kong has no chance of remaining immune to this threat. In these circumstances, I argue that we Hong Kong Christians must follow Jesus' self-sacrificial life and dispel the myth that humans are capable of domesticating the unpredictability of nuclear technology. Thus, we must stand in solidarity with all those who resist nuclear power.

DISCERNING OTHER ASIAN REALITIES

INDIA: EK-CENTRIC ENGAGEMENT— RESHAPING CHRISTIAN ENGAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SPACE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE MARGINS

Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar

INTRODUCTION¹

One of the biggest challenges faced by twenty-first-century India is the aggressive religious nationalism pursued by Hindu fundamentalist groups who subscribe to the ideology of “Hindutva” (literally Hinduness).² Such

¹ This article is based on reflections presented in Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, “Hunting Using Hoax: Dalits, Caste and the Conversion Debate in India,” in Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, I P Asheervadham (eds), *Mission At and From the Margins: Patterns, Protagonists and Perspectives* (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), 248–60.

² The conceptualization of Hindutva can be traced to a book published in 1923 entitled “Hindutva” by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, an ideologue of these politics: Vinyak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva* (Nagpur: V.V. Kelkar, 1923; later several editions were republished). The Hindutva ideology effectively seeks to reduce India to a Hindu nation comprised exclusively of Hindus—undermining the pluralistic ethos of the country. One of the chief arguments of Hindutva was the accordance of primary status to “Hindus”—those who considered India as both *pithrubhumi* (fatherland) and *punyabhumi* (holy land)—as against adherents of other faiths. Hindutva rests on three pillars of “geographical unity, racial features and common culture.” It is however with regard to the third pillar that much of the debate on the nationalist ideology of Hindutva has been framed, which is also important to understand Hindutva’s curtailing of conversions in the interests of sustaining the caste system at the heart of this pillar of “common culture.” Hindutva in its definition of Indian culture equates Indian culture with a parochial and selective version of this culture. It introduces a concept of nationalism defined in terms of

nationalism poses a deep threat to Indian secularism by seeking systematically to disenfranchise the minority religious communities as well as the most marginalized communities through the strategic curtailing of religious freedom and the infringement of human rights. As the cultural critic Homi Bhabha has perceptively pointed out, the enemies of secularism are today waging a war “not simply in opposition to secularism” but “within secularism and in fact in and through secularism.”³

This attack against secularism from within is blatant with regard to the issue of religious conversions, because here the Hindutva forces use the argument about the equality of all religions to protest against conversions by marginalized communities like the Dalits (those considered “out-castes” by the caste system and formerly called “untouchables”) and Adivasis (indigenous peoples) to Christianity and Islam, effectively threatening the fundamental right of these communities to follow a religion of their choice.

In such a context, this paper explores the shape and scope of Christian engagement in the public space in terms of “ek-centric” or “other-centered” engagement which is in solidarity with these marginalized communities. The paper will argue that it is in reshaping Christian engagement in the public space “from the ground up,” through an epistemological shift which is other-centred in its praxis and perspective, that Christian engagement in the public space can be reinvented as an engagement of and for life and can recover the promise of promoting peace, fostering freedom and upholding human dignity and integrity in India today. Christian public engagement in India is primarily conceived as “with-ness,” the radical accompaniment of the “other” the “margins,” i.e., those who have been sidelined and undermined by exclusion, marginalization and oppression.

culture which conflates Indian culture with “Hindu,” a predominantly brahminical and sanskritized version of Indian culture. This becomes clear if we consider Savarkar’s definition of culture: “[W]e Hindus are bound together not only by the ties of love we bear to a common fatherland and by the common blood that courses through our veins and keeps our hearts throbbing and our affections warm, but also by the ties of common homage we pay to our great civilization—our Hindu culture, which could not be better rendered than by the word *Sanskriti*, suggestive as it is that the Sanskrit language, has been the chosen means of expression and preservation of that culture, of all that was best and worth-preserving in the history of our race. We are one because we are a nation, a race and own a common Sanskriti (civilization).” Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (Bombay: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1969), 91–92. At the heart of this *sanskriti* is the religious duty to preserve the caste system. This makes Hindutva resist any attempts (including conversion) to break down the caste structure, even by resorting to violent means.

³ Interview with Homi Bhabha, *The Book Review* (Dec 1995), 19:12, cited in Brenda Crossman and Ratna Kapur (eds), *Secularism’s Last Sigh: Hindutva and the (Mis) Rule of Law* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.

(RE)-TURN TO THE “OTHER”—THE METHODOLOGY OF EK-CENTRIC PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Despite a proliferation of critical discourses in the public space, which have sought to address questions of power and inequality and take up the issues of the “Other”/the subalterns, in several instances such discourses have been implicated in the politics of power as they have often denied the agency of the “Other” and have remained elitist in their orientation. Such tacit inclinations towards perspectives emerging from the elites only function to reinforce the asymmetrical status quo rather than to change it. This elitist orientation is true of Indian and Western discourses, both theological and secular. A few examples can be cited.

Analyzing the discourses on economic poverty in the Indian context, K.N. Panikkar critically exposes how even “progressive thinking” in colonial India, which employed rhetoric and critiqued inequality, was clearly entrapped in a bourgeois perspective to such an extent that hierarchy and hegemony were reinforced and reproduced rather than being reconfigured and redressed. Critiquing the thinking of people like Keshub Chander Sen, Bakim Chandra Chatterjee and Vivekananda, Panikkar says:

That the intellectuals in colonial India were concerned with the problem of poverty is in itself not very significant; given the prevalent conditions, they would not have remained insensitive to it. What is important, however, is how they viewed this problem: whether their approach was from the standpoint of the poor or that of the privileged. Generally, it was the latter; therefore, while poverty was decried, the system and structure which decried it was not denounced.⁴

In a similar vein, Edward W. Said, for instance, critically brings out how in Western circles, even a philosopher like Foucault, who is known for his discursive analysis of power, did not really subvert the status quo by recognizing adequately the agency of the subalterns (marginalized) at the level of discourses. According to Said, Foucault’s “interest in domination was critical but not finally as contestatory or as oppositional as on the surface it seems to be.”⁵ This was primarily because of his reluctance to recognize the counter-discourses of the margins. Said goes on to flesh out his arguments as follows:

[...] to the extent that modern history in the West exemplifies for Foucault the confinement and elision of the marginal, oppositional, and eccentric groups, there

⁴K.N. Panikkar, *Colonialism, Culture, and Resistance* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 67–68.

⁵ Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2001), 242.

is, I believe, a salutary virtue in testimonials by members of those groups asserting their right of self-representation within the total economy of discourse [...]. What he (Foucault) seemed not as quite willing to grant is, in fact, the relative success of (these) counter-discursive attempts first to show the misrepresentations of discursive power, to show, in Fanon's words, the violence done to psychically and politically repressed inferiors in the name of an advanced culture, and then afterwards to begin the difficult, if not always tragically flawed project of formulating the discourse of liberation.⁶

This problem of not recognizing the agency of the margins/subalterns is what prompts a subversive methodology for Christian public engagement that seeks a “(Re)-Turn to the Other”—a way of analyzing things from the perspective of the subalterns; and which, through according agency to the subalterns, contests any tacit inclination to accord normativity only to perspectives of the dominant. We need to pay attention to a crucial question raised by the Tongan theologian Jione Havea who says, “The crucial question is not just *Can the subaltern speak?*, which expects subaltern subjects to speak our dominant language, but *Can we understand the subaltern-talk?*, in which we give ourselves to the language of the subaltern.”⁷ This paper is an attempt to understand the “language” of the subaltern through a methodological *metanoia* (repentance) that recognizes the agency of the subaltern.

This paper seeks to explore what it might imply if we read the contemporary history of conversions against the grain—from the perspective of the agency of the marginalized. It is about privileging the voices of the subalterns and seeking to understand what an epistemological irruption this would evoke, which would further justify our argument for Christian public engagement in India as essentially “ek-centric engagement” as a credible and appropriate form of Christian witness in the contemporary Indian context.

There are further theological and ethical grounds on which the arguments for Christian public engagement as an other-centered engagement, which takes into serious consideration the agency of the margins, can be premised. I would like to highlight two such grounds.

(a) However passionate I may be about this idea of an ek-centric engagement, I need to confess that talking of the “other” has had its limitations in terms of praxis within both modernity and postmodernity because of the way in

⁶ Ibid., 243-244.

⁷ Jione Havea, “‘Unu’unu ki he loloto, shuffle over into the deep, into island-spaced reading,” in R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Still at the Margins: Biblical Scholarship Fifteen Years after the Voices from the Margin* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), (88–97), 91.

which the other has been defined and understood. Kevin Vanhoozer brings out clearly how both modernity and postmodernity have failed in terms of praxis vis-à-vis the “other” by bringing in the dilemma of the ambiguous nature of the “other” who evades neat reification.

In modernity, the other (the weak, the foreign, the marginalized) was repressed, forced inside totalizing systems. In postmodernity, the other becomes the object of ethical concern. Or does it? Postmodern thinkers typically view the other as so different from anything our categories can name, so resistant to categorization, as to be unable to say anything positive about it. The other virtually dissolves. Lacking substance, the other once again becomes easy to ignore. For how can one care for or love that whose nature is unknown to us? Is it possible to love without knowing it? Christianity too, of course, seeks to protect the “other” but it does so by naming the other: “neighbor.”⁸

Deriving synergy from Vanhoozer’s idea of naming the other as our neighbor, but diverging from his interpretation of the category of neighbor, my contention is that this naming of the other as our neighbor brings an important theological twist to our praxis. The most popular biblical narrative on the neighbor is that of the Good Samaritan. In this parable, the neighbor is not an objectifiable presence. Rather, Jesus’ question at the end of the parable—“who proved neighbor to the wounded man?”—which clearly indicates the unexpected and unacceptable Samaritan as the neighbor, helps reconceive the idea of the neighbor not as the object of our attention but as the subject and the agent of creative, compassionate and counter-cultural action. The Christian category of the neighbor therefore cannot be estranged from recognizing the agency and subject-hood of the marginal other. It is in this recognition of the agency of the other and in the openness to receiving the gift the “other” brings that one can discover the promise and possibility of a credible public engagement.

(b) An ek-centric public engagement, premised in a preferential methodology of “(re)-turn to the other,” has ethical implications. Preferring the perspectives of the marginalized can help to reconfigure justice not in terms of the Rawlsian notion of fairness but as preference in an asymmetrical world. Recognizing that “to define justice as preference implies a stark contradiction in terms” and that justice as preference defies commonsense logic and “thus seems least fair,” Joerg Rieger makes a cogent argument for justice as preference in the following manner:

⁸ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: A Report on Knowledge (of God),” in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), (3–25), 24.

... [t]his notion of justice, understood as “being in solidarity with those who experience injustice,” and as “taking the sides of those who have been marginalized and excluded from relationship,” is required to produce true opposition to the injustices of the status quo. This notion of justice is more radical than mere rejections of the status quo’s notions of justice as fairness because it leads to unexpected reversals, implying not only attention to needs but closer attention to those pressured by injustice, and reminds us of alternative sorts of agency and energy that are often overlooked.⁹

It is this aspect of being reminded about “alternative sorts of agency and energy” that is significant about understanding justice as preference. Very often these alternative sorts of agency are overlooked. Therefore, a methodology of “with-ness,” which pays preferential attention to the subalterns, has the potential to address this lacuna because it helps us to understand what can be called the “productivity” of the subalterns. As Rieger puts it, “Justice in touch with the lives of the marginalized leads to a new awareness and valuation of the productivity of the margins—and thus it might lead also to a new awareness of God’s own mysterious productivity in places where we least expect it, even on a cross.”¹⁰ With this perspective, the issue of “conversions” can be analyzed in a manner which affirms the agency of the subalterns, particularly Dalit and tribal Christians, in the current context of aggressive and parochial nationalism propagated by the Hindutva.

REVISITING SUBALTERN CONVERSIONS

It is no secret that the rhetoric of “religious conversion” has not only been pivotal in fomenting violence against the Christian Dalit communities in India and the violation of their basic human rights, but is also widely used to justify atrocities against Christians in general and Christians from subaltern groups like Dalits and *Adivasis* in particular.¹¹ A tirade has been launched against

⁹ Joerg Rieger, “That’s Not Fair’: Upside-Down Justice in the Midst of the Empire,” in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau (eds), *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to “Radical Orthodoxy”* (New York/London: T & T Clark, 2006), (91-106), 100.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹¹ Conversion was cited as a just enough reason for the violence in the Kandhamal district of Orissa state in August 2008, as well as the murder of the Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons in the same state about a decade ago. It is not surprising then that the International General Secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the militant wing of the Sangh Parivar, Pravin Togadia openly sought the death sentence “to those who attempt to convert Hindus to other religions” in a public meeting on 9 November 2011, at www.thehindu.com/news/national/article2610541.ece.

Christianity on the grounds of “forcible conversions” and paradoxically this “fight” against conversions has resulted in the forced reconversion of many subaltern Christians to “Hinduism.” The rhetoric of forcible-conversions obfuscates reality and thus needs to be viewed with suspicion.

Delving into the issue of conversions, it is important to locate the Hindutva’s constant invocation of the rhetoric of debate on conversions at this juncture. We need to recognize that the question of conversions is the necessary foundation to sustain an anti-Christian campaign in India, because Hindu-Christian relations do not have other issues, like the memories of communal violence or Partition or “go-korbanī” (cow slaughter), which have affected Hindu-Muslim relationships. It needs to be mentioned that the issue of conversions actually forged an unlikely marriage between Gandhi and the Hindu nationalists who, in spite of having played a role in the murder of Gandhi for his supposedly anti-national soft-heartedness towards Muslims, have surprisingly “heralded him as the voice of reason when he opposed Christian proselytization.”¹²

What is crucial in our understanding of the conversion issue in India today is the way in which Dalits and *Adivasis* are imagined and constructed so as to serve the anti-conversion agenda of the Hindutva. It is important to analyze this construction because in many ways it has been uncritically accepted by Christian proponents of interfaith dialogue. In its anti-conversion rhetoric, Hindutva has made use of the report of the Niyogi Commission, a commission, set up by the government of the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh in 1954, to assess the work of foreign missionaries.¹³ “[G]enerated in a climate of chauvinism and ultra-nationalism,” the Niyogi Commission introduced a new argument in the discussion on conversions and contributed to a distortion and demonizing of conversions as “a form of exploitation threatening the integrity of the Indian state.”¹⁴ The report introduced the argument that weakness, ignorance and poverty were reasons which made the poor lose control over their free will. It hence rendered the deprived sections of the community “vulnerable to the inducements of converting to another religion.”¹⁵ It achieved this by characterizing India’s economically weaker sections as “essentially disabled, incapable of distinguishing motives and inexperienced in the exercise of their

¹² Gauri Viswanathan, “Literacy and Conversion in the Discourse of Hindu Nationalism,” in *Race and Class*, 42:1 (2000), 1.

¹³ Writing about the Niyogi commission report Andrew Wingate says, “For a commission chaired by a retired high court judge, the language is emotive and the conclusions sweepingly negative about evangelism and conversion.” Andrew Wingate, *The Church and Conversion: A Study of Recent Conversions to and from Christianity in the Tamil Area of South India* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), 34.

¹⁴ Viswanathan, *op. cit.* (note 12), 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

own judgement.”¹⁶ The implications of this report for the current context are succinctly brought out by Gauri Viswanathan:

The Niyogi Commission landmark report set the lines of an argument that have continued to the present day, blurring the boundaries between force and consent and giving very little credence both to the possibility that converts change over to another religion because they choose to. Interestingly in charging that Christian missionaries took advantage of the weakened will of the poor and disenfranchised, the report confirmed an elitist view of freewill and autonomy as the privileges of the economically advantaged classes.¹⁷

It is this argument floated by the Niyogi Commission report that has become a tool in the hands of the Hindutva forces, which refer to conversions as a diversionary tactic to draw attention to a non-issue. The rhetoric of conversions functions as a double-edged political sword that can be both used to attack Christian mission agencies working among the downtrodden sections of the community as well as to restrain subaltern groups from achieving upward social mobility through adopting a venue that is not sponsored by the Hindutva.

It needs to be mentioned that the conversion rhetoric has also been used by the Hindutva forces to attack the educational work of Christian missionaries at a wider all-India level. The fact that Hindutva targets educational institutions by accusing them of forced conversions is actually an attempt to suppress the threat that literacy of the poor could pose to people with a vested interest in poverty.¹⁸ Walter Fernandes points out how in Uttar Pradesh for example, dominant castes make it a point to send their own children to school while ensuring that no schools are built in the villages, “lest their laborers gain access to them and then either leave the village or demand better wages and working conditions.”¹⁹ Therefore, on the whole, the Hindutva’s rhetoric of “forcible conversions” needs to be seen as a strategy to ensure the perpetuation of the caste structure, which curtails the upward mobility of subaltern communities like the Dalits and also ensures that they are obligated to the caste hierarchy. It is true then that Hindutva politics aims to “strait-jacket and to chain the potential assertion of the subalterns.”²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 4–5.

¹⁸ Walter Fernandes, “Attacks on Minorities and a National Debate on Conversions,” in *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 16–23, 1999, (81–84), 82.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ P.R. Ram, “Left Ideology, Ends and Means and Hindutva,” in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 June 1997, 1426–28, here 1428.

