Discovering and Recovering Peace Praxis in Christian Education

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Peace as an Elusive Dream

It is needless to say that we live in a time of so much un-peace. Many happenings around us point to the lack of peace and, as a matter of fact, to a state of utter hopelessness and despair.

We continue to experience the negative impact of globalization—sometimes benefiting from it, but at other times perpetrating the unjust system behind the flows of people, information and capital, which characterize this phenomenon. While promoters of globalization proudly say that through this the world has become a global village, it is but a village that does not really know or care about each other's welfare. For many peoples in Asia, the system behind globalization is unjust for it only widens the gap between the rich and the poor; it benefits only a few and impoverishes the greater majority. We either benefit from or perpetrate the negative impact of globalization depending on where we are located in the economic continuum between the rich, capital-holding and investing countries on the one hand and the poor, cheap labor-providing countries on the other hand.

We continue to face the lingering conflicts in our Asian region that erupt time and again into violence. These can be conflicts related to ethnic issues (as in Sri Lanka and Myanmar), religious issues (as in parts of Indonesia and southern Philippines), ideological (as in the Korean peninsula), security and sovereignty (as with Taiwan and China, India and Pakistan), political (as in Myanmar and the Philippines) and economic issues (which actually run through all the places). I have taken the risk of simplifying the issues but in reality, they are not really separate but are all intertwined. In fact, at the root of most conflicts and violence could very well be economic and political issues but which often get covered or coated by ethnic and religious differences. Nevertheless, what affects one part of the region affects the whole.

We are now experiencing in greater intensity the depredation and devastation of the natural environment - as shown through the increasing signs of climate change, global warming, the "greenhouse effect" in the world's atmosphere, and the diminishing (non-sustainability) of much of the earth's resources. As nature seems to hurl its frustration upon us through one disaster after another, and even through the emergence of one virus after another, we

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cannot help but realize that we have not really *mastered* God's entrusted creation. I take the meaning of "not having mastered" as not fully understanding the potential and the limits of creation and of our responsibility and task as stewards or trustees of it.

We also realize that our countries in Asia are being used as pawns in this big global machinery called empire-building, led by the most powerful countries of the world. They have waged their so-called war on terror, initially as a reaction to the events of September 11, 2001 or the so-called terrorist acts committed in the United States of America. But much analyses point to the root cause of this war on terror—not only as a response to 9/11 but really, even before 9/11, out of the desire to promote the machinery of globalization and to ensure the control of power (represented by military might) and money or profit (represented by oil) all over the world.[2] Yet, if it takes one to know one—how can empire-building leader George W. Bush clearly point out what is terrorism and who is a terrorist? Unfortunately he uses religious language and symbols (i.e. from Christianity) to provide the cover for his empire-building spree in order to justify his deadly games, including the production, use and distribution, as well as control of weapons of mass destruction, and his aggressive attacks on nations and countries that dare to go against his wishes. With this empire-building machinery going on, the so-called "global village" has been turned into the cowboys' war field, and we (peoples of Asia) have not only been forced to become unwilling onlookers and bystanders but, worse, we are conscripted as allies/friends, if not condemned as foes/enemies (e.g. axis of evil). What the Dutch-American social justice and peace advocate A. J. Muste said many years ago seems to describe our own context and time today: "the economic, social and political order in which we live was built up largely by violence, is now being extended by violence and is maintained by violence."[3] Indian social analyst Ninan Koshy said that globalization and the war on terror are but two sides of the same coin—they are the faces of the global economic, social and political order which is built and sustained by violence. They are the faces of the current empire that we now have to deal with.

Kai Frithjof Brand-Jacobsen, the co-director of TRANSCEND, a global on-line peace university, describes conflict in relation to violence this way:

> Conflicts, like life and breathing, are natural. Whatever our culture, generation, gender, nationality, politics, beliefs, whether we live in cities or rural areas, whether we come from the global south or the global north, are rich or poor, we have all experienced and experience conflicts. Violence is what happens when we have systematically failed to deal with conflicts constructively, when we have mismanaged and ignored them, when we have developed deeply unequal, destructive and unjust social, economic and political systems, when we have invested systematically in developing, maintaining and promoting the institutions and use of violence, and/