From the perspective of “with-ness,” which recognizes the agency of the subaltern, it would be naive to buy into this rhetoric of inducement perpetuated by the Hindutva forces, which renders the subalterns as placid and inarticulate in the whole process of conversions. We need to recognize that “the whole emphasis placed on such popular discourse on conversions falls into the Orientalist’s pitfall, which accentuates the agency of the Western agents, whether colonial or missionary, and devalues the instrumentality of the native subjects themselves in such historical events.”²¹ In such a context, arguments such as those made by the Hindutva merely seek self-perpetuation of their self-identity through the tacit invocation of binaries, which constructs the other as a placid, weak and inarticulate object and reduces the other to a controllable, unthinking self, perpetuating new patterns of sustaining the asymmetries in relations between them. These arguments obfuscate the real framework of meaning in which conversions should be understood. An alternative framework for understanding subaltern conversions is brought out perceptively by Sathianathan Clarke:

Religious conversion [thus] can be interpreted to be one strategy whereby Dalits seek to pursue and secure release from the cosmically engendered and, more importantly, comprehensively and concretely actualized world vision of caste communities. Religious conversion to another symbolic world vision, in this case Christianity, was an effort at community-initiated bailing out from the constructs of the brahmanic symbolic world vision and contracting of newer pictures of the world. In a sense, this cumulative and comprehensive discriminatory treatment at the hands of the brahmanic caste communities that surrounded them for many centuries, must have been responsible for the stirring in Dalit communities to seek another symbolic world vision.²²

In this context, one needs to understand conversion as the articulation of self-assertion by the Dalits. It functions as a mode of upward mobility for the Dalits in their search for equality and dignity.

Conversion as a strategy of self-assertion and symbolic emancipation of the subalterns is also counter-intuitive to the Hindutva’s agenda of cultural nationalism, which thrives on the perpetuation of binary notions of identity as the “Hindu” and the “non-Hindu.” Conversion contests nationalism’s

²¹ Sathianathan Clarke, “Conversion to Christianity in Tamil Nadu: Conscious and Constitutive Community Mobilization Towards a different Symbolic World Vision,” in Sathianathan Clarke and Roweena Robinson (eds), *Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivations, and Meanings* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 323–50, 336.

²² *Ibid.*

recourse to watertight conceptualizations of identity by demonstrating how porous these reifications of identity are. Conversions also demonstrate that identity can be formulated and reformulated at will, which makes it particularly threatening to cultural nationalism, which resorts to positivist ways of conceptualizing difference through such fundamental markers as race, religion, color, ethnicity and nationality. As Viswanathan states:

When identity is destabilized by boundaries that are so porous, that movement from one world view to another takes place with the regularity of actual border-crossings, a challenge is posed to the fixed categories that act as an empirical grid for interpreting human behavior and action.²³

In this context, conversion contests the reduction of identity to serving interests in a way that renders it more dynamic than either the concept of hybridity or that of syncretism. Conversion conveys a dynamism of movement of identity-crossings which is different from hybridity. Unlike hybridity, conversion conveys the remaking of the very categories that constitute identity and does not view border crossings as exchange or fusion. It is more concrete than syncretism, which is more a blurring of differences than a negotiation of differences.²⁴ As such, it contests the very agenda of Hindu nationalism that seeks to reify the subalterns as passive beings incapable of autonomous agency.

THE SHAPE OF CHRISTIAN “WITH-NESS” IN INDIA

Taking into consideration the above case, it is important that Christian public engagement in the contemporary Indian context be reimagined in terms of “ek-centric engagement” and take the form of “with-ness” (solidarity) in the context of the conversion controversy. Such “with-ness” would carry with it the moral imperative for us to recognize conversions as a means of furthering human flourishing. The shape of such with-ness should take the form of accompanying the subalterns in their quest for freedom from systems of human decline. Usually, subaltern conversions are considered to be merely “social” and as lacking a religious or spiritual dimension. The derogatory epithet “rice-Christianity” is used synonymously with Dalit conversions to indicate that these were merely conversions of convenience for the sake of food and work though in reality, under the present constitutions, Dalits who convert from Hinduism to Islam and

²³ Viswanathan, *op. cit.* (note 12), 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Christianity stand to lose the special affirmative benefits they are entitled to as Hindus. Moreover, dividing conversions in terms of binary notions of social and spiritual hardly does justice to either notion. One can affirm that it is precisely the political nature of subaltern conversions which makes them religious, given the “polity” of Jesus who came so that life could be lived in abundance and affirmed that the key to salvation is in responding to the human predicament (Mt 25:31–46). In line with this thinking, the contours of Christian public engagement in the Indian context can be imagined in relation to three different areas.

First, Christian public engagement as “ek-centric engagement” would entail resisting a cultural nationalism based on majoritarianism and affirm and articulate alternative versions of nationalism. Hindutva politics has distorted the face of Indian nationalism in the third millennium by being overtly or covertly involved in a barbaric and aggressive effort to facilitate a shift from the “secular-territorial” version of nationalism of the 1950s, which refused to make the nation co-terminus with a particular religion.²⁵ This secular-territorial version of nationalism recognized “the dangers inherent in the religious and fascist varieties of aggressive nationalism” and did not approve of “nationalism not tempered with morality.”²⁶ Such nationalism “was a humane nationalism, comprehending within it political freedom, economic justice, and social solidarity” and today, “given the resurgence of a communal politics that conflates religion and culture,” such a version of nationalism is threatened.²⁷

Christian public engagement in India should attempt to recover a humane nationalism in which the defining category is not adherence to a particular religious worldview but concern for our neighbors. There is a need to rethink the notion of loyalty to the nation. Catholic theologian Ambrose Pinto in his critique of the misguided notion of loyalty to the nation that is expected by the Hindutvavadis and the rightists says that if the burning of the Dalits and *Adivasis* accompanied by caste-based-discrimination against the “Backward Castes” as well as hatred towards minorities is thought of as a sign of loyalty to national culture and heritage, then one needs to redefine loyalty in terms of a concern for the poor, compassion for the suffering and integrity and rectitude. The Christian public engagement needs to be reimagined as resistance to anything that curtails the freedom and dignity of the marginalized and minorities and re-visioning nationalism in terms of equality and justice for all.

²⁵ Panikkar, op. cit. (note 4), 87.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Secondly, Christian public engagement as ek-centric engagement also needs to prompt a redefinition of the notion of interfaith dialogue. With regard to the issue of interfaith dialogue, it needs to be stressed that a critical approach to interfaith relations is needed in a context where there is a growing recognition of the nexus between dominance, power and religion. In such a context, it is the task of Christian theologizing and social thinking to bring a sociopolitical lens to the various attempts at interfaith dialogue. Shantha Premawardhana uses a corrective lens appropriate for the Indian context when he points out that in a context where caste is legitimated by the dominant religion it is right “to question whether we should be in dialogue with them.”²⁸ Out of such political consciousness emerges the affirmation that “[t]oday our partners in dialogue are not necessarily those religious leaders who are a part of the exploitative structures, but those who suffer from exploitation.”²⁹ Such a view subverts the traditional and popular views of interfaith dialogue. Recognizing that those affected by exploitative structures are overwhelmingly the poor, Premawardhana identifies these people as the “partners in dialogue, to build alliances and to challenge the power structures of government, corporations and indeed religions that exploit and destroy our communities.”³⁰ It is this counterintuitive mode of dialogue that we need to embark upon in a context of rising religious fundamentalism so that interreligious dialogue becomes a viable means of furthering the flourishing of relationships.

Thirdly, the other area where “ek-centric engagement” as solidarity can be practiced in the context of conversions relates to two predicaments that the Dalit communities face in India. In some circumstances, Dalit Christians retain a dual identity. Though they are religiously Christian, they still retain their Hindu identity legally as a form of resistance to a public policy that denies positive discrimination to Dalits who convert to Christianity or Islam. Sometimes, we also see Dalits who have converted to Islam or Christians taking part in a new phenomenon of reconversions (euphemistically called *Gharwapsi* (literally, homecoming) that are forcibly organized by fundamentalist groups in slums. Very often, the dominant Christians in Indian churches view such acts of holding dual identities and resorting to symbolic reconversions as instances of “un-faith.” It has not been unusual for the church to criticize their actions as lacking a liberative dimension. In both these circumstances of seeming apostasy, subalterns are accused of exercising a fickle faith that does not actively and openly resist oppression and domination.

²⁸ Shantha Premawardhana, “The Strange Exorcist,” in *Masihi Sevak: Journal of Christian Ministry*, Vol.XXXIV, No. 2 (August 2009), 61–70, here 63.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

In these contexts, Christian ek-centric engagement should take the form of pastoral sensitivity, which does not view these actions as the rescinding of faith but, rather, recognizes that at certain times these actions can also be manifestations of alternative subaltern agency. It however needs to be said that these forms of alternative agency should neither be romanticized nor idealized. In making this argument—that acts, which seem to be compromising, may actually be manifestations of the alternative agency of the “ordinary people,” the so-called dominated, who may actually be enacting their own agenda of liberation through these outward acts of “compromising their faith”—I am following the line of thought proposed by James C. Scott. In his work *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*,³¹ Scott speaks of “arts of resistance” which, in the words of Gerald West, involve:

[...] first, the establishment of a safe sequestered site offstage, behind the backs of the dominant forces in society, where they are able to articulate and act out a hidden transcript of defiance and affirm their dignity; and second, an insertion of resisting forms of discourse into the public realm which assert their presence.³²

With regard to the second strategy, the argument that is made is “that subordinate groups have typically learned to clothe their resistance and defiance in ritualisms of subordination that serve both to disguise their purposes and to provide them with a ready route of retreat that may soften the consequences of a possible failure.”³³ In such a context, we need to accept an “alternative analysis that the poor and marginalized are already engaged in forms of resistance.”³⁴ In such a case, even what looks like the culture of silence and of accommodation may actually be disguised forms of defiance, “an elaborate act, a show” that oppressed people “practice and perform in order to survive, while they wait for an opportunity to transform their reality.”³⁵ Between the two moments “of hidden transcript offstage” and “of public irruption at center-stage,” there is “a zone of constant

³¹ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1990).

³² Gerald West, “Disguising Defiance in Ritualisms of Subordination: Literary and Community-based Resources for Recovering Resistance Discourse within the Dominant Discourses of the Bible,” in Gary A. Philips and Nicole Wilkinson Duran (eds), *Reading Communities Reading Scripture* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2002), 194–217, here 197.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

contestation.”³⁶ Inhabiting this zone are “disguised forms of resistance” that “are a constant reminder that all is not as controlled as it appears.”³⁷

In such a context, we need a conversion “from below” when we look at the reservations issue and at the issue of reconversions instead of easily judging them as being apolitical, benign and engaging in passive acts of accommodation to the status quo. We need to tread cautiously, never forgetting that “what is hidden is hidden for good reason, so any attempt to penetrate the disguise [...] is potentially dangerous.”³⁸ Despite whatever activist unrest such seeming accommodation to domination may evoke within us, we need to recognize that, “Rituals of subordination have their place. And when dignity and autonomy demand an irruption or an articulation, this must be done in ways determined by the dominated.”³⁹ Christian witness as “with-ness” in this context would imply that we follow the agenda set by the dominated themselves and not our own agendas, which may more often than not seek to bolster our own egoistic images of ourselves as “self-styled activists.”

“(IN)”CONCLUSION

Talking of the productivity of the margins, Rieger says “Below the surface, at the level of what has been repressed, lie tremendous energies that push toward transformation and justice, not primarily in its punitive or redistributive forms but as creating the space for alternative productivity.”⁴⁰ In line with this observation, in conclusion it can be stated that subaltern conversions can be understood not only as “speaking truth to power”—the power of religious fanaticism, but also as the carving out of visions of equality and the creation of alternative or surrogate spaces where justice and freedom thrive.

³⁶ Ibid., 199.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Rieger, *op. cit.* (note 9), 102.

INDONESIA: THE CHALLENGE OF PLURALITY. BUILDING COMMUNION FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE AND JUSTICE

Fernando Sihotang

INTRODUCTION

Life in Indonesia is marked by significant ethnic, religious and cultural plurality. This has been an asset as well as a challenge for democracy in Indonesia. Many Indonesian scholars regard the promulgation of *Pancasila* (Five Basic Principles) in the preamble of the Indonesian constitution as the best way of defining Indonesian identity as being plural, considering itself neither as a religious nor a secular nation. *Pancasila* in essence prevents any particular group from monopolizing or hegemonizing the public space for their own ends. At times however, this immense diversity has hindered the effective response to such challenges as poverty, corruption and hunger due to a lack of solidarity across the different communities.

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN INDONESIA

Hinduism and Buddhism came to Indonesia in the late fourth century A.D. and founded fast-growing empires throughout the archipelago. Islam was brought to Indonesia in the thirteenth century by Indian Gujarat traders rather than by Arabs and was cordially welcomed by Hindu and Buddhist institutions. Christianity arrived in the sixteenth century with the Portuguese and was reinforced under Dutch colonial rule. All these religions travelled on the ships of traders and missionaries from China, Yemen, India, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands and Germany.

For many centuries, the various religious groups, particularly Christians and Muslims, lived in peaceful coexistence. There was some competition between Christians, whose expansion was much influenced by the Dutch, and Muslims, and who became dominant in many islands or territories. There were many stories about locals, not necessarily Muslims but other indigenous communities too, fighting against Christians because of Christianity's image as an oppressor's religion.

Today, Christianity represents about ten percent (or 25 million members) of the Indonesian population. Muslims constitute the majority group, accounting for approximately eighty-five percent of the 250 million inhabitants. The remaining almost five percent is made up of Buddhists, Hindus, Confucians and adherents of traditional beliefs.

PANCASILA—A UNIQUE CHARACTERISTIC OF INDONESIAN DEMOCRACY

Prior to independence, an intensive debate took place in Indonesia on how to define the country's religion-state relations. Should the voice of the majority religion (Islam) be enshrined in the national constitution?

Engaging in the debate over the ideological foundation that would best suit the new nation were two factions. One was the nationalist faction, which envisaged a secular framework, while the other favored Islamic law. As suggested by Soekarno, Indonesia's first president, *Pancasila* was finally proclaimed as the unifying national identity that defined the newly independent country as being neither a secular nor a religious state. According to the *Pancasila*, the first of the five principles upon which the Indonesian state is based is the general idea of "belief in the Divine"—a principle to which diverse religions can refer.

This decision was based on the insight that the state must uphold all sides without privileging or denying one or the other. The Protestant theologian Eka Darmaputera explained this decision as follows:

First of all, it is very clear that *Pancasila* was proposed and accepted as a compromise between those who were in favor of a religious (Islamic) state and those who preferred a secular state [...]. It tried to satisfy both parties, while at the same time, it could not accept any of those ideas in their entirety. That is why the first principle was formulated in the neutral form.¹

¹ Eka Darmaputera, *Pancasila and the Search for Identity and Modernity in Indonesian Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 153.

This religion–state relationship model differs from those found in either secular Western states or those governed by Islamic law. Mohammad Hatta, who became Soekarno’s first deputy, gave a clear argument for Indonesia’s religion–state relationship:

We are not going to establish a state which applies the separation of religion and state, yet we are going to establish a modern state on the basis of differentiation between state affairs and religious affairs. If religious affairs are under state control, religion will merely function as a tool (utilized) by the state and thus conceal its purity.²

Differentiation instead of separation and the integration of religion into the state are the more precise relational patterns used to overcome the emerging problems pertaining to religion in this modern state, based on the rule of law.³ The differentiation concept aims at making sure that religion will not interfere with the state on the one hand, yet will not become a tool of the state on the other.

This was a time when Indonesia laid a unique foundation for an inclusive, deliberative democracy. Also unique was the manner in which Indonesia successfully formulated its very inclusive identity in accordance with the very purpose of democracy, which aims at preventing any precept or principle from becoming an absolute truth that is binding for everyone.⁴

This formulation deliberately allowed equal space for all religions to participate in the establishment of Indonesia as a nation free from the practice of colonialism and aiming at justice for all. Highlighting the important insight of the renowned philosopher Jürgen Habermas in his deliberative democracy theory, Gusti Menoh argues that the religious plurality of this country challenged its founders to engage in public reflection on their religious traditions and to acknowledge the diversity of different religious perspectives.⁵

² Quoted according to Gusti A.B. Menoh, *Religiusitas Bangsa Sebagai Hasil Penalaran Publik Agama-Agama di Indonesia: Diteropong dari Perspektif Filsafat Politik Jürgen Habermas* (Yogyakarta: Waskita Jurnal Studi Agama dan Masyarakat Vol. II, No. 1, April 2014), 98.

³ Gusti A.B. Menoh, *Agama dalam Ruang Publik: Hubungan Antara Agama dan Negara dalam Masyarakat Post-Sekuler Menurut Jürgen Habermas* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015), 157.

⁴ Mouhanad Khorchide, “State and Religion in Islam–Islam’s Contribution to the Political Culture of Democracy,” in Simone Sinn, Mouhanad Khorchide and Dina El Omari (eds), *Religious Plurality and the Public Space. Joint Christian-Muslim Theological Reflections*, LWF Studies 2015/1 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 22.

⁵ Menoh, *op. cit.* (note 2), 83.

CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY IN INDONESIA TODAY

In what follows, I will discuss what challenges Indonesian people today in maintaining plurality in a country in which democracy is now more open than when the authoritarian President Soeharto was still in power. The expression “more open” refers to the constitutional guarantee that human rights will be respected, especially the right to freedom of expression and association, granted by the state to all citizens and enshrined in the constitution after the May 1998 riots. But how relevant is the term “more open” for interreligious relations that have been very dynamic for many years?

In February 2009, US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, visited Indonesia. After praising the country’s more or less successful transition to democracy since the 1998 fall of President Soeharto, she told a dinner crowd composed of Indonesian academics and activists that “If you want to know if Islam, democracy, modernity and women’s rights can coexist, go to Indonesia.”⁶ Her statement indicates that there have been lots of changes in Indonesian democracy. Many people looking at Indonesia from the outside see the improvements in the Indonesian political system and the provision of human rights as positive developments after 1998.

The fall of the Soeharto regime after thirty-two years encouraged hope that a new, better life was already here. Following the promise of freedom and of human rights, the constitution was deliberatively amended four times between 1999 and 2002 and human rights-related articles were immediately enacted.

At the same time, religions regained their influence in the public sphere. Religious communities jointly came out into the open, even daring to criticize the government for not promulgating pro-citizen regulations related to the achievement of social justice for all, for its lack of commitment to the eradication of corruption, its half-hearted environmental protection measures, its failure to guarantee freedom of religion or belief or to resolve conflicts in non-violent ways and so forth. The fall of the authoritarian regime seemed to draw several religious groups’ attention to rehabilitating the public role of religions amidst pluralistic societies.

In the midst of the rejoicing over the new freedoms, the regime’s transition towards open democracy also enabled sectarianism to flourish. Islamic groups, both Islamic political parties and in particular Islamic fundamentalist groups, became more actively involved in the political process. The number of legislative seats held by Islamic-based political parties significantly increased. These parties have also built vibrant and growing youth and student movements.

⁶ Eliza Griswold, *The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Fault Line Between Christianity and Islam* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 201.

In post-Soeharto Indonesia, freedom of expression alongside changes in the political system has created a dilemma for democracy, in particular as the question of Islamic law has returned to the political agenda. At a national level, *sharia* was banned in 2002. At the local government level however, the Autonomy Act opened the way to the enactment of *sharia*-oriented regulations. Already in 2007, seventy-eight *sharia*-based local regulations were enacted by fifty-two local governments, with an increase of 300 per cent in 2011, mostly in Aceh and West Sumatra provinces (states).⁷

Those laws have largely created discrimination and neglect of women's rights, freedom of speech and the rights of religious minority groups. Women are the most vulnerable to and negatively affected by the implementation of *sharia* laws.⁸ Furthermore, these laws are becoming a favorite commodity for several local and national politicians interested in securing support from the majority population. Domination over the minority by the majority contradicts the principle of *Pancasila*-based democracy. Cases of burning and sealing off worship houses and of refusal to issue worship permits are some of many that show how public attitudes towards minority religions are being questioned. Unfortunately, the government is more interested in political compromise than in maintaining a position of impartiality between the different faiths.

Despite its claim to "more openness," Indonesian democracy is increasingly challenged and threatened today as violence is being used to push individual agendas. The government has been frequently questioned on its neutrality in keeping this reborn democracy on track according to the "public reasoning" for which this state struggled seventy years ago.

SIGNS OF HOPE

The 2004 tsunami disaster devastated major areas of the Aceh province along the western coastline of Sumatra Island and killed nearly 200,000 people. For decades, this province with a ninety-eight percent Muslim population was fighting for independence from Indonesia. As a result of assistance received from the international community (including several national and global church communions), Aceh was reconstructed after the tsunami. Since then, Aceh separatists and the Indonesian government have been engaged in a non-violent peace reconciliation process known as the Helsinki Peace Accord in 2005.

⁷ Favor A. Bancin and Anick H.T (eds). *Diskursus Hubungan Agama dan Negara: Respons Gereja Terhadap Perda Syariat* (Jakarta: BPK & Marturia PGI, 2014).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3–13.

In 2006, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) organized an interfaith event called “Dialogue in Life” as a response to the tsunami disaster. One of the objectives of this dialogue was to develop and disseminate practical ways of holding interfaith dialogue. In the Aceh experience, the LWF saw that post-tsunami friendship, cooperation and mutual help could open a window of opportunity to help people, both Christians and Muslims, to come to know and trust one another at a deeper level through working together in practical ways.⁹

The many interfaith gatherings happening around us were evidence of how plurality will continue to exist in our many life contexts, irrespective of interreligious conflicts that might be facing us. Though there is some skepticism about the future of pluralism in Indonesia, it can be said that the increase of violence after spiritual doctrine has been misinterpreted: interreligious conflicts that cause the loss of many lives and the loss of minority rights as a result of discriminatory regulations do not automatically draw the majority of Muslims into fundamentalism. Instead, such conflicts push interreligious groups into building peaceful dialogues and addressing issues that may directly affect all people, regardless of their faith. The perpetrators of the burning of a *Musholla*, a Muslim place of worship, in Tolikara, West Papua, in July 2015, were allegedly several followers of a church denomination. Christian and Muslim leaders drew up a petition denouncing the accident and called for the case to be brought before the law.

The majority of Muslims in Indonesia consistently prove their inclusive and tolerant attitude in order to retain public space based on *Pancasila*. The two largest Muslim organizations, *Nahdatul Ulama (NU)* and *Muhammadiyah*,¹⁰ choose to hold on to *Pancasila*. *Pancasila* is not merely rhetoric to Indonesians, but an integral part of their culture and national history. Although freedom of expression was granted as an immediate consequence of the reform movement after 1998, this did not automatically incite the majority Muslims to discard *Pancasila*. As an influential organization with approximately 40 million members across Indonesia, *Nahdatul Ulama* for instance refers to a national vision of what Indonesian society should look like. It was said that Indonesia should not be based on Islamic

⁹ The Lutheran World Federation, *LWF Seminar on Dialogue in Life* (Geneva: LWF, 2006).

¹⁰ There was a survey done by *KOMPAS*, 29–31 July 2015 of 496 seventeen-year-old respondents, selected randomly, on how they view the roles of *NU* and *Muhammadiyah* in bridging the interests of state and citizens. The survey found that 52.5 percent of respondents expressed optimism about these two largest Muslim organizations in relation to keeping the values of nationalism, promoting interreligious tolerance and preserving democracy in Indonesia. Published by *KOMPAS* Newspaper on 4 August 2015.

politics, but instead that religion should be considered as a private matter to guide social interactions and behavior. *Nahdatul Ulama* has also been fostering national unity rather than a state based on Islam.¹¹

BUILDING INTERFAITH COMMUNION

The use, in this paper, of the term of “communion” to address the significance of practicing interfaith communion is indebted to the ideas shared by Michael Kinnamon in his book, *Can A Renewal Movement be Renewed?* He looks at the experiences of communion between churches globally and at efforts in interreligious contexts to advance interreligious cooperation in the USA. Communion, for Kinnamon, is the ultimate stage of building relationships, either within the churches or between different religious contexts, in what he calls “the 5Cs steps,” namely competition—coexistence—cooperation—commitment—communion.

What does using the term “full communion” mean in the context of interfaith relations? Full communion is an understanding, first, of the relationship between geographically separated churches as being one body. But it subsequently describes a relationship in which churches mutually recognize each other’s validity.¹² The word communion, taken from the original Greek word *koinonia*, signifies a profound intimacy with God through Christ and a concomitant intimacy with one another in Christ.

Let me briefly evoke in my own words what Kinnamon notes as relating to the term of communion:

- Communion implies that we no longer live as separate entities and that we accept full recognition of our neighbors
- Communion leads us to act as one in sharing what is sacred
- Communion requires us to manifest this unity and to come together in common mission and service
- Through communion, we no longer perceive our neighbors as “they (them)” but as “we (us)”;
- Communion enables our full participation, meaning that we are subjects engaging in equal participation.

¹¹ Douglas E. Ramage, *Social Organizations: Nahdatul Ulama and Pembangunan Indonesia; the Challenge of Change* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), 207.

¹² Michael Kinnamon, *Can A Renewal Movement be Renewed?: Questions for the Future of Ecumenism* (Kindle DX Version: 2014).

These characteristics of communion do not necessarily fit the five principles (divinity; civilized humanity; unity; deliberative democracy; and social justice) enshrined in *Pancasila*. Both sets of characteristics point toward the same end however. Being in communion will allow us to understand that, despite our differences, we may be enabled to recognize significant meaning embedded in our neighbors' faiths; that we share what is sacred for the sake of those who are poor, suffering, hungry; that our common mission and service because of our unity will bring us self-fulfillment; that we should not allow our neighbors to take the responsibility alone, but take it together as being already united; and that our common mission aims at justice for all.

Working in common mission through interfaith communion, we will come to understand that issues that concern us are not simply Christian or Muslim problems and that the effects of such common mission will affect all religions. As communion offers an understanding of a no-more-separated experience, Christianity will no longer be seen as a religion of Westerners, colonialists or oppressors, while Muslims will no longer be regarded as fundamentalists or terrorists (as was sometimes the case after the various bombings in Indonesia, 9/11 and now so-called ISIS). Interfaith communion will also provide us with the courage to encourage one another see that all we need to do is to understand, recognize and to share.

I would like to add some reflections from experiences with church youth after our interfaith gatherings addressing climate change and HIV/AIDS in two villages. They spent much time discussing how young people in religious communities could be empowered and organized to work for peace instead of being educated for “war.” Much energy is spent blaming young people for being the chief perpetrators of crimes, war and interreligious conflicts rather than in educating them for peace.

As the Muslim scholar from Tunisia, Adnane Mokrani, says about the role of religions, “It is not the role of religion to offer a political system but rather to educate and prepare the human being for being a good citizen: a person free from egoism, ready to serve, full of love and altruism, constructive and not violent, with a critical mind.”¹³

With the knowledge we have gained and our understanding of spirituality written in the scripture, we may reasonably be called to be key actors of peacemaking. But what have we created behind our religiosity? How do we manifest our understanding of peace through our identity as religious people? This is a good moment of faith for religious people in Indonesia to prove that we all long for peace and justice. No one should be forced

¹³ Adnane Mokrani, *The Secular State as Religious Necessity. An Islamic Perspective*, in Simone Sinn et al, op. cit. (note 4). 47.

out of a community because they are different. Instead, we may take our very diversity as an opportunity to join hands for our common well-being.

To conclude, I am convinced that by applying the communion model to the way in which we develop our relationship with others, we will experience the meaning of breaking bread in order to break the wall of differences that challenge our public sphere; we will come together at the same table to discuss things that concern us. Such a gathering always begins with need. And lastly, we can move some steps forward by avoiding mistrust in the midst of our diversity.

JAPAN: MISSION AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Arata Miyamoto

RELIGION IN JAPAN

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN JAPAN TODAY

Summarizing a half-century of religious discourse in Japanese society, the Japanese scholar of religion Susumu Shimazono notes that a new situation emerged after the turn of the century.¹ The fact that many volunteers organized by religious bodies joined disaster relief work after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 was clear evidence of this development, which can be understood as a sign that religious bodies now work prominently in the public sphere. Also observed was an increase in the number of worshippers at Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. For example, the 2013 statistics of visitors to the Ise Shrine (Shinto, *Ise Jingu*), the most traditional Shinto shrine, recorded the largest number of visitors since 1895 when the shrine began keeping records. The increase over the past sixty years is summarized below.

- 1953– 4,820,000 visitors
- 1973– 8,590,000 visitors
- 1993– 8,390,000 visitors
- 2013–14,200,000 visitors.

In considering these statistics, we should also be aware that although many people who visit shrines may consider themselves “non-religious,” it is not

¹ Susumu Shimazono, “Religion and Publicity in Contemporary Japan,” in Susumu Shimazono and Jyunichi Isomae (eds), *Religion and Public Space: Rethinking Religion* (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 2014).

appropriate to call them “tourists.” The fact that they refer to themselves as “non-religious” may mean that they do not belong to any specific religious group or organization. This, however, does not necessarily mean that they do not concern themselves with “things religious” (*shukyo-teki narumono*). As a rule, secularization in the context of Christianity points to the phenomenon of withdrawal from religious institutions or religious discourse. In a word, not to belong to a specific religion means that one is “non-religious.” However, this is not necessarily the case in Japan. Visitors to Shinto shrines may have little consciousness of themselves as adherents of Shintoism. But it may be misleading to consider that they do not have a “religious mind.” I would argue that a Japanese sense of “things religious” (*shukyo-teki narumono*) exists precisely in between the spheres of the “religiously institutional” and the “non-religious.” If this can be called a grey zone, then in Japanese society it is a very broad zone. In discussing religion in Japan, it is not enough only to observe trends about organized religious institutions. We also need to consider those persons who may not belong to a specific religion but who keep a religious mind and a sense of “things religious” in their ordinary lives.

THE TREND OF KYUSAI-SHUKYO (SALVATION RELIGIONS)

Examining trends in the Buddhist religious community is important for understanding current religious movements in Japan. What matters for Buddhism is the formation of its own religious community and the propagation of its own message about human salvation. Shimazono categorizes such Buddhist religious formation as belonging to “salvation religions” (*kyusai-shukyo*). This type of religion forms community, works with propagation and develops its own theology and system of organization. While considering the relationship between religion as “salvation religion” and the grey zone of “things religious,” I will attempt to explore the trends of Buddhism and Buddhist new cult movements over the past half-century.

In Japan, we need to distinguish between traditional Buddhism and newer forms of Buddhism, often referred to as “new religions” (*shin shukyo*). Historically, traditional Buddhism formed religious community around a temple. It mainly took root in a local community through the practice of ceremonial occasions such as funeral ceremonies. Local people were called “*dan-ka*” (meaning those who belong to a temple as members of a family unit) and were organized into a community in a given locality. A Buddhist priest functioned as a local leader. Such traditional Buddhism took root everywhere in Japan, including in the rural areas.

On the other hand, Buddhist “new religions” such as *Reiyu-kai*, *Rissho-kosei-kai* and *Soka-gakkai* have also built their own religious communities

in modern Japan. In contrast to traditional Buddhism, they have successfully propagated in urban areas by emphasizing the attainment of salvation in this world. Buddhist “new religions” work to develop a local community of lay people and propagation and also engage in political and social activity. Many involve themselves through volunteer activities for disaster relief, disabled persons and the peace movement. These activities carry a religious mind into society and extend into fields in which ordinary Japanese congregations are actively engaged. Therefore, following Shimazono’s categorization, Protestant churches (including Lutheran churches) tend also to be categorized as “salvation religions.”

It is noteworthy that Japanese religious behavior has changed over the past half-century. People began to withdraw from traditional religious commitments during the 1970s and on through the 1990s. From the 1980s on, a younger generation joined in a “spiritual boom” (*seisin sekai buumu*) while being uncommitted to any specific traditional religion. Among some new cults, brainwashing and unethical business practices caused social problems and strengthened an emerging anti-religious mood in society. The “Aum Shinrikyo Incident” (*Aum shinrikyo jiken*), a terrorist incident in which the chemical Sarin was released in the Tokyo subway system, helped to bring anti-religious feeling in Japanese society to a climax. Since then, a general anti-religious mood has continued in Japanese society. On the other hand, as Shimazono reminds us, Japanese concerns about “things religious” are complex. People have shifted away from traditional religious commitments and distrust of religious organizations has increased. Yet, since the 1980s, an emerging younger generation while not traditionally religious shows a deep interest in the spiritual world. Moreover, Shimazono contends, while it is true that Japanese society has progressed toward secularization into the 1990s, religious bodies have also continued to withdraw from the public sphere towards privatization.

When privatization is linked with withdrawal from religious commitments, it takes the form of personal consumerism. A person may seek a personal religious or spiritual experience and, after finding it, commit themselves to religious activity. In this growing consumer-oriented privatization of religion, what gets lost are traditional religious bodies including traditional Christian churches. In the case of Buddhism, this is called “withdrawal from religious community” (*kyoudan banare*), which Shimazono summarizes in the following way,

It becomes gradually difficult for contemporary people to make any sense of traditional religious life in which religious adherents passively join fixed patterns of ritual. A communal feeling among religious members which was formerly appreciated is understood as causing an exclusive mindset over and against

others. It becomes more difficult for religious bodies to form close relationships of lay people in community, while keeping traditional religious relationships such as the master and pupil relationship. Both traditional religious bodies and “new religions” find it difficult to unite people together as religious groups or communities under a religious ideal.²

Shimazono continues, “It is ideal that a religious person joins in faith with a community of fellow-believers. Believers create confidence as they engage in concretization of a better future.” This model can be found in American Christianity and Japanese Buddhism in the process of modernization. I believe that many Japanese churches, which were founded by American missionaries, share this ideal of building congregations. In such churches, people “join religious gatherings;” “share their salvation experience with one another;” “find solidarity in the ground of faith;” “create a time of community with fellow-believers.” Through these activities, they find community and joy in their religious lives.³ This describes the formation of religious bodies.

Yet, many people today also see “solidarity with fellow-believers” as something binding: as belonging to a religious body in which one is restrained rather than providing oneself with a stable identity. The religious body in society is seen as being closed to other people and repressive for its individual members. This is the result of secularization as privatization. However, after the year 2000, a new religious stream has begun to emerge.