[2] Ninan Koshy, "The War on Terror", in CCA News, Vol. 37, No. 1 (March 2002), pp. 20, 22-23. See also Arundhati Roy's *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2005).
[3] Quoted by Kai Frithjof Brand-Jacobsen [www.transcend.org], in "Peace Studies, Peace Movements, Peace Praxis," accessed at http://www.transcend.org/t_database/articles.php?ida=505 on 29 April 2007.
[4] Kai Frithjof Brand-Jacobsen, "Peace Studies, Peace Movements, Peace Praxis," accessed at http://www.transcend.org/t_database/articles.php?ida=505 on 29 April 2007.

or when we have identified violence as a means for achieving our goals.[4]

So conflict and violence are not the same thing. Conflicts are natural parts or aspects of life. But conflicts often erupt in violence when people are not able to deal with conflicts constructively or positively.

More recently, we were shocked by the news of how a 20-year old Cho Seung-Hui (who is very much a part of us in Asia), child of a Korean immigrant family in the USA, carried out a series of killing (including himself in the end) at Virginia Tech where he was a sophomore biology major. In a special report on "The Anatomy of Violence," *Newsweek* pointed to pathological genes, disturbed mind, social isolation, gun culture, and individual will[5] as among the factors that could have influenced Cho's action. The report disclosed what Cho mentioned in a video he sent to NBC in between the killings, "You thought it was one pathetic boy's life you were extinguishing. Thanks to you, I die like Jesus Christ, to inspire generations of the weak and the defenseless people." What happened to Cho serves to us as a glaring mirror of the lack of peace within just as there is a glaring lack of the same outside us. People use different coping mechanisms—some unfortunately leaning towards more violence.

These are just a few among the many signs of the lack of peace in our Asian region and throughout the world today. It is against this backdrop that I raise the question, "Is peace an elusive dream?" For the more we long and work for peace, the more it seems to be far from our reach. By peace of course I do not just mean the absence of conflict—but a state of living where justice is upheld in order to ensure the wholeness and fullness of life of everyone. Thus, peace has personal and social, internal and external dimensions. One can experience inner peace inside oneself when one knows that he or she deserves a world much better than what we live in now. But this is not the passive peace that looks to the after-life or the next life in order to have peace. It is an active peace that prods one to be involved in the struggle to help achieve that peace right here and now. So in fact, that sense of inner peace can also lead to some kind of restlessness, of discomfort with the way things are—and hopefully lead to more positive action for change and transformation.

Although peace seems to be an elusive dream, it is the hope for peace that gives us the inspiration, will and determination to pursue it. The dream or vision of an alternative world that is much better than what we know now is in itself uplifting, inspiring and empowering. Archie C. C. Lee, an Old Testament scholar from Hong Kong who is into cross-textual reading of religious scriptures, illustrated this point so well in his theme presentation during the Fifth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS V) held in August 2006 in Hong Kong. Thus, he spoke of the need to uphold and share various religious sources on utopian imagination:

> In a world desperately crying for hope in the midst of human suffering and oppression the powerful prophetic voices of the Bible and the various non-biblical resources on utopian imagination from our respective cultures should be upheld and shared. We must open up our minds and let the outcries and aspirations of our

[5] Sharon Begley, "The Anatomy of Violence," in Newsweek (April 30, 2007), 24-30.

[6] Archie C. C. Lee, "Naming the Divine in Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Sharing Hope in a New World," a paper presented at the Fifth Congress of Asian Theologians in Hong Kong on 20-26 August 2006. This paper will be published in a forthcoming edition of *CTC Bulletin*.

people stretch our imagination and inform our social actions.[6]

The Role of Religion in Attaining Peace

Although many followers of most, if not all, religions claim that their respective religions are bearers of, if not pathways to peace, many have also witnessed the role of religions in fomenting conflict and instigating violence. In his book, *Understanding Religious Violence: Thinking Outside the Box on Terrorism*, terrorism specialist J. P. Larsson analyzes the role that religion has played throughout human history. Larsson observes that religion sometimes can be the "most potent of all sources of war." He rightly observes that in every religious tradition, religion has probably "caused more warfare than it has prevented" whether by giving an otherworldly assurance of victory or a glorification and justification of an otherwise unjustifiable violence.[7] Come to think about it, Christianity as a religion is not exempted from this actuality.