“THINGS RELIGIOUS” IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

As already stated, this process of privatization does not mean that the concern about “things religious” has decreased. Religious bodies have become more active than before in intentionally engaging in activities in the public sphere. The volunteer activities after the Great East Japanese Earthquake were highly visible evidence of this trend. Shimazono identifies twelve activities that marked these years of public work and divides them into three streams:

- **Group A: Commitment with Social Suffering:** (1) disaster relief; (2) support for the homeless and the poor, suicide prevention; (3) human aid throughout the world; (4) palliative and spiritual care; (5) contributions to medical and health care.

² Ibid., 269.

³ Ibid., 269–70.

- **Group B: Commitment with Public Issues:** (6) engagement with local issues; (7) engagement with environmental and nuclear issues; (8) bioethics; (9) engagement with peace, war and human rights issues; (10) dialogue and companionship with other religions.
- **Group C: Commitment with Education and Culture:** (11) contribution to education; (12) succession to and development of traditional religious culture.

Studying these streams, Shimazono argues that religious bodies—traditional Buddhism or Buddhist “new religions”—decrease their own vitality in society but keep engaging in non-religious forms of public activities. If we observe these currents in religious bodies, we find the decrease of religious bodies through secularization on the one hand yet a positive commitment to public issues with both people of other religions and people of no religious affiliation on the other. The volunteer activities by religious bodies after the disaster may be seen either as merely “volunteer” activities or as a wholly different and non-traditional type of religious activity.

Shimazono raises the question,

Should this involvement with secular issues by Buddhists be distinguished from Buddhist spirituality? I do not think so. We can find religious or spiritual dimensions in all corners of the world. In the process of modernization, we have been familiar with the dichotomy between the holy and the secular and the leaving of secular issues to the secularized sector in social institutions [...]. However, in this area we also notice a religious dimension today.⁴

CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC ISSUES

These complex involvements by religious bodies in public issues are not irrelevant for Christianity. Regarding religious commitments on the above public issues, churches have a long history of engagement in terms of mission and service. Within a discussion of missiology, we continue to question whether these activities are missiological matters or matters of service. Some argue that any activity for the betterment of the public welfare is irrelevant to Christian mission if it is not related to evangelism or the result of evangelizing people. Others take the position that anything is always missiological as long as Christian service for human betterment is done with a Christian heart. Still others develop a theology of *missio Dei* within a social context. In the case of my church, the Japan Evangelical

⁴ *Ibid.*, 273.

Lutheran Church, we agree with the understanding of mission as a kind of synthesis of evangelism, education and service; however, it is not enough to develop theology within a triangle of concepts.

How have religious commitments to public issues of a non-religious or non-spiritual dimension, as Shimazono has suggested, been discussed within the field of Christian missiology? The answer depends on how one understands mission. It is a theological but also a social-public issue, a local but also a global issue. This means engagement in the public sphere through religious activity as well as engagement in the secular sphere through a religious mind. We can develop this issue within the Christian tradition of missiology. The Japanese church in society shares the same trends with institutional Buddhism as well as an engagement on public issues with people of other religions and the secular world. Within these contexts, how can our theology and mission develop a possibility for mission in a post-secular age? In order to address this issue, I would like to return to my own theological heritage and its Lutheran legacy.

LUTHERAN LEGACY FOR MISSIOLOGY

WHICH WAY, LUTHERAN IDENTITY?

The Luther Institute affiliated with Japan Lutheran College and Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary currently focuses on “The Augsburg Confession” (CA). It is expected that the study of CA will clarify Lutheran identity. In terms of the CA, I would like to consider it from a missiological perspective. I believe that CA 7 brings not merely “signs of a church,” but also something important for the strengthening of a missiological viewpoint.

In CA 7, the church is definitively an “assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.”⁵ Richard Bliese develops these signs of a church into a centripetal evangelism. They are not merely definitional signs of the church, but also a dynamic means of grace through which people encounter the real presence of Jesus Christ.⁶ Bliese recognizes that Lutheran mission is in depression in the North American context. The

⁵ “The Augsburg Confession–German Text–Article VII: The Church,” in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 42.

⁶ Richard H. Bliese, “Addressing Captives in Babylon,” in Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder (eds), *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 32ff.

cause of this situation is not poor missiological technique and methodology. Rather, Lutherans have been poor in deepening and developing a larger theological legacy in our contemporary context of mission. Such a legacy would allow us to tackle such fundamental questions as, What is mission? and Why do mission? Instead of addressing these questions, Lutherans are buried in everyday questions about how to do mission efficiently. As a rule, Lutheran theology traditionally focuses on Christology. Lutheran preaching, the celebration of the sacraments, teaching, meditation and ordinary worship have traditionally tended to focus on a belief in meeting Jesus Christ in the present, the here and now. Nevertheless, meeting Jesus through these means is not self-evident. Why? Because tackling the “why question” is a missiological endeavor. Bliese brings CA 7 into the context of Lutheran mission.

It was David Bosch who located the New Testament as the original context of mission. The authors of the New Testament documents did not define mission, but testified through documents. It is not difficult to see that Jesus’ life was lived out in mission. Jesus healed, called, taught, forgave and created a communion of people. He preached the coming Kingdom of God. However, those who later read these testimonies read them as a record of the past. In this case, preaching the biblical story, like the teaching of a proverb, is meant to give people something that they can learn. Other contemporary Christians may try to gain healing, peace of mind or reach an existential decision through these texts. They are not wrong, but Lutheran legacy points to another purpose through the signs of the church: meeting the real presence of Jesus Christ. This is Luther’s theological core oriented for a theology of incarnation.

SALVIFIC EXPERIENCE

Salvation lies in the real presence of Jesus Christ. The way that Christ comes to us is described in CA 7 in three sets of signs of the church: “the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.”⁷ This confessional idea gives us the potential to move forward from signs of the church to signs of *missio Dei*. To keep these three sets of signs of the church and serve them is to serve a Christocentric *missio Dei* in a centripetal way. The preaching, sacraments and gathering of all believers form a place for

⁷ BC, op. cit. (note 5), 42.

the doctrine of incarnation and the Christ-event. This is the perspective of centripetal evangelism present in CA 7.⁸

From the perspective of this centripetal evangelism, each believer makes their own decision of whether or not to belong to a church; whether or not to attend a gathering; whether or not to join a community of faith; it is sociologically correct. On the other hand, CA 7 maintains a theological motif here. Believers participate in being invited into the sign of a church and at the same time, participate in reforming the church. This is a missiological perspective. Phenomenologically, gathering theologically and gathering sociologically share the same place and time. What is to be asked concerns both relationships.

In the case of Japanese religious trends, religious bodies encounter sociological crises: distrust and withdrawal. Religious bodies join work for the public good at the cost of neglecting fully to form their religious bodies. How should we relate to this? Some may insist that it is all right because religious bodies keep working egocentrically for themselves. Others may disagree on the grounds that religious bodies are a kind of base camp, providing people with spiritual energy for real life. Speaking from a Christian perspective, some may also ask whether joining a gathering of believers is a holy duty or whether the real presence of Jesus Christ is met not only in worship. Others still may say that to join the church and participate in its formation is a holy task toward the realization of faith and salvation in the world. If this is so, how does this concern our ordinary interaction with others in public life?

These topics have been repeatedly discussed over the past century within the context of the debate on ecumenism and mission. The church has been exposed to criticism when it missiologically confesses serving the public good in the context of secularization. According to this argument, the sign of a church is whether it provides some benefit for public goodness; in this context, worship and gathering seem far removed from the public concern and are viewed as a private matter only related to worshippers. This understanding of mission presupposes a dichotomy between the secular and the spiritual realms, theologically and missiologically.

I will continue to explore this issue beyond its conventional dualism, because even if the holy and the secular can be distinguished, they cannot be separated. To examine mission in the public sphere in its complexity

⁸ Concerned about tackling this issue within Lutheran theology, care must be taken with regard to indirect revelation as a topic of the epistemology of God. We should pay attention to Luther's theology of the cross to distinguish a theology of glory. A key for a Lutheran paradoxical understanding of faith lies in simultaneously accepting both "faith alone" and its stumbling block.

while keeping the theological motif of mission, it will be useful to examine the missional parameters of double direction as developed by Naozumi Eto.⁹

Eto introduced a double viewpoint of missiology: centripetal evangelization and centrifugal mission. Both perspectives of mission are inseparable but distinguishable. CA 7 clarifies the viewpoint of centripetal evangelization. Especially in the case of the Lutheran tradition, we teach the basic structure of an encounter with our Lord, Jesus Christ in the place of public worship. As a rule in determining the sign of a true believer, we do not teach people to look at Jesus with their own eyes face to face like Jesus' disciples did, nor do we mention a kind of ecstasy-through-Christ-experience nor a kind of Spirit experience (though I do not intend to deny these possibilities). We continue to teach, believe and confess that we meet Jesus Christ through the Word of God, the sacraments and the sacred community. This clarifies the place of the congregation and worship in our faith. All of us are invited to God's service in every public worship service.

However, this is not the entire story. Those who are invited simultaneously become people sent (*missio*) by an inviting God. Our Lord takes a central place in our faith. The Word of God, the sacraments and the community of believers are also the people sent out. "Centripetal evangelization" and "centrifugal mission" take opposite directions but are both one in terms of God's mission and a pair in God's action, which invites and sends people. It is like breathing that is composed of inhaling and exhaling. The minimalism of CA points to the highest common measure of mission.

While I do not oppose the function of the CA in distinguishing Lutheran identity from other Christian communities, I would like to move forward to a missiological reading of CA in order to see the basic sense of mission shared among other Christian missions around the world. In other words, CA as an historical document of confession also gives an opportunity to learn about the catholicity of the churches. What I expect of the missiology of CA is that the more thoroughly the Lutheran church pursues Lutheranism, the more clearly the catholicity of the church emerges. This expectation takes the risk that the more we seek Lutheranism, the more our accent is catholic rather than Lutheran. Rather than seeking an authentic Lutheran church, we seek the Lord's church—a catholic church. I believe that the Reformation (and the CA) is not a movement about distinguishing between this world and church, but a way to live faithfully and spiritually in this world. It is the movement to follow Jesus Christ who is the Lord "for" and "in," "but not belonging to" the world. I understand the catholicity of the church in this way.

⁹ Naozumi Eto, "Lay People as the *Laos* of God: An Essay toward a Missiological Ecclesiology for Today," in *Theologia Diaconia*, 1996.

IN THE MIDST OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

INTER-CONTEXTUALITY

It is important to pay attention to the context of mission as well as to its content. This is the way of looking at the world as well as the condition of the world. Christianity in Europe grappled with secularization after the Reformation. Protestants, including Lutherans, were deeply committed to this topic, both positively and negatively. Martin Luther could probably not have imagined a post-Reformation age in which, in addition to the church, missionary associations also promoted mission; an age in which missiologists discussed whether social engagement was the goal of mission or a mere means of it; an age in which mission was challenged by the either-or of “public-private,” “political-social or religious-evangelical,” “governmental or ecclesiastical” and so on. Yet, today, the way of thinking about the world has been completely shaken up by the concept of secularization, so that the old paradigm has been almost completely transformed.

The contemporary discussion about secularization focuses on two points. The first is that, while the term “secularization” has been often used in the Christian world, there is also an awareness that secularization is not a universal concept. Rather, current scholars discuss “secularization” as an historical concept stemming from Protestantism. The second point is that the world after secularization is not a “de-religionized” world. Secularization is real, but not in the same way for the entire world. There has been much discussion about the invalidation of religion or predictions about the decline of religious institutions, yet the secular age also produces religious revivals throughout the world. We see the rise of Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism within Christianity, the global expansion of Islam and the New Age Movement or what is often termed, spirituality. Mission for conciliar Protestants seems to be buried somewhere between secularization and religious revival.

Christian theology has responded to this complex and pluralistic situation by reforming traditional into contextual theology. Those who do theology in a contextual manner are conscious that an old-fashioned universalism or essentialism that attempts to explain everything through a single principle cannot keep pace with the current change of the world. The importance of contextual theology, in which people pay attention to the manner of receiving and communicating the gospel, is on the increase in various places.

Moreover, regarding the discussion about secularization, we are urged to move forward one more step. It is not enough for us to pay attention to our own context, to the sensibility of our own religion, denomination or

position; we need to be aware of ourselves as being shaped by an inter-contextuality between others and ourselves. As church historians have discussed whether Hellenism was Christianized or Christianity was Hellenized, the old and new challenge coexist in the history of mission from the beginning.¹⁰ This is also the case for mission in the twenty-first century.

MISSIONS IN THE WORLD

If centripetal evangelism is inseparably connected with a theology of mission and stably placed in the mission of the public sphere, then this theological legacy should be maintained beyond the Lutheran church. The catholicity of the church stems from the graceful event between God and the world. The world is the arena in which God works. It has become more difficult to talk about a public as distinct from a private sphere. (Of course, I am not talking about the secularization that forbids talk about religion on television, in public schools or in public transport stations. Public-private binarism goes to the edge.) We are more aware that our missions are related to both the public and the personal, whether negatively or positively in the same way that the heart cannot be separated from the body. There, we encounter the face of mission with others. Mission is relational. I believe that this sensibility to relationships can be shared within a global sensibility. In our case, we can talk about this as ecumenical sensibility. But in order for us to talk about a common sensibility among the larger human community, whether religious or global, we need to learn more about each other.

In this context, I have learned from the Jewish thinker Judith Butler about the idea of “cohabitation.” Butler uses this concept to introduce a religious perspective into the ethics of the public sphere. It is important to distinguish “cohabitation” (*kyou-sei*) from “symbiosis” (*kyou-sei*).¹¹ As I understand it, symbiosis is rendered as *kyou-sei shakai* (symbiosis society) as a social construct. By using the word, we imply human will and freedom of choice. On the other hand, cohabitation seems to be broader in perspective. Butler writes, “to co-habit the earth is prior to any possible community or nation or neighborhood. We may choose where to live and who to live by, but we cannot choose with whom to co-habit the earth.”¹²

¹⁰ I tried to show the direction of theology and mission in my book, *Embodied Cross: Intercontextual Reading of Theologia Crucis* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2010). I develop the idea of “inter-contextuality” as the process of mission through the grace of Jesus Christ.

¹¹ Judith Butler, “Is Judaism Zionism?,” in Judith Butler et al (eds), *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 70–91.

¹² *Ibid.*, 84.

Thus, the vision of cohabitation urges us to an ethics beyond simply “being nice to each other” or saying “how wonderful our neighbors are.” It makes us rethink what the terms of mission and mission fields are. The sensibility of cohabitation urges all to be aware of the simple fact that varieties of people live on this earth and that people have an “inability to choose” in terms of cohabitation.

If individual churches that have carved out and left historical traces are willing to be a part of the global reality of the twenty-first century, must they not also share in this sensibility of cohabitation? The challenge is how to do this. Like our previous discussion about secularization, if church and mission are no longer thought of in terms of being “private and individual spheres,” “shared interest and hobby groups,” or of being in mission solely to promote growth, then mission will again be able to practice the art of being in cohabitation among various peoples with multiple histories.

To be sure, this is easier said than done. Whether or not it can be concretely accomplished in the context of our missiological activities, we must be prepared for a long journey with failures and repeated course corrections along the way. I believe that we must seek widely to identify with others through a catholic mind of faith, mission and church. The churches in the world must also be conscious of being in a network of cohabitation by participating in shared mission as something that is truly possible in the present.

MALAYSIA: REIMAGINING SOLIDARITY—THE “ALLAH” CONTROVERSY, PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

Sivin Kit

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a multicultural, multireligious, Muslim-majority country with a great potential to model healthy interreligious relations. However, recent religious controversies have disrupted not only the image of a moderate Malaysia, but have added pressure to interreligious relations among its citizenry.

Currently, the Federation of Malaysia, formed in 1963, is organized around a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy. While Islam is the religion of the Federation, other non-Muslim religions can be practiced freely within some restrictions on propagation to Muslims stated in the Federal Constitution.¹ By 2011, the ethnically diverse 28-million population of Malaysia had a sixty percent Muslim majority and a forty percent non-Muslim minority composed of different religious persuasions, including Buddhism (19.2 percent), Christianity (9.1 percent), Hinduism (6.3 percent), Confucianism, Taoism, other traditional Chinese religions (2.6 percent), other or unknown (1.5 percent) and none (0.8 percent).²

¹ “Religion of the Federation,” Article 3, *Federal Constitution of Malaysia* (Malaysia: 2010), 20; “Freedom of Religion,” Article 11, *Federal Constitution of Malaysia* (Malaysia: 2010), 25–26.

² Statistics.gov.my, “Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010,” at www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php?option=com_content&id=1215.

While there have been ongoing reports of religious discrimination compared to some other Muslim majority countries, for example in the Middle East, Malaysia has not shown signs of widespread religious violence.³ Observers often attribute the success of this interethnic and interreligious harmony to the Malaysian government's ability to balance the various sociopolitical and economic interests of both the Muslim majority and non-Muslim minority citizens; others highlight the Malaysian society's ability to celebrate its religious and cultural diversity.