Xue Yu, a Buddhist professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong whose research interest is on religious dialogue, spoke on the relationship between religion and violent conflict during the interfaith panel at the Fifth Congress of Asian Theologians in Hong Kong in August 2006. He said:

> Religion and violent conflict are sometimes seen as twins as they are closely connected with each other. Religion can be the source of war and war can be waged for the sake of religion. Religious violence currently rampaged in the Middle East, which is predicted as the site for the Fourth World War (after two world wars and a cold war), reveals this connectedness: that war may be resorted to in order to solve religious differences and religion can inspire people to go to war due to such differences.[8]

Xue Yu shared his analysis of the causes of religion-related violent conflict, which include both internal and external causes. Focusing on the internal causes, he cited that religious violence is seen in religion whose gods are said to exercise violence to demand human obedience and surrender. Religious followers believe that the wrath of such gods incurred by human offense can be pacified only through human sacrifice, thus, they carry out violence to fulfill their religious faith and obligations. He cited fear of death as punishment from the superior violence and wrath of God as another internal cause of violent religious conflict. Another fear results from the sense of guilt for the believer who is not doing enough to protect and defend one's faith. Thus, violence is seen no longer as violence but as religious performance to fulfill one's religious duties.[9]

Another cause that Xue Yu mentioned is that within religious texts, one may find religious sanction and justification for the violence that one is already engaged in or intends to be engaged in. He cited just war theories, fighting for survival of religion, saving more people,

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[7] J. P. Larsson, *Understanding Religious Violence: Thinking Outside the Box on Terrorism* (London: Ashgate, 2003), 16.

[8] Xue Yu, "Sharing Hope for the Solution of Religious Conflict: From Buddhist Perspective", a paper read during the interfaith panel at the Fifth Congress of Asian Theologians on 20-26 August 2006 in Hong Kong, p. 3. This paper will be published in a forthcoming edition of *CTC Bulletin*.

[9] Xue Yu, p. 4.

converting infidels, punishing evil or sinful people in the name of God as examples of how religious followers may justify their violent actions.

Moreover, the tendency to make absolute claims to truth and the spirit of exclusivism that characterizes monotheistic religions have led to a superiority complex that fuels arrogance and self-righteousness, and which in turn leads to violent conflict. Claims to being the favored, "chosen" or selected people of God have put a certain group of people above other groups, and for the latter to be treated with contempt as enemies, doomed for condemnation, destruction, or even annihilation.

It was good that Xue Yu shared his analysis to a group of 70+ Asian Christian theologians because too often theologians of a particular religion would be blinded to the weaknesses of their own religion and would be defensive rather than critical about them. Following his analysis of the role of religion in violent conflict, Xue Yu asserted that religion can be "both for violence and peace". He said that although parts of religious texts permit violence and conflict, and religious traditions and history have witnessed religious violence, religion also manifests its nature for peace and provides the means for the realization of such peace in this world. "Thus, the ambivalence or ambiguity of religion in respect to violence and peace in fact exists in the sacred texts, histories, and traditions of individual religions, and it is up to human beings to decide whether they should follow the path of peace or choose the road of violence," he concluded. He compared religion to a drug (medicine) that has double functions:

> Certain drugs, if used correctly and properly, can cure a patient who is suffering from a particular disease; yet it may kill one if it is abused, misused or overused. Similarly, religion can be used for conflict and violence, yet it also can contribute to peace and harmony. It is the human being who can make such difference. In other words, it is the followers of religion, rather than religion itself, that creates religious conflicts. Likewise, it is the followers of religion who can make efforts towards peace through the elimination of violence.

Building on the metaphor of a drug, I would like to add that forcing others to take the drug as if it is the only cure for all ailments is another way that followers of a particular religion may cause conflict and even violence. As it is, claims that our drug (i.e. our particular religion) is the only cure-all there is to take instead of recognizing that there are other drugs out there, some of which may work well for certain people but not for others, can also cause un-peace.

How Can Christian Education be a Source of Peace Praxis?

Is there such a thing as peace praxis in Christian Education? Can Christian Education be a source of peace praxis that is badly needed in our time?

Christian educators are all familiar with the famous quote from liberation theologian and educator Paulo Freire who defined praxis by saying: "theory without practice is verbalism, practice without reflection equals activism." Therefore, for Freire, practice and reflection, theory and action together, equal praxis. Gleaning from the context from which Freire

came, the whole notion of praxis has to do with education for liberation. Education that is for liberation is not only verbalism; it must include activism. But activism that is for liberation is not only action; it must include reflection. And now we are talking about Christian Education and how it can be a source of peace praxis (action-reflection-action) for authentic liberation.