However, in recent years, a series of religious controversies has challenged the image of Malaysians living in "peace and harmony" as advertised on Malaysian tourist sites. One religious controversy that has received particular local and global media attention is the "Allah" controversy.⁴ The phrase "The 'Allah' controversy" refers to the Malaysian government's ban on the use of the word "Allah" in Christian publications and to the broader public debate on whether the word "Allah" is "exclusive" to Islam in Malaysia. Chief Judge Mohamed Apandi Ali said in a ruling in 2013: "The usage of the word Allah is not an integral part of the faith in Christianity; the usage of the word will cause confusion in the community."⁵

Although English is also widely used in both the public and the private sector, Malay is the national language. In Malaysia as in Indonesia, Christians translate the word "God" as "Allah" in the Malay-language Bibles.⁶ While the Malaysian Christian community (depending on its ethnic roots) widely uses English, Mandarin and Tamil for its religious practices, Malay has become the primary religious language for the indigenous Christian communities in both East and West Malaysia.

³ See P.G. Riddell, "Islamization, Civil Society and Religious Minorities in Malaysia," in K. S Nathan and Mohammad Hashim Kamali (eds), *Islam In Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2005), 162-90.

⁴ Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST), *Unity Threatened by Continuing Infringements of Religious Freedom* (Kuala Lumpur: 2007). The official website of the MCCBCHST is harmonymalaysia.wordpress.com/.

⁵ Siva Sithraputhran, "Malaysian Court Rules Use of 'Allah' Exclusive to Muslims," 14 October 2013, at www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/1elled4/us-malaysia-court-allah-idUSBRE99D01J20131014.

⁶ For the history of the translation of the Indonesian and Malay Bible, see "Sejarah Alkitab Indonesia / Sejarah Penerjemahan Alkitab Dalam Bahasa Melayu/Indonesia," in *Sejarah.Sabda.Org*, 2014, at sejarah.sabda.org/artikel/sejarah_penerjemahan_alkitab_bahasa_melayu_indonesia.htm. For an introduction to the discussion of the use of "Allah" for Christians, see K.J. Thomas, "Allah in Translations of the Bible," in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 23/4 (2006), 171-74.

Through a whole series of events, the voices of those who support or disagree with the government's prohibition have surfaced in the public sphere; these public debates, revolving around the rationale used by the government to justify its actions as well as the legal challenge of the Catholic Church have lasted more than seven years, since 2007. The government has asserted that the Christian usage of the word "Allah" might confuse Malay Muslims, leading to a disruption of public order and even a possible threat to national security. The Catholic Church has persistently defended its right to use the word "Allah" in its publications and has labeled the actions of the government as unjust. The whole controversy has been further complicated by various attacks on places of worship in 2010 and 2014, interspersed with threats to burn the Bible in public; therefore, Malaysia's image as a moderate Muslim-majority country continues to attract scrutiny by its own citizens and observers both locally and overseas.⁷

The aim of this essay is to understand the public statements around the "Allah" controversy beyond what appears to be simply a dispute between Christians and Muslims over the use of a religious word. What insights do the public statements from government, religious and civil society actors around the "Allah" controversy give us into the dynamics of Muslim and non-Muslim relations in Malaysia and what insights do they provide for imagining a future that transcends the present impasse?

To answer the above questions, I will turn to the events and public discourse around the "Allah" controversy from 2007-2015; they highlight the tensions faced by religious leaders between defending the rights of religious minorities and advocating national solidarity in a Muslim-majority and multicultural society. Through the narrative of the "Allah" controversy with its twists and turns, we may witness how Christians, Muslims and people of other faiths struggle, through public statements and symbolic actions, to reclaim the public space to challenge ethno-religious centric discourse in Malaysia.

A PUBLIC CONTROVERSY OVER THE USE OF THE WORD "ALLAH" (2007-2015)

The unfolding of events around the "Allah" controversy illustrates the complex interrelationships between religion, law, new media and politics

⁷ Niluksi Koswanage, "Fourth Church Attacked in Malaysia as Allah Row Deepens," *Reuters*, 9 January 2010, at www.reuters.com/article/2010/01/09/us-malaysia-religion-idUSTRE6080MV20100109, and "Malaysian Church Attacked amid Allah Dispute," in *The Associated Press*, 27 January 2010, at bigstory.ap.org/article/malaysian-church-attacked-amid-allah-dispute.

in contemporary Malaysia. I will focus my paper on the controversy to the government's prohibition of the use of the word "Allah" in the Catholic weekly newsletter *The Herald*. The subsequent reaction of the Catholic Church of Malaysia to challenge the government's ban in the civil courts had further publicized this dispute, which led to interventions from both local and international voices. The whole incident can be understood as a struggle against interreligious hostility between Christians and Muslims; furthermore, the emergence of non-Muslim voices in the public sphere together with like-minded Muslim voices point to expressions of Malaysian solidarity transcending ethno-religious tensions.

CONFLICT BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE GOVERNMENT: THE HIGH COURT JUDGMENT AND PUBLIC DEBATE (2007–2009)

On 5 December 2007, after the government issued a sixth show cause letter to *The Herald*, the weekly filed for a judicial review and set into motion the legal process that resulted in the High Court judgment in their favor on 31 December 2009.⁸ *The Herald* primarily complained about the power of the Minister of Home Affairs to restrict the use of the word "Allah" in its publication. The controversy between the Roman Catholic Church and the Malaysian government is a conflict between a religious and a political institution. As the arguments unfolded, both institutions did not limit their debate to the legal sphere; rather, theological, historical and cultural dimensions were part of their reasoning.⁹

The Ministry of Home Affairs defended its interference in *The Herald* on political and theological grounds. It referred to the notion of "confusion" and implied that such confusion might lead to a "threat to the public safety and order and will generate religious sensitivity in the country."¹⁰ Furthermore, it referred to the various legal restrictions on the propagation of non-Muslim religions to Muslims.

The Ministry of Home Affairs also argued that the use of the word "Allah" could only refer to the One God of followers of the religion Islam, and

⁸ See Titular Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur v Menteri Dalam Negeri & Anor [2010] 2 MLJ 78.

⁹ Titular Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur v Menteri Dalam Negeri & Anor R1-25-28-2009, Judgment by Justice Lau Bee Lan. The 59-page High Court judgment in 2009 is significant because it details the chronology of the dispute and the arguments from both *The Herald* and the Ministry of Home Affairs.

¹⁰ Ibid.

claimed that alternative translations of the word “God” were available in the Malay language. According to the Ministry, the word “Allah” in general refers to the Almighty “Tuhan” (God) for followers of Islam in Malaysia; in its view, the word “Allah” is the proper name for “Tuhan” (understood as “God” by Malay-speaking Muslims). For the Ministry, these grounds are sufficiently clear in the Qur’an and are also “enshrined” in the Federal Constitution because Islam is the religion of the federation.¹¹

The Roman Catholic Church, which represented *The Herald*, argued against the Ministry of Home Affairs that the control of Islam is the business of the federal states and not of the federal government, except in federal territories. The Catholic weekly denied the accusation that its publication was intended to proselytize Malay Muslims, arguing that its cover clearly stated that its purpose was to disseminate news and information on the Catholic Church in Malaysia and elsewhere. Furthermore, since the weekly was not for sale outside the church, it had not been made available to the Muslim public. Regarding the content of the weekly, the church claimed that *The Herald* had neither contained content that might cause public alarm nor touched on the sensitivities of the religion of Islam in the fourteen years of its publication. On matters of translation, the church stressed that, based on academic and linguistic reasons, “Allah” is the correct Malay word for “God” and the word “Lord” is translated as “Tuhan.” The use of “Allah” to refer to God had been the practice for Christians and Muslims since the 1500s. Indeed, the Christian usage predated Islam in classical and contemporary Arabic Bibles in Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and other Asian and African countries.¹²

According to the church, the great majority of Catholic congregations in Malaysia and Indonesia hold that it is legitimate to use “Allah” since the Malay language has been the lingua franca of Catholics for several centuries. The church furnished additional historical evidence to support the legitimate use of the word, such as the 1629 translation of Matthew’s Gospel and the entry on the meaning of the Latin *Deus* to Malay *Alla* in the 1631 Malay-Latin Dictionary.¹³ Therefore, the church argued, there is strong evidence of the use of Malay in Christian publications that included the use of the word “Allah” translated for “God” in such literature long before the independence of Malaysia in 1957.

For contemporary Malaysia, the church claimed that Christian natives of West Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak have used Indonesian and Malay translations of the Bible for generations. Additionally, at least three decades of Malaysian congregations in the Catholic Church freely use the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9–11.

¹² *Ibid.*, 15–25.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Alkitab (Malay Bibles) and Malay-speaking congregations use the word “Allah” for worship and educational instruction. These arguments showed that the Ministry of Home Affairs’ prohibition may have wider unintended consequences which, more than the publication of the weekly, will also affect the congregational and educational life of Malay-speaking believers.¹⁴

After almost two years, Judge Lau Bee Lan ruled in favor of the Roman Catholic Church, stating that the Ministry of Home Affairs’ action to set conditions on the use of the word “Allah” was illegal, unreasonable and unconstitutional.¹⁵ The reasons for banning *The Herald* were not justified because there was no evidence of a threat to public security and social order. The judge ruled that the actions of the Minister of Home Affairs were irrational given the circumstances around the usage of “Allah” in *The Herald*.

In the midst of these religious controversies, there was also a wider demand for free and fair elections and a push for mature democratic development by citizens in the country. Religious communities who were critical of the government supported the improvement of the democratic process with the visible participation of clergy—Muslim, Christian and Buddhist—in public rallies for free and fair elections in 2007.¹⁶ In other words, if previously it was not surprising to observe visible Muslim participation in the democratic process, now non-Muslim religious communities too became more vocal and visible through either public statements or public participation. The 2008 general elections marked a significant shift in the political consciousness of Christians in particular and of the wider non-Muslim community. On 8 March 2008, according to the final election results, the ruling government under the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition lost its two-thirds majority of parliamentary seats for the first time as well as another five states. The overall results of the elections further suggested the voters’ discontent with the ruling government, with the popular vote for the coalition Barisan Nasional-led government falling from 63 percent in 2004 to 51.2 percent.¹⁷ Soon after the 2008 elections, Najib Razak replaced Abdullah Badawi as Prime Minister of Malaysia and introduced the concept of 1Malaysia as an inclusive approach to governance to distinguish his own

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 56–57.

¹⁶ The website for the BERSIH (“The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections”) is www.bersih.org/. See F.A. Noor, *After the Bersih 2.0 Rally: Impact and Implications*, RSIS Commentaries, No. 103 (Singapore: Nanyang Technological University 2011); B. Welsh, “People Power in Malaysia: Bersih Rally and its Aftermath” (2011), at bridgetwelsh.com/2011/08/people-power-in-malaysia-bersih-rally-and-its-aftermath-2/.

¹⁷ Rashid Moten, “2004 and 2008 General Elections in Malaysia: Towards a Multicultural, Bi-party Political System?,” in *Asian Journal of Political Science* 17/2 (2009), 173–94.

premiership from that of his predecessors.¹⁸ According to Najib Razak, the 1Malaysia concept was meant to reinforce national unity “irrespective of race or religious belief” in concert with “real improvements on the ground.”¹⁹ However, such public rhetoric did not match the experience on the ground.

The “Allah” controversy—particularly *The Herald* case—needs to be situated in this sociopolitical climate in order fully to appreciate how these external political conditions inform public discourse around the controversy. Although the government’s public policy appears to promote religious moderation and multi-religious peaceful coexistence, its political practice undermines this. The *Herald* case in particular highlights the struggle of one religious minority, Christians, in the Muslim-majority context; furthermore, the public confrontation brings to light the problematic nature of state inference in internal religious practices.

The next section, in which I highlight the unequal power relations in Malaysian society, broadens the lens beyond the courts.

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER: ARSON ATTACKS, DETAINED BIBLES AND CONTINUAL DEBATE (2010–2012)

After the High Court judgment in December 2009, the “Allah” controversy was marked by two main events in the public debate: arson attacks on churches and other places of worship in January 2010 and the detention of Bibles under government authority in 2011. Dissatisfied with the High Court judgment, certain Muslim nongovernmental organizations protested against the judgment, calling on Muslims to unite against a perceived threat to the place of Islam in Malaysian society. A gathering was proposed on 10 January 2010 at the National Mosque in Kuala Lumpur. Different politicians expressed conflicting views on the planned protest. Critics labeled the ruling government politicians’ statement as at best hypocritical and at worst fueling religious sensitivities.²⁰ On 9 January, one day before the planned protest, the Metro Tabernacle, the first of many churches vandalized, was gutted by fire. This event caught the attention of international

¹⁸ See J. Chin, “Malaysia: The Rise of Najib and 1Malaysia,” in *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2010, no. 1 (2010), 164–79; M.A.M Sani et al., “Malaysia in Transition: A Comparative Analysis of Asian Values, Islam Hadhari and 1malaysia,” in *Journal of Politics and Law* 2/3 (2009), 110–18.

¹⁹ “1Malaysia Initiatives,” *1Malaysia*, at www.1malaysia.com.my/en/my-record/1-malaysia/. See R. Camilleri, “Religious Pluralism in Malaysia: the Journey of Three Prime Ministers,” in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24/2 (2013), 225–40.

²⁰ Jacqueline Ann Surin, “‘Allah’ Issue: Who Started It? | The Nut Graph,” *Thenutgraph.Com*, at www.thenutgraph.com/allah-issue-who-started-it/.

media and magnified the Malaysian situation beyond national borders.²¹ Later, in March 2011, government authorities withheld 30,000 copies of the New Testament and Psalms. The Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) issued a strong statement condemning the action; they were “greatly disillusioned, fed up and angered by the repeated detention of Bibles written in our national language, Bahasa Malaysia.”²²

The following conflicting public statements reflect the disagreement between the Christian leaders and the government on how to address religious minority issues. On behalf of the CFM, Anglican Bishop Ng Moon Hing voiced the determination of the Christian community to reclaim its voice in the public sphere:

We wish to express the frustration of our churches and all Christians in having to deal with lengthy bureaucratic red tape and ever-changing goal posts. We have exhausted meetings at the highest ministerial level and have made attempts to dialogue at various levels and yet we often find the most effective means for action to be taken is when the issues are raised in the public sphere.²³

At the end of the same year, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Najib Razak, downplayed the need for public engagement:

I do not want to be a prime minister for only a section of the community, but for all Malaysians [...]. We have, in fact, achieved quite a lot for the Christian community through subtle engagement, away from the glare of publicity.²⁴

²¹ “Inside Story–Religious Violence in Malaysia,” YouTube video, 23:24, posted by “Al Jazeera English,” 12 January 2010, at www.youtube.com/watch?v=cV89G-wrgDQ.

²² Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM), “Detention of Bahasa Malaysia Bibles Yet Again,” 10 March 2011, at www.necf.org.my/newsmaster.cfm?&menuid=43&action=view&retrieveid=1275. The Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) consists of three national Christian bodies comprising: the Catholic Bishops Conference, the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM) and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF). For more information, see www.cfmsia.org.

²³ Ng Moon Hing, “CFM concerns,” in *The Micah Mandate*, 4 January 2012, at www.themicahmandate.org/2012/01/cfm-concerns/; the original speech can be downloaded from www.necf.org.my/newsmaster.cfm?&menuid=43&action=view&retrieveid=1372.

²⁴ “Datuk Seri Najib’s speech at the Christmas High Tea,” YouTube Video 16:50, posted by “D Lum,” 25 January 2012, at www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wltCLO2aao and Lavanya Lingan and Akil Yunus, “Najib: I’m PM for all Malaysians,” in *New Straits Times*, 27 December 2012, at www.nst.com.my/nation/general/najib-im-pm-for-all-malaysians-1.192084.

Whereas in the 1980s and 1990s, there was arguably “subtle engagement out of the gaze of publicity,” now, in the early twenty-first century, the possibility of public debate has a new arena: the Internet. In the early days of the “Allah” controversy—restricted to Bible translations in the 1980s and 1990s—public debate on this matter was limited to the mainstream media. Due to the 1988 series of arrests, with many people being detained without trial for public criticism of the government, the government injected a degree of fear and apprehension into the debate.²⁵ The Internet was introduced in Malaysia in the 1990s and its usage surged from 2000 onwards, growing exponentially from 2005 onwards.²⁶ The Internet had already been used in Malaysia in support of activism in a number of prior controversial cases related to religion such as the Moorthy incident and the Lina Joy controversy.²⁷ The rise of alternative news websites is frequently cited as playing an important part in this development.²⁸ For example, such articles as “‘Allah’ issue: Who Started It?” and infographics about *The Herald* case featuring key actors and key events were now easily accessible to the public via these sites.²⁹ Bishop Ng’s conclusion on the effectiveness of using the public sphere suggests the need to make the government accountable to the public for its statements and actions.

The year 2012 ended with a public Malay-Muslim outcry about a speech given by the Chief Minister of Penang, Lim Guan Eng. Part of his speech called on the federal government to “allow the use of the word Allah” and rejected the claims that Christians were engaged in a plot to establish a “Christian State.”³⁰ Soon after this speech, a Malay Muslim nongovernmental organization (NGO), led by independent Member of Parliament Ibrahim Ali, threatened to burn the Bible in public.³¹ This threat came after reports of another anonymous threat that had called supporters to burn the Bible in Penang.

²⁵ See J.C.H. Lee, “The Fruits of Weeds: Taking Justice at the Commemoration of the Twentieth Anniversary of Operasi Lalang in Malaysia,” in *The Round Table* 97, no. 397 (2008), 605–15.

²⁶ Internet users (per 100 people) from the World Bank—“Malaysia,” at data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.P2, and “Malaysia: Internet Usage Stats and Marketing Report,” at www.internetworldstats.com/asia/my.htm.

²⁷ See S.G. Yeoh, “Managing sensitivities: Religious pluralism, civil society and inter-faith relations in Malaysia,” in *The Round Table* 94, no. 382 (2005), 629–40.

²⁸ See Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani, *The Public Sphere and Media Politics in Malaysia* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

²⁹ Jacqueline Ann Surin, op. cit. (note 20).

³⁰ Lim Guan Eng, “Christmas Day Message 2012,” 24 December 2012, at limguaneng.com/index.php/2012/12/24/let-us-advance-efforts-to-establish-a-people-centric-government-based-on-integrity-that-puts-people-over-profits-to-put-a-stop-to-all-future-lynas-rare-earth-plant-automated-enforcement-systemaesa-a/.

³¹ “Police quiz Ibrahim Ali over ‘Bible-burning’ threat,” in *The Malaysian Insider*, 31 January 2013, at www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/police-

In the midst of these events, however, concerned Malaysians countered these provocations with a “Read books, not burn them” event, organized in peninsula Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur and Penang as well as in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.³² The organizer, Masjaliza, highlighted the following:

The main purpose of this event is to prove that I can read the Bible and still be Muslim [...]. By reading we are celebrating knowledge, mutual respect and enlightenment to counter ignorance, stupidity and narrow-mindedness. The response to my invitation is the people’s response to Ibrahim’s bigotry.³³

Hence, concerned citizens, often facilitated by human rights NGO leaders, responded to what was perceived as “religious bigotry” or evidence of interreligious hostility with alternative ways of protest—reoccupying another public space and offering a different kind of public discourse of solidarity over hostility.

Although the unequal power relations between Muslims and non-Muslims are visible in the political and legal arena, the critical minority voice of civil society initiatives such as “Read books, not burn them” point towards a reframing of how the controversy is understood. The event and its symbolic acts of solidarity show a different way of relating to the scriptures of the religious Other. Overall, the confrontation then is no longer between Muslims and non-Muslims but, rather, one between social forces that sow seeds of interreligious hostility versus counterforces that offer an alternative vision of Malaysian solidarity.

REVISITING MALAYSIAN SOLIDARITY: THIRTEENTH GENERAL ELECTION, GLOBAL ATTENTION AND LEGAL DEFEAT (2013–2015)

State religious authorities such as the Selangor Islamic Council (MAIS) continued to make statements that undermined the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom. In response to MAIS, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) reiterated its position that it recognized “the only restriction imposed on non-Muslims in the Federal Constitution” as being “propagation of religious doctrine or

quiz-ibrahim-ali-over-bible-burning-threat.

³² Yuen Mei King, “Read books, not burn them,” in *The Star Online*, 28 January 2013, at www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2013/01/28/Read-books-not-burn-them/.

³³ Stephanie Sta Maria, “Holy book reading to douse Bible-burning zeal,” in *fz.com*, 25 January 2013, at www.fz.com/content/holy-book-reading-douse-bible-burning-zeal#ixzz2rbfP3eMN.

belief among persons professing the religion of Islam.” Nevertheless, they also reaffirmed that “every religious group has its right to manage its own religious affairs” and, according to the MCCBCHST, this would include the use of the word “Allah” in the holy scriptures of non-Muslim religions.³⁴ In other words, the wider non-Muslim community as part of its overall struggle also considered the “Allah” controversy as the defense of religious freedom for all religious minorities, Christians being not the only ones affected.

The period up to the general elections in May 2013 was frequently dominated by the public debate over religion and politics, with the “Allah” controversy being one topical issue. These elections were labeled as potentially the “dirtiest” election in the history of Malaysia and yet for some, they still represented the best possible chance for a change of government.³⁵ The “Allah” controversy was featured not only as an important issue for the Christian community, but due to the intense political campaign, the controversy became an election issue that church leaders were obliged to address.

Earlier, the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) had sent out a pastoral communiqué to “Vote Wisely” on 12 July 2012, but there were unprecedented statements and an open letter that addressed the public and politicians directly during the election campaign. First, it was reported that the “Allah” controversy was used as part of an anti-Christian campaign in one constituency. A picture of a campaign board went viral on the Internet.³⁶ The CFM issued a statement against “the despicable anti-Christian message on election campaign billboards,” in particular, and interpreted the message on these billboards as attempts to pit “one community (Muslim) against Christians by spreading fear through scare tactics, using the issue of ‘Allah’, which the High Court had allowed as a right to freedom of religion.”³⁷ Once again, the

³⁴ The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST), “MAIS Statement: Unprecedented and Unconstitutional,” 5 February 2013, at ccmalaysia.org/index.php/2013/02/mccbchst-mais-statement-unprecedented-and-unconstitutional/.

³⁵ Ambiga Sreenevasan, “Will elections in Malaysia be free or fair?,” in *Al-Jazeera*, 4 May 2013, at www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/04/201342982454925143.html.

³⁶ Deborah Chong, “Christians protest ‘Allah house’ billboards, want EC action,” in *The Malaysian Insider*, 1 May 2013, at www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/allahs-house-billboards-make-christians-see-red-ec-called-to-act. The literal translation of the words is, “Do we want to see our children entering to pray in this house of God? If we allow the word Allah to be used in churches because of politics to sell out religion, race and the country. Vote for Barisan Nasional to defend religion, race and the country. God is great! God is great! God is great!”

³⁷ Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) press statement, “CFM Abhors and Protests the Despicable Anti-Christian Message on Election Campaign Billboards,” 1 May 2013.

“Allah” controversy became a trigger that resulted in a non-Muslim religion engaging in the public sphere in order to clarify its position and protest the use of a religious issue in a political campaign.

Next, the Association of Churches in Sarawak (ACS), representing the only Malaysian state with a Christian majority, further issued a pastoral communiqué for the *Bumiputera* (or “indigenous”) church in Sabah and Sarawak to represent the silent voices from East Malaysia. It announced that “We, the native Christians of Sabah and Sarawak, have kept silent for a considerable length of time. Some have taken our silence to mean something else. Therefore, the time has come for us to speak.”³⁸ After speaking out against “racism,” “extremism” and “religious bigotry,” the ACS turned the focus specifically onto the “Allah” controversy and highlighted state legislations and *fatwas* “expressly directed at non-Muslims.” The ACS summarized its reasons and position:

In Sarawak and Sabah, the word “Allah” has been used or spoken by native communities of the state for generations long before the formation of Malaysia and is part of their native language. Native Bumiputeras have always been using the term “Allah” in all aspects of the profession and practice of their Christian faith from baptism to final rites and these include in services, prayers, praise, liturgy, worship and religious education. The term “Allah” is also used in Christian publications and multimedia resources. The right of the native Bumiputeras to use or speak their own language and to practice their religion in the state is safeguarded by the Federal Constitution.³⁹

Additionally, the ACS further appealed to reason and insisted that the issue was more political than religious:

The “Allah” controversy is not really about religion as such but about unreasonable government policies and laws. In the face of such unreasonableness, we cannot and should not remain silent. The time for us to speak has come.⁴⁰

However, while the ACS appealed to rights and reason and reaffirmed a united voice for Christians, it nonetheless also affirmed that it “harbors neither ill will nor malice toward people of other faiths including our Muslim brothers and sisters.”⁴¹ As it challenged the unreasonableness of the government, the ACS reached out to the Muslim majority. The need

³⁸ Association of Churches in Sarawak (ACS) Pastoral Communiqué, 2 May 2013.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

for the ACS to affirm people of other religions who “together seek to build this beloved nation for the good of all peoples”⁴² went hand in hand with a strong criticism of political actors. Similar to the CFM statements, the ACS too was careful to make the distinction between how religion related to politics and the everyday practice and cultural bases of religion.

On 14 October 2013, three judges from the Court of Appeal allowed the appeal of the Ministry of Home Affairs against the decision of the 2009 High Court judgment.⁴³ Two themes caused alarm among the Christian leadership. First, the judges stated:

It is our common finding that the usage of the name “Allah” is not an integral part of the faith and practice of Christianity. From such finding, we find no reason why the respondent is so adamant to use the name “Allah” in their weekly publication. Such usage, if allowed, will inevitably cause confusion within the community.⁴⁴

Second, the judges understood the term “in peace and harmony” in the Federal Constitution as implying that “the welfare of an individual or group must yield to that of the community.”⁴⁵ Both opinions were subject to much debate after the decision was made public because these statements appeared to make explicit the ethno-religious Malay-Muslim-centered values that seemed to inform these judgments, especially when the judge used the word “adamant” to refer to the Catholic Church’s legal action.

Adding to the expressed disappointment of the CFM,⁴⁶ both the ACS and the Sabah Council of Churches (SCC), whose members mostly have *Bumiputera* (indigenous) status, organized a number of forums and issued statements to express their dissatisfaction with the state of religious affairs in Malaysia. Basel Christian Church Bishop Thomas Tsen, representing the SCC, questioned the Prime Minister’s commitment as the leader of the Global Movement of Moderates (GMM) because, compared to the message of moderation overseas, “back in [our] own backyard, we are experiencing extreme action against the church in Malaysia.” Referring to the Court of Appeal’s decision, which the SCC considered “wholly unreasonable, irrational and repugnant,” the SCC stated:

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ See *Menteri Dalam Negeri v Titular Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur*, [2013] 6 MLRA 8.

⁴⁴ *Menteri Dalam Negeri v Titular Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur* Civil Appeal. No. W-01-1-201, Summary of Decision, §5, 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, §6, 3.

⁴⁶ Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM), “Courts Continue to Ignore the Rights of Christian Minority,” 14 October 2013, at necf.org.my/newsmaster.cfm?&menuid=43&action=view&retrieveid=1533.

We concur with our brothers churches in Sarawak in their recent statement that, “it is our view that the judges overstepped their boundaries in determining that using the word ‘Allah’ is not integral to the Christian faith.” In deciding this, the judges arrogated to themselves a right that does not belong to any human court of law—the right to determine religion.⁴⁷

The decision of the Court of Appeal not only failed to resolve the controversy; it may have further magnified the fundamental questions of justice, power, culture, religion and knowledge that constitute matters of concern, not only for religious minorities but have alarming implications for the wider Malaysian society.

Unsurprisingly, those against the use of the word “Allah” by Christians welcomed the Court of Appeal’s decision; lawyers for the seven state Islamic councils, for example, called for critics to respect the decision.⁴⁸ However, there were also prominent local and international criticisms of the decision. The Malaysia Chinese Association (MCA), which is a component party in the Barisan Nasional (BN), the coalition led by the Prime Minister, opined that “national interest” was ignored by the judges.⁴⁹ A former mufti criticized another former state mufti for labeling Muslims who questioned the decision as “infidels.”⁵⁰

Numerous editorials, written by Muslims from Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and the USA, also questioned the court’s decision,⁵¹ while a number of academics in Islamic studies expressed puzzlement not only with the court case but also with the whole controversy as such.⁵² The

⁴⁷ Sabah Council of Churches (SCC), “The Prime Minister Must Act against Religious Intolerance,” 26 November 2013, at www.necf.org.my/newsmaster.cfm?&menuid=43&action=view&retrieveid=1544. The statement by the ACS referred to in the quote is from a statement issued during a forum on 13 November 2013.

⁴⁸ “Critics told to respect the court’s decision,” in *MalaysiaKini*, 14 October, 2013, at www.malaysiakini.com/news/243871.

⁴⁹ “MCA ‘Allah’ ruling ignores national interest,” in *MalaysiaKini*, 16 October 2013, at www.malaysiakini.com/news/244003.

⁵⁰ “Muslims who query Allah verdict risk being infidels,” in *MalaysiaKini*, 16 October 2013, at www.malaysiakini.com/news/243946, and “Scholars counter ‘infidel’ argument over ‘Allah’,” in *MalaysiaKini*, 16 October 2013, at www.malaysiakini.com/news/243994.

⁵¹ Malik Imtiaz Sarwar, “Of Allah and the state of Malaysia,” in *Al-Jazeera*, 28 October 2013, at www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/10/2013102844433318666.html, and Muhammad Musri, “Besmirching Allah’s Name By Trying to Protect It,” in *Huffington Post*, 7 January 2014, at www.huffingtonpost.com/imam-muhammad-musri/besmirching-allahs-name-b_b_4551747.html.

⁵² “Academic, religious scholar knock ruling on ‘Allah’ ban,” in *The Malay Mail Online*, 15 October 2013, www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/academic-religious-scholar-knock-ruling-on-allah-ban.

Lutheran World Federation (LWF) issued a letter in which the current president of the LWF, Palestinian Bishop Younan, referred to the fact that in his Arab-speaking context, Christians use the term “Allah” with no prohibition.⁵³ Malaysia once again received sustained global attention due to the unresolved “Allah” controversy; furthermore, the irrational actions of the Malaysian government received sustained international critique.

Back in Malaysia, the tension over the “Allah” controversy intensified. In January 2014, Father Lawrence, editor of *The Herald*, declared in public that he maintained the right to use the word in Malay-language worship and liturgy. Subsequently, Selangor state religious authorities raided the Bible Society of Malaysia and confiscated more than 300 Malay and *Iban* Bibles, which they alleged were used to proselytize Malay-Muslims.⁵⁴ The reason cited by the religious authorities was a “decree” by the Selangor Sultan that reiterated the state’s enactment on the prohibition of the use of twenty-five words including “Allah” by non-Muslims; these religious authorities perceived themselves as accountable only to the Sultan.⁵⁵ The result of the religious authorities’ actions gained public attention and outcry. During this time, the Malay Rights Group and voices within the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) called for a protest in front of a church in Klang against Christians like Father Lawrence who refused to yield to external pressure to give up the use of the word “Allah.”

However, another group of concerned citizens later renamed *Malaysia for Malaysian*, mitigated the tension and countered such provocations with their own “mixed-faith solidarity gathering.”⁵⁶ These ordinary Malaysians stood in front of a Catholic church with flowers to show solidarity after

⁵³ Peter Kenny, “Lutherans see Malaysia ‘Allah’ ban for Christians violating religious freedom,” in *Ecumenical News*, 12 November 2013, at www.ecumenicalnews.com/article/lutherans-see-malaysia-allah-ban-for-christians-violating-religious-freedom-22561.

⁵⁴ Neville Spylkerman, “Jais raids Bible Society of Malaysia,” in *The Star Online*, 2 January 2014, at www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2014/01/02/jais-raid-bible-society/.

⁵⁵ Zurairi AR, “As ‘Allah’ case drags on, Selangor Sultan insists on non-Muslim ban,” in *The Malay Mail Online*, 14 November 2013, at www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/as-allah-case-drags-on-selangor-sultan-insists-on-non-muslim-ban.

⁵⁶ Zurairi AR, “Malay groups to protest at Klang church, threaten ‘uprising’ over ‘Allah,’” in *The Malay Mail Online*, 2 January 2014, at www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/malay-groups-to-protest-at-klang-church-threaten-uprising-over-allah, and Ida Lim, “Mixed-faith ‘solidarity gathering’ to protect Klang church from Muslim protesters,” in *The Malay Mail Online*, 5 January 2014, at www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/mixed-faith-solidarity-gathering-to-protect-klang-church-from-muslim-protes.

Muslim groups threatened to protest there.⁵⁷ In an open letter, Azrul Mohd Khalib, one of the organizers of *Malaysia for Malaysians*, summarized the needed immediate response to intervene at crucial moments of tension to avoid further conflict:

To all Malaysians: we need to get some sanity back and to send a clear signal to our leaders, representatives and these people who claim to speak for us and on our behalf but remain silent. This arrogance is not what our individual faiths are about. Neither is it about being rigid, regressive, dominant, tyrannical nor authoritarian.⁵⁸

After further legal proceedings initiated by the Catholic Church against the Court of Appeal judgment, the Federal Court decided that it would not grant leave to the Catholic Church to make its final appeal in the highest court in Malaysia. The decision was a unanimous vote by five judges; thus, the legal fight for the Catholic weekly *The Herald* finally ended.⁵⁹ The Archbishop of the Diocese of Kuala Lumpur issued a pastoral letter acknowledging the end of a long legal battle. He maintained the position that the church had correctly defended its right to “practice [its faith] unhindered” and that its challenge in court was reasonable since the government’s position “affects all *Bahasa*-speaking Christians in Malaysia.” He nonetheless exhorted Christians with the following words:

We must see with the eyes of faith and I believe we have gained much from this whole saga. We need to make a stand on the side of justice and truth. We need to protect the rights of the minority and the voiceless. We need to engage and to dialogue with the ignorant and bring about understanding. We need to

⁵⁷ Ida Lim, “Mixed-faith ‘solidarity gathering’ to protect Klang church from Muslim protesters,” in *The Malay Mail Online*, 5 January 2014, at www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/mixed-faith-solidarity-gathering-to-protect-klang-church-from-muslim-protesa, and Boo-Su Lynn, “At morning mass, non-Christians turn up with flowers,” in *The Malay Mail Online*, 5 January 2014, at www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/at-morning-mass-non-christians-turn-up-with-flowers.

⁵⁸ Azrul Mohd Khalib, “To my Muslim and non-Muslim brothers and sisters,” in *The Malay Mail Online*, 26 January 2010, at www.themalaymailonline.com/opinion/azrul-mohd-khalib/article/to-my-muslim-and-non-muslim-brothers-and-sisters.