Writing about Christian faith in times of violence and war, Sri Lankan ecumenist S. Wesley Ariarajah proposed an "Axis of Peace" that religions must all be concerned about. The axis of peace has three coordinates: **justice**, **reconciliation** and **non-violence**.[10] **Justice**, which is the condition for peace, involves just relations at personal and social levels, protection and preservation of human dignity, and an approach to the disadvantaged—knowing that "violence of justice denied at the margins results in counter-violence at the centre".[11]

Reconciliation, for Ariarajah, is the way to peace. It includes the healing of memories and breaking the cycle of violence, in order to open the possibility of creating new memories. The process of reconciliation is more than just 'forgive and forget'. It requires the recognition and willingness to admit that what has gone wrong cannot be fixed by further use of violence or by the efforts of only one of the involved parties. It requires repentance, which is not only a sense of remorse about something that has been wrong but also a willingness to walk a different path. It also requires forgiveness—which is not simply overlooking or downplaying wrong but really working on correcting it. Hence, the repentance-forgiveness approach involves both parties to break the cycle of violence in order to create a new space for just relationships.

For Ariarajah, non-violence is the hope for peace. He wrote,

> There are no circumstances under which violence is justified. Nonviolence is the only option open to us as intelligent beings endowed with the Spirit of God. If we are forced to bear arms to defend a nation, or to make an armed intervention to prevent a massacre, we may well end up doing so, but even those reasons do not 'justify' the use of violence. If ever we have to use violence, we must do so knowing that we have been forced into choosing something that is both unacceptable and wrong.[13]

For Ariarajah, some acts of counter-violence may be necessary but none of it is justified. He said that believing in the so-called "reasonable" use of violence and justifying its use for any reason takes one on a slippery slope that only leads downhill for violence is like

[10] S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Axis of Peace: Christian Faith in Times of Violence and War* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004), 112. The title "Axis of Peace" is a counter to the "axis of evil" that George Bush Jr. used to describe three countries unfortunately. The General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. Bob Edgar, attributed to someone else a new formulation of the axis of evil that must be confronted: endemic poverty, devastation of the environment, and weapons of mass destruction. Going even further, Ariarajah has proposed a more positive axis that Christian faith and other faiths must be concerned about.

[11] Arirajah, 115, 118, 120, 121, 122.

[12] Ariarajah, 128, 129, 130.

[13] Ariarajah, 134.

[14] Ariarajah, 137.

a cancer that eats away from within. Ariarajah affirmed that it takes many small steps to overcome violence in its manifold forms. Affirming peace as both the way and the goal requires transforming the culture of violence into a culture of peace and nonviolence.[14]

So this is where Christian Education as a foundational ministry of the church can be a source of peace praxis in our time and context of so much un-peace. The question before us, as Christian educators, is how can we contribute towards transforming the culture of violence into a culture of peace and nonviolence?

First, we need as Christian faith communities to address the problem which is at the root of this culture of violence. For me, part of the problem is our inability to deal with otherness or diversity creatively and constructively in a region that is naturally plural or diverse. When working on my doctoral research, I was greatly helped in coming to terms with our various approaches to diversity by the three typologies of *exclusivism, inclusivism*, and *pluralism* as expounded by Diana L. Eck, professor of comparative religion and Indian studies in the USA. In her book, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*, she wrote:

> First, there is the *exclusivist response*: Our own community, our tradition, our understanding of reality, our encounter with God, is the one and only truth, excluding all others. Second, there is the inclusivist response: There are, indeed, many communities, traditions and truths, but our own way of seeing things is the culmination of the others, superior to others, or at least wide enough to include the others under our universal canopy and in our own terms. A third response is that of the *pluralist*: Truth is not the exclusive or inclusive possession of any one tradition or community. Therefore the diversity of communities, traditions and understandings of the truth, and visions of God is not an obstacle for us to overcome, but an opportunity for our energetic engagement and commitments; rather it means opening up those commitments to the give-and-take of mutual discovery, understanding, and, indeed, transformation.[15]