⁵⁹ Celine Fernandez, “Malaysia’s Top Court: Catholic Newspaper Cannot Use ‘Allah,’” in *WSJ*, at www.wsj.com/articles/malaysias-top-court-catholic-newspaper-cannot-use-allah-1421845655, and Kate Mayberry, “Catholic Church ‘Allah’ Appeal Shot Down in Malaysia,” in *Aljazeera.Com*, at www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/01/catholic-church-150121100311536.html.

forgive and to reach out in love, especially to those who misunderstand and are misinformed. It is only love that conquers all and God is love.⁶⁰

In addition to reaffirming constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, Christian leaders like Archbishop Leow and like-minded Muslim voices pointed to the significance of the whole controversy for social solidarity in a religiously diverse society. Such appeals were made in the public sphere through a variety of channels such as the courts and the media, also interspersed with symbolic actions that offered a glimpse of what social solidarity that transcends ethno-religious centric interests looks like.

CLOSING REMARKS

In the field of interreligious studies, recent scholars have continued to feature the concepts of tolerance, dialogue and hospitality as important both analytically and normatively. In this essay, I point to the importance of such discourse, yet also of transcending it towards solidarity, particularly where unequal power relations feature strongly. Leirvik, for example, advocates the use of the concepts of tolerance, conscience and solidarity for religious education.⁶¹ Following Dussel, he also notes the value of solidarity as a globalized concept; according to Dussel, solidarity goes beyond mere tolerance and friendship but implies the responsibility for the Other, especially victims of injustice.⁶²

The Christian community in Malaysia claims that it is a victim of injustice due to the unreasonable actions of the government. The non-Muslim community and some like-minded Muslim voices express solidarity with the plight of the Christians over their right to the use the word “Allah” in their religious practice. In this controversy, solidarity may have begun to be reimagined by transcending ethnic and religious interests. Such imagination may perhaps be found in some of the sentiments expressed in the public discourse on the subject as well as in some of the symbolic actions enacted in public throughout the events around the “Allah” controversy.

⁶⁰ Julian Leow, “Pastoral Letter in Reference to the *Herald* Case,” at www.archkl.org/index.php/main-archbishop/pastoral-letters/402-pastoral-letter-in-reference-to-herald-case.

⁶¹ Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Interreligious Studies: A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 102.

⁶² See Enrique Dussel, “Deconstruction of the Concept of ‘Tolerance’. From Intolerance to Solidarity,” in *Constellations* 11/3 (2004), 326–33.

In Malaysia and also in a global context of religious and cultural plurality, religious communities are confronted with the challenge to contribute to healthy interreligious relations. Conflicts with a religious dimension seem inevitable, either due to rising religious extremism or the political use of religion; furthermore, we observe that religious controversies struggle to find resolution if we confine ourselves to politics and law. In fact, as shown in the public debate around the “Allah” controversy, once religion reenters the public sphere, we need to anticipate ambiguous and possibly messy and unintended consequences. However, such consequences also bring to light implicit assumptions, values and concerns that require real engagement beyond tolerance and understanding. A commitment to justice and solidarity provides a stronger normative ethic that may reshape the way we address these conceptual puzzles and also practical problems.

This suggests a move from merely reiterating our shared humanity—an approach that may gain some currency in religiously diverse settings in the short term. But in contexts where there are authoritarian tendencies and a lack of democratic participation and culture, we need to revisit the notion of human solidarity—solidarity with the weak, the victim and the marginalized of religious minorities—that needs equal attention. Attention to how solidarity is reimagined in this public discourse and demonstrations in the public space force us to reconsider our priorities or who should be prioritized in the midst of our efforts to solve the respective controversies. Reimagining solidarity through public discourse and shared symbolic actions that transcend ethno-religious centric interests suggest one way in which the Muslim majority and a non-Muslim minority such as Christians can move beyond an interreligious impasse arising out of controversies with a religious dimension, not only in Malaysia but also in other contexts where unequal power relations are likewise evident.

MYANMAR: RELIGIOUS PRESENCE IN THE PUBLIC SPACE AND INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

Saw Hlaing Bwa

Many people base the way in which they organize their lives on religion—both individually and publicly. While Buddhism plays a major role in Myanmar’s public life and political establishment, Myanmar is also a pluralistic country, where Christian, Hindu and Muslim communities coexist. Historically, relations among the different religious communities were marked by tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Nonetheless, since no religion is free of its political, social and national contexts, conflicts of interests arise in terms of doctrine, theology, tradition and practice. These usually occur in the public space and people who normally live together peacefully become antagonistic and violent toward one another. This traumatizes the entire society. Much depends on how we view diversity and handle conflict. Since recent conflicts in Myanmar escalated into the form of religiously motivated conflict, efforts have been made to redirect these conflicts toward creating an opportunity to develop healthy relationships between religious communities through interfaith dialogue.

BACKGROUND

The Union of Myanmar is the largest country in mainland South East Asia covering a total land area of 676 577 km². The population is estimated at over 53 million with a population growth of 1.8 percent. Myanmar is populated by as many as 135 ethnic groups with the Bamar (Burmans) forming the

largest ethnic group. Only twenty-five percent of the population resides in urban areas. Myanmar, a member of ASEAN since 1997, is strategically located between South Asia and Southeast Asia and geographically sandwiched between the two most populous nations in the world—China and India. The other neighbouring countries are Thailand in the southeast, Laos in the east and Bangladesh in the west.

The ethnic minorities are located in the border areas, in the rugged hills, steep gorges and mountainous areas; this has resulted in their socio-cultural, economic and even political isolation from the rest of Myanmar. There are eight major ethnic groups: Kachin, Kayin, Kayah, Chin, Mon, Bamar, Rakhine and Shan. The Bamar, comprise 70 percent of the population, the Karen 9 percent, the Shan 8 percent, the Rakhine 5 percent, the Mon 2.5 percent, the Chin 2.5 percent and the Kachin 2 percent. It is estimated that 80.1 percent of the population are Buddhist, 7.8 percent Christian, 4 percent Muslim, 1.7 percent Hindu, 5.8 percent adherents of traditional religions and 0.2 percent others. Although there are increasing numbers of Christians among the non-Burman ethnic minorities, there is an overall decline in the number of Christians, especially among the Karen, because so many churches have been destroyed in the conflict-affected areas. Other ethnic groups such as the Burman, Mon, Rakhine, Shan and Karen remain strong adherents of Buddhism.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

Human beings are not only social and political beings, but also religious beings. Religion plays a vital role in the embodiment of human rights since religious beliefs are fundamental to the way in which many people organize their lives and develop their cultural, social, moral, educational, political and economic life—the basis of civilization. This is true for the people of Myanmar, where Buddhism plays a foundational role in the development of Burmese civilization and Christianity shapes the embodiment of the identity and the life of the ethnic minorities. In Myanmar religion is not only a private and personal matter, but also a visible, decisive power inseparable in people's public life. Reducing the role of religion to the ceremonial and restricting it to one of the many aspects of human life would miss the mark; religions contribute to a life in dignity and freedom. The type of freedom religions offer is the freedom to life; the freedom from fear of being oppressed, discriminated against and exploited by those in power; the freedom from egoism that discriminates and denies the freedom of the other; the freedom that comes with responsibility to God, to oneself and to others. Human rights are human responsibilities; they make possible the meaningful freedom powered by religions.

The freedom of religion is fundamental for a humane and harmonious society. In today's globalized world, there is no society with only one true religion. Modern society is graced by many true religions with different expressions of the truth; they are easily abused and manipulated. The diversity of religious faiths, expressions and practices could easily fall prey to the power of domination that uses the public space for its own self-interest—whether this be the media, technology or cultural, economic, military and political interests. Since a particular religion could be tempted to let itself be used and abused for its own interest—doctrinal, institutional or nationalistic—religion and politics could form either a holy or unholy alliance that unleashes either a power of social control or a power that liberates. This is the case not only in Western history, but also in the history of Myanmar today.

Various human rights reports reveal violations of religious freedom and human rights in Myanmar, despite some new openings and hope for a transition to democracy. The controversial 2008 constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar allegedly echoes the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion and Belief. However, it is still a long way from meaningfully embodying the essence of human rights and religious freedom and to guarantee such by formulating and enforcing the appropriate laws, mechanisms and instruments. This is so because of the seed of sin that is already woven into the constitution, according to which Buddhism has the status of a favored religion, a privileged position and power alongside the military to dominate and control the public space. The favoritism bestowed on the military and religious nationalism paved the way for the maneuvering of political power and systematic discrimination, which has led to the silencing and neutralizing of the ethno-religious minorities. This is based on the misconception that the majority is always right and possesses the inalienable right to have control over the minority in order to keep the country united and stable. This is evinced by the fact that the dominant ruling power, in collaboration with the religious nationalistic majority, creates fear in people's minds by giving hate speeches against the religious other. This is supported by totally unrealistic assumptions and stories that the country's 80.1 percent religious majority will be overwhelmed and disappear because of the rapidly growing population among the religious minority (four percent) over the next few decades.

Hence, old wounds were reopened and the resurgence of communal violence resulted in the speedy drafting of four bills on the protection of race and religion in order to protect the religious majority. These laws, the Religious Conversion Law, Interfaith Marriage Law, Population Control Law and Monogamy Law, were passed by parliament and came into effect,

despite serious objections from women networks and over hundred civil society organizations, including the minority religious organizations. They pointed out that there will be further discrimination in addition to the current segregation and that these laws simply provide a mechanism to control the rights of the Buddhists, rather than to protect the religious minorities. The ethnic religious minorities also fear that increasingly there will be severe persecution, depending on the interpretation and implementation of these laws that quasi legalize discrimination and the violation of human rights and the freedom of religions. They give license to dominate rather than to liberate and to serve as a platform for religious harmony and national reconciliation.

These laws are intentionally meant as face-saving instruments to camouflage the discrimination and violation of human rights in other areas of the country. Since the 2008 constitution of the Union of Myanmar forbids the abuse of religion for the purpose of politics, imposing these laws constitutes a breach of the constitution. Religion is being politicized as an effective weapon of social and political control in order to divert public attention from such major issues as:

- The uncertain transition to a guided democracy and an amendment of the constitution in order to pave the way to federalism that could guarantee national reconciliation and sustainable peace
- Increasing military expenditure and the unnecessary creation of armed conflict during national peace talks. At the same time, the attempt to achieve a ceasefire in order to have the upper hand and systematically to eliminate the rights of ethnic minorities and to control their habitats and the country's natural resources
- Human rights violations
- Steadily worsening plight of the poor due to nationwide land grabbing by the military and their collaborators
- Human trafficking affecting mostly women and children
- Absence of the rule of law and corruption of those who enforce the law
- Intolerance and hate speeches—abuse of religion for national and political benefit
- Discrimination on the grounds of race and religion in government services

- Lack of civic education and critical thinking at the grass roots
- Lack of transparency—unjust management of natural resources and megaprojects that are of little or no benefit to the local population.

The lack of recognition of and respect for the existence, values, rights and contributions of the other have resulted in the use of violence and the solving of problems by force for over half a century. There is no glimpse of hope that there will be an imminent change of mindset, behavior and practice. This is evinced by the handling of the increasing numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Rakhine, Kachin, Shan and Karen and other parts of the country and the brutal suppression and unjust convictions of the students who led the national education reform movement and other leading social activists, including journalists and prominent religious figures, such as, for example, the recent raiding of the Maha Thandhithukha Monastery.

Religious intolerance is not unique to Myanmar; it is a global phenomenon. In order to overcome the current abuse of religion, discrimination and intolerance, we need the cooperation of the international community and the media in order to

- Strengthen mutual trust, understanding and cooperation of religious leaders through interfaith dialogue
- Positively engage the regime at various levels, to learn lessons from other countries and to develop appropriate legal mechanisms and democratic practices for the protection of the rights and freedom of the religious minority
- Educate the grass roots in civic awareness and pluralism to broaden their perception of identity, nationalism and provide a sense of security so that each and everyone in the society may be free from all fear and coercion.

Instead of playing a blaming game, all parties involved should together strive for short- and long-term solutions. Since there is no one right answer to such complicated issues, the burden of responsibility cannot only be left to the government. Every stakeholder should respect and recognize the value and contribution of the different voices and a platform of interfaith cooperation should be created in order to find a sustainable solution in Myanmar.

TOWARDS A PEACEFUL AND HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

Sociology defines society as “a group of people who share a common culture, occupy a common territory, and feel themselves to constitute a unified and distinct entity.”¹ It is a system of human organization generating distinctive cultural patterns and institutions and usually provides protection, security, continuity and a national identity for its members. However, as human society becomes more pluralistic in the age of globalization, there is a need to expand our understanding of society as “a complex system or network of relationships within which most of the humanity lives.”² In today’s world, no society is a monolithic culture: we live in societies made up of many different ethnic and racial affiliations, religions and beliefs, social status and vocational varieties, economic activities, political aspirations and educational levels. Each and everyone has their respective experience and history. Different “sub-societies” characterize every society and diversity and plurality become a reality. Without the recognition of and willingness to embrace, appreciate and celebrate the reality and the value of diversity there will always be conflicts within the society in which we share our common existence. Since we are human, conflict will be always with us. At the individual level, conflict is within us because we are beings of flesh and blood and much depends on how we regard and approach conflict. Conflict arises there where there are differences of mindsets, opinions, interests, values, concepts, beliefs, behavior and ways in which we try to solve conflict.

In diverse and plural societies, with relational systems and networks of differences, conflict becomes unavoidable. Conflict always has two dimensions: the negative and the positive dimension, depending on its dynamics and how we deal with it. On the negative side, it can lead to a divisive, destructive life, eliminating the values, dignity and the right of the other to exist. Hence, it destroys the harmony and cohesiveness of a society and finally leads to the destruction of ourselves. This is the conflict that originates in our self-interest and develops a defensive mechanism for the promotion and protection of our cause at the expense of the cause of the other. It is deeply rooted in our mental image of the other that creates fear, suspicion, mistrust and hostility: in short, the enemy image that we have created of the other. In Buddhism, it is a conflict driven by ignorance (*avijjā*) and a craving or attachment (*taṇhā*). In Christianity, it is a conflict

¹ Gordon Marshall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 498.

² Frank W. Bealey, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Political Science* (Oxford, UK; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 305.

driven by the sin of egoism. Generalizing somewhat we can say that almost all conflicts have this kind of negative dimension that leads to suffering (*dukkha*) and that needs to be transformed into a positive dimension by the enlightening truth (*dharma*).

Conflict can also have a positive dimension that leads us to a better life and a better and healthier society where peace, justice and harmony reign. This occurs when we see conflict as an opportunity, a platform for walking together on a journey of dialogue and coming to a mutual understanding based on a shared vision. We need conflict management, a dialogue, in order to transform conflict and redirect it as a driving force toward a more constructive, harmonious and healthy society. Managing, transforming and redirecting conflict in order to yield a more positive and constructive effect is impossible if we stick to our old mental models, yesterday's so-called dualistic and hierarchical mindset based on compartmentalization, separation, segregation, discrimination. Dualistic thinking recognizes differences as opposites: it creates an antagonism that fights against and destroys the other without taking into account the mutual relationship, the interconnectedness of things that mutually enrich each other. Albert Einstein once said, "No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world anew."³ Dualism and hierarchy try to establish unity in terms of uniformity that eliminates differences. This can be seen in the history of almost all societies and religions. History should be learned, not repeated.

In light of the above, a harmonious society can no longer be defined as a public space in which there are no problems and conflicts, a kind of monolithic, uniform space that does not take into account the uniqueness of the other. The only way to achieve this is by means of force, coercion, exclusion or absorption.

A harmonious society can also be depicted as a public space where everyone coexists peacefully, according to their own aspirations, and without violent interference in the affairs of the other. This concept is often the result of war and conflict and the solution thereto. In this case, peaceful coexistence can simply mean non-participation, non-interference, non-intervention, in other words, a complete separation of the different factions. To my mind this passive coexistence is the opposite of harmony, because peace, justice and harmony cannot be secured simply by means of coexistence without acknowledging, appreciating, accepting and constructively engaging with the existence and the value of the other. Throughout Myanmar's history until today people of different religions and cultures

³ Quoted according to Bela H. Banathy, "Developing a Systems View of Education," in *Educational Technology* (June 1995).

have coexisted without any meaningful interaction and without properly understanding the religious beliefs, practices and cultural values of the other. People live side-by-side without together building one nation. This type of coexistence can succumb to fear, misunderstanding, suspicion and hatred which, in turn, can lead to violence. In order for society to be harmonious it is therefore not enough simply to coexist peacefully but passively. What is needed is a shift toward “pro-existence,” “pro-life.” This can be achieved by actively building healthy relationships in the public space that affirm the right to life of all in mutual understanding, respect and trust and that can fully protect us from any divisive and life destructive forces.

The concept of tolerance goes hand in hand with the concept of peaceful coexistence. The people of Myanmar pride themselves as being very tolerant and tolerance is sometimes understood as being synonymous with patience. While tolerance can help establish peaceful coexistence it has its limitations. It is conditional and therefore cannot secure a sustainable harmony. Coexistence based on tolerance has its limitations. This does not mean that people do not need to tolerate one another but a constructive engagement is needed to transform differences into strength and diversity into harmony and thus to create a healthy public space.

In the context of different ways of understanding religious tolerance, the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief should provide the basis for us to create a common platform. The General Assembly of the United Nation stated that that it considered “to promote understanding, tolerance, and respect in matters relating to freedom of religion and belief”⁴ as being essential and that it was resolved “to adopt all necessary measures for the speedy elimination of such intolerance in all forms and manifestation and prevent and combat discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief.”⁵ Article 2:2 of the Declaration, states that

For the purpose of the present Declaration, the expression “intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief” means any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on religion and belief and having as its purpose or as its effect nullification of impairment of the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis.⁶

⁴ United Nations General Assembly, *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, A/RES/36/55, 25 November 1981, www.un.org/documents/ga/res/36/a36r055.htm.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Religious tolerance comprises recognizing, appreciating and accepting the value and freedom of the other. This corresponds to the Christian belief that all human beings are created in the image of God with equal dignity, freedom and responsibility, despite their many differences. Difference and diversity, if embraced and celebrated, are the different faces of God's image and as such manifest the richness and beauty of creation in which we all share and participate. Religious tolerance should therefore not be blind, passive and naive, but firmly grounded in our conscious faith. Mere tolerance without the thorough knowledge, recognition, appreciation and acceptance of the distinctiveness and value of the other in the public space is not enough to promote peace, harmony, stability and to support the sustainability of creation; it is merely a passive tolerance. Active religious tolerance is theologically sound and based on our spiritual value of love and justice. In Buddhism, it is the spiritual value based on four *brahma vihara*: *metta* (loving kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudhita* (sympathetic joy) and *uppekkha* (equanimity). Tolerance does not mean ignorance that neglects or ignores the other's values. It is not indifferent but constructively engages the other, leading toward mutual understanding, respect and trust. It is a healthy attitude in search of a deeper truth on the journey of life. Intolerance, which is contrary to the basic values of religion, leads to discrimination, extremism and violence; it destroys the other and, consequently, is self-destructive.

Tolerance comprises forgiveness not only at the personal but also at the social and national levels. Its power of transformation has to be nurtured, especially at these times of misunderstanding, distrust and the risk of destroying each other in the name of protecting race and religion in Myanmar. In this context, a tricky misconception of majority and minority relations plays a substantial role. It includes the wish to dominate the other because of the fear of being dominated, and the false illusive conception of security. For over half a century, the fear of being dominated by the other and certain misconceptions of the other have been cultivated by the military as have intolerance and the inability to forgive. During the transition to democracy, the people of Myanmar experienced the danger of a culture of fear that results in people abandoning their dignity and humanity and surrendering their freedom and rights and even their religious values. Fear and suspicion turn religious tolerance, the essence of religious love, into a religious myth and illusive truth, and forgiveness into a trait of cowardice. As victims, suffocated by fear, insecurity and suspicion, people seek false security in the power of violence and aggression while the rule of law provides no succor for the powerless. Hence, in our daily lives, we have lost trust in the other.

We are in desperate need of an interfaith religiosity or interfaith spirituality in the public space. Interfaith spirituality is the driving force that allows religions, like a tree, to prosper in different directions in the freedom of the open air (*pneuma*), while harmoniously providing spiritual fruits for the whole world, regardless of creed, gender, race and class. This is not a dream but, rather, the concrete experience of the reality grounded in our common humanity. The awareness and aspiration of our common humanity, suffering, struggle, issues and hope, although differently defined, expressed and interpreted, draw us into interreligious dialogue and interfaith spirituality in the hope that they may become the major driving force for peace so desperately needed in the world today.

THE NEED FOR INTERFAITH SPIRITUALITY IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

In the context of religious plurality, dialogue means “all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths, which are directed at mutual understanding and mutual enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom.”⁷

Interfaith dialogue is a response to religious plurality and diversity in the public space. As mobility increases and communication becomes easier and more rapid, today’s globalized world becomes increasingly religiously plural and dialogue has become an imperative. This issue driven dialogue seeks to provide joint responses to the global issues we face. But before we address the external motivation for engaging in dialogue, the Buddhists remind us that we need to find our internal motivation to engage in dialogue in order to reach out to others—“being at peace before doing peace” (Thich Nhat Hanh). This reminds us of Jesus’ teaching to love God, so that we can love our neighbors as ourselves. Before we enter into dialogue with others, we need to realize that our very self is a dialogical self. According to the Buddhist teaching of *anattā* there is no autonomous self but only the relational self, a dialogical self of “inter-being.” Our being is always “being-with” (Paul Tillich) as we build a relationship with “the Other” as well as with others. The Other, the Ultimate, whom we call God, is the dialogical God, the Inter-Being, who is in continuous dialogue not only with Christians but with all other faith traditions throughout the history of human relations in the public space. And this is the basis of

⁷ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, Rome, 19 May 1991, at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html.

the interfaith dialogue in which we open up to let the other speak to and communicate with us.

The inner motivation helps us to deal with the external motivation. Conflict-driven dialogue focuses on three areas: pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict. In other words, the prevention of conflict, the reduction and transformation of conflict and the healing of trauma. Does this imply that when there is no conflict, there is no need for dialogue? Although we do not want conflict and feel uncomfortable with conflict, in reality, conflict is and will always be with us. It is a part of our lives and we have to live with it; it is unavoidable. We should see a positive dimension of conflict in our everyday lives. A life without encountering conflict would deprive us of creative energy, impetus for progress and the opportunity to deepen our experiences and broaden our horizons. It is crucial that we can deal with the emotions that arise in ourselves and in others when faced with conflict. Avoiding conflict creates indifference, unhealthy relations and the neglect of the other, including the Ultimate Other. This does not solve the problem, because conflict serves as a platform. It forces us to come out of our shells and to relate to others in the public space in order together to create a healthy harmonious dialogical space. We must not forget that conflict has a creative potential—conflict as the outcome of the creative power to transform chaos to cosmos, without doing away with chaos, but living creatively with the residual chaos. The history of Christianity is a history of dialogue with other religions and philosophies, embracing conflict and growing with conflict. In this sense dialogue becomes a creative power of transformation that unlocks the door to an open future in which all can celebrate the fullness of life.

Whenever we encounter religious pluralism, we feel the threat of the other because we do not yet realize our inner relational self that always drives us into a dialogical self in the public space. If we are unaware of our dialogical self, a conflict driven dialogue could intentionally or unintentionally lead us to the negation of the other in order to do away with conflict. Negating the other means conceiving of a world free from conflict. However, in reality, in doing so, conflict breeds conflict that drags us into an endless vicious circle of conflict. In Buddhism, *sa sāra* is a conflict driven cycle of life regarded as suffering (*dhukkha*). The cause of any conflict lies in the extreme attachment to certain views (exclusivism) and the core of Buddha's teaching is of great help here. In addition to being transient, all phenomena arise and disappear according to a complex set of conditions (*pratīyasamutpāda*). When we apply this truth to conflict, we can give up a simplistic, dualistic mindset in and through which conflict is usually described and perpetuated. Views about the “good” and the “bad,” the “true” and the “false,” the “right” and the “wrong” in an absolute sense simply

do not correspond to reality. Seeing issues from an absolute perspective has to do with the attachment to the “dualism” of perspective.

We therefore need to take another look at conflict; this will help us to have a healthy dialogue without negating the other but, rather, preserving the other and to maintain the creative-tension, balance and harmony of the self and the self-other.⁸ This is the *mijjimapatipada*, the middle way, not a compromise but, rather, a transcendent way, described as *ariya attangika magga*, the Noble Eightfold Path, with its three essential characteristics: *sīla*, ethical conduct (right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort); *samādhi*, meditation, or concentration (right mindfulness, right concentration); and *paññā* wisdom (right understanding, right intention) arising from a pure heart or mind. Living a life of the Noble Eightfold Path is a transcendental dialogical life that equips us with *upekkhā*, non-attached equanimity. It avoids all such extremes as centrism that leads toward polarization and is detrimental to a healthy dialogue and a dialogical life in all its fullness. Transcendental dialogue, the dialogue of the middle way, engages and transforms conflict with a transcendent mind and unattached love (*agape*). It does not seek its own security, but security for all so that all may be free from the fear of losing their own identity in dialogue. It transforms the other into a friend and creates a healthy pluralism, which

⁸ The concept of the “other” is commonly understood as a social construction of the self contrasting to and different from the self—a process of dichotomization in identity building. However, since no self autonomously exists in isolation from the differently other selves in a society (being is always being-with, Paul Tillich), the self and the other cannot be separated radically as in the case of dualism that ignores the interaction and the interconnectedness of things. In reality, the “other” is non other than the self-created other, i.e., the otherness of the self, and since all self is the relational self, my expression of the “self-other” is an attempt that relegates the concept of autonomous self in favor of the relational self, which is in line with the Buddhist concept of the inter-relatedness of all beings, as well as the biblical notion that the other is no other than the self (this is the bone of my bone, the flesh of my flesh Gen 2:23). Here, a sharp dichotomizing of the other with the self is broken down, and with the concept of the relational self, the recognition of the other as the self-other is made possible. Indeed, the self is made manifest or realized in and through the other, because the other is no more than the self-other. The concept of the self-other in my articulation is the middle way that transcends both the rigidity of the self and the fixity of the other leading towards extreme polarisation. This can be understood theologically as well from the Trinitarian relational perspective that the Son as the self-other of the Father, the Father as the self-other of the Son. The Son as the self-other of the Spirit, and the Spirit as the self-other of the Son, the Father as the self-other of the Spirit and the Spirit as the self-other of the Father.

does not run into monism or self-contained ethnic identities, but embraces difference for one's own enrichment.

CONCLUSION

The only way to overcome fear, insecurity, suspicion and distrust in the public space is to come out of one's own shell, to break out of our ghettos and to build bridges through transcendental interfaith dialogue in order to promote a culture of positive religious tolerance. As the prominent theologian Hans Küng said, there will be no peace in the world without peace among religions. Furthermore, there will be no peace among religions without interfaith dialogue and no interfaith dialogue without the willingness to dialogue with one another. In recent years, there has been a growing willingness to dialogue. At an academic interfaith conference, co-organized by the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), Sitagu International Buddhist Academy, the Catholic Bishop Conference of Myanmar and the Myanmar Council of Churches, religious leaders, civil society leaders, government officials and international scholars met to create a platform for mutual sharing on "Security, Peace and Coexistence" (1-2 October 2013). Since 2003, the Judson Research Center of the Myanmar Institute of Theology, has been making assiduous efforts to introduce and promote interfaith dialogue and has jointly conducted academic Buddhist-Christian dialogues with the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University under the themes "Towards a better Harmonious Society through Buddhist-Christian Dialogue" (30 October 2011); "Loving Kindness" (29 August 2014); "A Critical Appraisal of Reconciliation from the Buddhist and Christian Perspectives" (28 August 2015). This ongoing process is gathering momentum. The Judson Research Center of MIT conducts annual, certified courses in interfaith dialogue to promote interfaith awareness and skills for churches and community leaders. At the practical level, the interreligious organization Religions for Peace in Myanmar Network, promotes the rights of children. On 19 January 2014, Religion for Peace (Myanmar), in collaboration with the Program on Peace Building and Rights of Columbia University, the Sitagu International Buddhist Academy and the Judson Research Center of the Myanmar Institute of Theology, conducted a conference on "Interfaith Dialogue: The Religious Roots of Social Harmony." The Myanmar Peace Center, while serving as a platform for political dialogue, developed a Center for Diversity and National Harmony, under the leadership of Dr Kyaw Yin Hlaing, and convened the first inaugural event on "Religious Tolerance" (31 January 2015). In July 2015, an interfaith conference was organized by the Interfaith Dialogue

Group Myanmar in cooperation with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) on the theme of “Strengthening the Relationship of all Faiths.” Various interfaith groups led by respected religious leaders have recently emerged in some major townships such as Yangon, Mandalay, Lashio, Taungyi in order to attempt to prevent communal violence. Young people, members of ten socially engaged groups, have organized themselves into a consortium called *Myetasetwaing* (the Circle of Love), that focuses on the introduction and promotion of interfaith dialogue among the grass roots and promotes a culture of religious tolerance for positive social change in various fields. In combating a powerful movement, which propagates hate speeches that create religious intolerance, the young generation is now becoming aware of the importance of religious tolerance based on the value of pluralism in the public space. There are active peace movements and campaigns against the abuse of religions for political purposes and movements of courageous groups of young people such as *Pan-Sagar* (flower language) and musicians such as Saw Poe Khwar. They promote love speeches among the grass roots and there are promising signs that religious tolerance and the culture of dialogue are being fostered in the public space in Myanmar.

COMMUNIQUÉ

INTERFAITH CONSULTATION “RELIGIOUS LIFE AND PUBLIC SPACE IN ASIA”

*Lutheran World Federation/Tao Fong Shan Christian Center/
Areopagos. 3-7 September 2015, Hong Kong, China*

The fundamental question discussed was how the church can exercise its prophetic voice and active participation in public venues. How can the church and individual Christians listen deeply, learn carefully and speak influentially from their theological and spiritual resources, addressing the compelling issues specific to the context in which they exist? This question has taken on greater urgency in the twenty-first century, with its vibrant media cultures, and it seems clear that the church cannot restrict its role and place to the personal, individual, private sphere, abdicating its responsibility for the public, communal, political realms. The simple reason for this is that being Christian does not affect merely one part of an individual; instead, our relationship to God affects all of who we are. Therefore, the church must engage in all aspects of human life and society.

WHY HONG KONG?

Because of its history and its location, Hong Kong has a dynamic hybrid identity. A key factor for choosing Hong Kong for this consultation was the Umbrella Movement and its lingering effects. This movement began in September 2014, as a form of protest, demanding that the Chinese government honor its promise to implement universal suffrage. In this context, “suffrage” does not refer to the right to vote, but to the candidates themselves, and the government’s promise that in the election there would be

a genuinely diverse slate of candidates without screening. The emphasis here is on democracy and the demand for the democratization of the political process in Hong Kong.

In the face of this unprecedented protest, the churches in Hong Kong had to react, and many individual congregations struggled to get involved. The churches were divided, different denominations or even individuals within a specific congregation had a wide range of responses: positive, negative or indifferent. This was true for other religious communities as well; and these diverse responses made clear how important it is for the church to wrestle with its role and place in public discourses, and the nature of its response to contested political and social issues.

KEY POINTS

In light of this, one of the salient questions raised concerned the relationship between religious communities, political authorities and society at large. Obviously, this relationship varies greatly from country to country, and different religions have different legal and social standings. For example, vulnerable migrant communities often do not share the privileges of the predominant populations. Often this is due to legal constraints imposed by governments.

Looking at the Christian context in particular, while some Christians argue that the church must be active in the political sphere, the temptation of churches to identify with the powers of the state must also be acknowledged. This is an important challenge that the church needs to wrestle with in every context: What is its relationship to the state, and how does it engage constructively and faithfully in the political sphere? A balance must be struck between working collaboratively with political structures, while also maintaining a critical stance and a prophetic witness. Also, the church does not speak in public spaces on its own, but stands with other religions; there is a need to negotiate interfaith relationships in public spaces as well. One positive example of this comes from the Indian context in the constructive interreligious response to the increased violence against women, including challenging the use of rape as a tool of shame and terror.

We recognize the need to be more creative theologically and look deeply into our own traditions to find relevant theological and spiritual resources that can be used to build bridges with other religions, rather than dividing us. An example of this was a conversation around the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Such work encourages a holistic view of salvation that facilitates and promotes Christian engagement with society and with other religions. This includes conversation with individuals who

do not self-identify with any specific religious tradition but still want to be part of the conversation.

We affirm the importance of what has been called a “dialogue of life.” This dialogue occurs spontaneously at the grassroots level, and brings community members together around specific social issues. These dialogues can challenge or confront violence, xenophobia, racism, discrimination, corruption and climate change, particularly when we learn from victims who suffer from such injustices. These dialogues enable disadvantaged populations to claim their voice and influence the discourse. In this process, we make neighbors out of strangers in spite of very different religious beliefs.

Even though many churches and individuals value harmony, we also acknowledge the reality that sometimes conflict can be an opportunity, sparking theological creativity and depth. In some cases, queer readings of Scripture can empower marginalized communities (as well as the religious majorities) to see God at work in their midst. These readings themselves can be examples of conflict that invite more profound understandings of Scripture. In other cases, when religious communities defend the rights of religious others in situations of controversy as citizens of a shared public space, they transcend ethno-religious centrism by reimagining solidarity.

We affirm the commitment to interreligious dialogue; therefore, the consultation also included visits to a local mosque, gurdwara and Chinese temple, as well as conversations with local Daoist, Muslim and Confucian leaders. We were shown great hospitality and generosity, reminding us of the importance of these virtues in public discourse. This consultation provided an open forum for conversation, intentionally including youth voices, which is particularly valuable in the Asian context. We support the creation of other open, safe places around the world where transformative conversations can continue. Finally, we also were reminded of the urgency of doing theology not only with our heads but with our hearts and bodies, fully engaged in the world.

The thirty participants in the consultation came from China, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Norway, Philippines, Sweden and United States of America.

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In today's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Asian contexts, religious plurality is one of the hallmarks of many societies. This book provides new insights into the current realities of religious life in Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and Myanmar, highlights the influence of religious commitment on the public space, and examines how Christian theology engages with contemporary realities in Asia. Christian theologians of different denominations offer fascinating theological reflections on justification, salvation, the Holy Spirit and the Trinity, and discuss interactions within and between Asian societies as well as with the world at large.

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