While exclusivism delves on religious arrogance ("one against all"), inclusivism delves on religious imperialism ("one above all"). But religious pluralism posits religious openness ("one with and among all"). Speaking about God, the exclusivists would say: "our God" is not listening to those of other faiths, hence they exclude everyone else. The inclusivists would say, "our God" is indeed listening, but it is "our God" as we understand God to be, hence, they include others into their worldview but on their own terms. The pluralists would say, "God is not ours to possess, for God is our way of speaking of a Reality that cannot be encompassed by any one religious tradition, including our own." Thus, pluralists would recognize the limits of their own worldview, and seek to understand others on the others' terms in order to have a healthy dialogue, a mutual learning, and mutual understanding.

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[15] Diana L. Eck, as quoted by Hope S. Antone in *Religious Education in Context of Plurality and Pluralism* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia and Manila: New Day Publishers, 2003), p. 33. See also Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

The tendency of our churches' Christian education is to instill in our members the attitude and mindset of exclusivism or, if at all, to open up with a little bit of inclusivism. Our claims to having access to the absolute truth; claims that our religion is not mere religion but is really "the revelation;" our claims to being the children of God but denying such relationship to others who are not from our faith group—these are clear examples of our attitude and mindset of exclusivism. The attitude or mindset of inclusivism is shown when, after meeting a good Buddhist or a good Muslim or a good Hindu, we say they have the "hidden Christ" or they are the "unknown Christians" even unknown to themselves. For while we include them in the circle of goodness, we do so with the mindset that our standard is still the overarching one. So both exclusivism and inclusivism basically deny the worldviews of other religious traditions. We therefore need to temper these two typologies with pluralism—where members are nurtured in the tenets and traditions of their own religion but are also equipped to be open to learn from and with other religious traditions.

Part of what we can do as Christian educators is to critique the exclusivist and inclusivist attitudes grounded in our interpretation of biblical texts that seem to promote and reinforce such attitudes, which can lead to pride and arrogance for ourselves and contempt for others. In the scriptures, for example, are statements of claims to uniqueness (e.g. "Jesus answered, 'I am the **way** and the **truth** and the **life**. No one comes to the Father / Abba except through me.'" John 14:6) or claims to superiority (e.g. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is **no other name** under heaven given… by which we must be saved" Acts 4:12) which many Christians have appropriated for their religion and themselves. We have to temper these with the very mindset of Christ, "who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Philippians 2:6-7). We need to highlight teachings from other parts of scriptures that show positive and loving attitudes to people of other faiths, other ethnic groups, and all sorts of otherness.[16]

Second, we need as Christian faith communities to critically assess our legacy of a strong missionary orientation which has colored the content and goal of Christian education. Ironically, although Christianity was born in Asia, its spread throughout Asia is attributed to the missionary expansion that came with the colonization of the region. While the missionary movement has been credited for its positive contributions such as the study of languages, advances in anthropology, sociology and ethnography, improvement of health care, and establishment of new patterns of education, there is also the memory of its having evoked mistrust, suspicion and anger among the well-established religious communities of Asia. In fact, in many places of Asia, the whole of Christianity itself is viewed suspiciously, and even today, unfortunately as synonymous with white culture, white civilization, Western modernization, colonialism and imperialism. The word mission itself has unfortunately been misunderstood as the aggressive efforts of Christians to convert (or really proselytize) other believers (so-called non-believers) into the Christian fold, usually a particular denominational fold.

[16] In my book, *Religious Education in Context of Plurality and Pluralism*, I have a few examples of handling such texts such as the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman.

The tendency of our churches' Christian education is to pass on this inherited missionary orientation. Today, among the most zealous or aggressive missionaries throughout the region and the whole world are people from Asia. Many Asian Christians have been brainwashed into carrying the guilt that they have not succeeded into turning their non-Christian neighbor into a Christian or that they have not made a clear cut from anything that or anyone who is non-Christian in their past life. With this baggage, it is worth listening to what S. Wesley Ariarajah calls the four shifts in mission thinking[17] in order to free us from the narrow traditional orientation that has often kept us at odds with our neighbors of other faiths. The first shift is "from an exclusive to an inclusive (or open) understanding of God's mission. We do mission because God is already present and active in the world, bringing it unto Godself; not because we are bringing God to the world. The second shift is "from conversion to healing." Conversion must be properly understood as the transforming activity of the Spirit and not as simply dragging people from one faith community to another. Mission should not be concerned about the number of "converts" (or really members) added to the church, no matter how it is done; but about the quality of life of all. As our context shows, the healing of lives and of relationships is more urgent for peoples in Asia today. The third shift is "from majority to minority"—meaning being at home with being a small minority. With conversion being misunderstood as a strategy to increase in number, Christians in Asia must realize that the desire to be big, or the majority, reflects imperial and colonial tendency. The fourth shift in mission thinking is "from mere doctrinal issues to deep spiritual concerns"—this means transcending traditional absolute claims to uniqueness or superiority in order to search together for meaningful and authentic spiritual life for all. If Christian educators are serious about these shifts, we may have to overhaul the content and goal of our Sunday Church School, Vacation Church School, Bible Study, retreats and camps.

Third, as Christian Educators it is our duty to prepare our constituents not only for living out their faith as members of the Christian family (which comes in many denominations) but more importantly as members of the wider household of God—which includes many other religious, human and other (natural) families. Although biblical references to the household of God seem to be limited to just the church, using the creation account as foundational narrative, I have expounded it to refer to the *oikoumene* (the whole inhabited world as the household of God).[18]

It seems to me that with our traditional and narrow mission orientation and our over concentration on ourselves (as the "new Israel", the "new chosen race", etc.), we have created some blinders that prevent us from seeing the wider household of God. Indian theologian and Bible scholar Dhyanchand Carr links the tendency of many churches

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[17] Quoted in Hope S. Antone's *Religious Education in Context of Plurality and Pluralism*, pp. 44-46 from S. Wesley Ariarajah, "Christian Mission: The End or a New Beginning", unpublished paper presented at the Meeting of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), October 1998.

[18] Hope S. Antone, "Living Together in the Household of God: Becoming a Household of Love, Faith, and Hope" in *CTC Bulletin*, Vol. XXII, No. 2 (August 2006), pp. 52-60.

[19] Dhyanchand Carr, "Innovative Methods in Theological Education" in *CTC Bulletin*, Vol. XIX, No. 193 (December 2003), 79.

to be concerned with self-preservation and self-propagation to the Noah's Ark model, whose mission is conceived as that of helping a few more who are drowning to get on board the ark and to help the people of God already on board from being tempted to jump into the flood.[19] One model to counter the Noah's Ark model is what Christ Jesus himself demonstrated in his life and is articulated in his Nazareth Manifesto (Luke 4:18-19)—where church mission is not for the sake of self-preservation and self-propagation but for the sake of realizing the fullness of life for all.[20] Initially, the people in the synagogue marveled at his words—for who would not like the agenda of good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and the year of the Lord's favor? Unfortunately, however, the people in the synagogue only wanted all these for themselves; so when Jesus talked about prophets who saved other people (Elijah and the widow from Sidon; Elisha and Naaman the Syrian), the people got so angry that they dragged Jesus out of the town and almost threw him over the cliff.

As Christian educators, we need to be critical about possible blinders that we have created - in terms of our concepts of God and Christ that tend to box them according to our own limited understanding of who they are and what they are about. God is much bigger than we can ever comprehend; God is much greater than what religions put together could ever conceive God to be. In view of this, Christian Education needs to be expanded to go beyond the first language of our own faith (education in our Christian faith) but to widen and broaden into the second language of religious education (education in becoming religious).[21] For me, religious education is another way of naming ecumenical education. In my present work with the Christian Conference of Asia, I have tried to campaign for four shifts in our thinking and practice so that the spirit of ecumenism (*oikoumene*) can be promoted at the local congregational level.[22] The four needed shifts for ecumenical religious education are:

> (a) *From competition to cooperation among Christian denominations*. The ecumenical movement started with the goal of unity as Christ Jesus himself prayed to God that his disciples "may be one" just as God and Christ are one. The ecumenical movement was conceived to overcome the competition, rivalry and animosity among Christian groups, which only contradict the message of the gospel. The existence of many rival denominations sadly attests to this spirit of competition, especially as they engage in sheep stealing or bad-mouthing of other groups. Thus, our Christian Education for our church constituency must include intrafaith dialogue and cooperation.
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> (b) *From condemnation to dialogue with other religious or faith communities*. Although the ecumenical movement began mainly with the concern for Christian unity, the need for a wider unity with other religious groups has led us to a broader understanding of *oikoumene* as the household of God. This is why we situate interfaith dialogue and cooperation within the whole life of the household of God. Other religious believers

[20] Hope S. Antone, "Living Together in the Household of God…," 55-56.
[21] I have expounded this notion, borrowing from Gabriel Moran's *Religious Education as a Second Language in my book, Religious Education in Context of Plurality and Pluralism*.
[22] Hope S. Antone, "Learning to Live in Oikoumene: Towards a Relevant Ecumenical Theological Education," in *CTC Bulletin*, Vol. XXII, No. 3 (December 2005), 55-57.

are also children of God. It is sheer arrogance on our part to think that only we (i.e. Christians) deserve to live, spread and propagate. Thus, our Christian Education for our church constituency must include interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

I think it would be appropriate to insert here the gist of a doctoral dissertation written by Indonesian Christian educator Tabita Kartika Christiani who suggests a three-fold praxis in Christian Education for her plural context in Indonesia,[23] but which can be helpful for other countries in plural Asia. Using a Shared Christian / Faiths Praxis approach, she has proposed a model of Christian Religious Education ***behind***, ***at***, and ***beyond the wall***. Christian Religious Education *behind the wall* has to do with "reading the Bible through new eyes and learning inherited Christian dogmas through a historical approach, which supports doing contextual theology." Christian Religious Education *at the wall* has to do with "learning about and from other religions, and taking part in interreligious dialogue." Christian Religious Education beyond the wall has to do with "working together with people of other faiths for peace and justice, and then reflecting on the shared work."

(c) *From isolation to collaboration (conviviality) with civil society and people's movements*. When the Christian Conference of Asia was being established as a regional expression of the ecumenical movement, Asian church and ecumenical leaders who planned for this eventuality were very clear about not being aligned with the two superpowers that seemed to have divided the world in a cold war—i.e. the USA and its capitalist ideology and the former Soviet Union and its communist ideology. However, many of the Asian Christians continue to be trapped by this ideological divide—name-calling those who are opposed to injustice and are working for social change as communists, leftists and radicals, and now (because of the War on Terror) the new term is "terrorists". The church should not allow itself to be dragged by this war game of the superpowers and powerful countries. Our Christian Education for our church constituency must include overcoming this unquestioned "commie-scare" and finding areas where we can work together with secular groups that are already working for change and transformation—for any work for justice and peace can only be part of the justice of God.

(d) *From disintegration to integrity of creation*. The household of God does not only consist of people as members. Part of God's household is the natural environment—of air, water, land, plants and animals. Our life is sustained by all these, for we are all interconnected and interdependent. The disintegration however is prevalent even among ourselves as human beings because of sexism, classism, racism and casteism;

[23] Tabita Kartika Christiani, "Blessed are the peacemakers: Christian religious education for peacebuilding in the pluralistic Indonesian context", unpublished dissertation at Boston College in Massachusetts, USA, 2005.

but also between human beings and the rest of creation because of anthropocentrism and sheer lack of understanding (mastery) of the limits and potentials of the world's resources and of our tasks and responsibilities as trustees of these gifts of God's creation. Thus, our Christian Education for our church constituency must include conscientizing about our place in the total web of life and our role in protecting and sustaining it not only for our sake but for the whole web of life.

Conclusion

We have so much to do as Christian religious educators in order to discover and recover the peace praxis that is in Christian education as inspired by the life and work of our model teacher, Christ Jesus. However, since Christian education curriculum tends to reflect the theological perspective and mission orientation of the church, our Christian education has tended to serve traditional and narrow mission orientation, be concerned about self-preservation and self-propagation rather than Christ's mission of giving fullness of life for all. Hence, I have highlighted the need to broaden Christian Education to Religious and Ecumenical Education—this is the component in Christian Education that must be discovered and recovered.

However, like just one part of the body, Christian Education cannot do everything to set things right. The whole curriculum in theological education needs to be revisited, critiqued, revamped, updated and transformed. So Christian Educators are challenged to be change agents to clamor for changes in the perspective and orientation of the other fields or disciplines—e.g. theology, Bible, history, mission, ministry, etc. We need to envision a new curriculum in theological education that is relevant to our unique and plural situation in Asia and that will promote genuine peace for all that we dream of.

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