

Contents

I Foreword

- *Dr. Mathews George Chunakara*

II Asia Mission Conference 2017 : An Overview

- *Nant Myat Noe Aein, Salome*

III Thematic Presentations: Themes and Sub Themes

- Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia
 - *Rev. Dr. Wesley Ariarajah*
- Journeying Together: Mission as Prophetic Accompaniment through Dialogue and Engagement
 - *Archbishop Dr. Paul Kwong*
- Journeying Together: Mission as Affirming the Servanthood
 - *Sr. Sudha Varghese*
- Journeying Together: Mission as Participating in the Reign of God
 - *Bishop Reuel Norman O. Margiza*
- Journeying Together: Mission as Embodying the Spirituality of the Cross
 - *Rev. Dr. Septemmy Lakawa*

IV Panel Presentations

- Nurturing of Inter-Religious Harmony and Building Peace
 - *Rev. Dr. Albert Sundaraj Walters*
 - *Bishop Dr. Prem Chand Singh*
- Groaning of Creation and Economic Injustice: Prophetic Witness
 - *Rev. Dr. Naoya Kawakami*
 - *Dr. William Stanley*
 - *Rev. Dr. Ronald Laldinsuah*
- Embracing the Stranger and Accompanying the Marginalized
 - *Dr. Gemma Cruz*
 - *Rev. Dr. Hong Jung Lee*

- *Rev. Stephen Arulampalam*

V Hearing Sessions

- Witness to the Truth and Light: Buddhist Religious Perspective
 - *Venerable A Shin Pannajota*
- Witness to the Truth and Light: Hindu Religious Perspective
 - *Swami Navananma Jnana Thapaswi*
- Witness to the Truth and Light: Islamic Religious Perspective
 - *Dr. Musdah Mulia*

VI Asia Mission Statement

VII Asia Mission Conference Closing Session

Closing Sermon : “The Truth Implies Ultimate Freedom and Liberation for all God’s People”

VIII Reflective Responses from Representatives of Pre- AMC Events

- Consultation on Asian Ecumenical Disability Advocacy Network (AEDAN)
- Regional Conference on Human Trafficking

IX CCA Diamond Jubilee Celebration and Thanksgiving Service

Homily : ‘You Will Be My Witness to the Ends of the Earth’

- *Bishop Dr. Soritua A. E. Nababan*

Welcome Address

- *Dr. Mathews George Chunakara*

Presidential Address

- *Bishop Willem T.P Simarmata*

Diamond Jubilee Message

- *Rev. Dr. Olav Fyske Tveit*

Felicitation Addresses

- *Archbishop Felix Machado*
- *Dr. Ja Bu*

Our Profound Thanks

- *Rev. Diana Tana*

X List of Participants

Foreword

Asia Mission Conference-2017: An Overview

- Nant Myat Noe Aein, Salome

Introduction

Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), which has been journeying through the past six decades for the service of God's mission, nurturing and strengthening the ecumenical movement in Asia, organised an 'Asia Mission Conference' (AMC) in conjunction with the culmination of the Diamond Jubilee commemoration of CCA. It was held in Yangon, Myanmar from 11 to 17 October 2017. Asia Mission Conference(AMC), which was hosted by the Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC) and the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC), focused on the theme- 'Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light, in Asia'. The AMC was attended by more than 600 participants representing member churches, councils, ecumenical partners, missiologists, theologians, theological students, interfaith leaders and others from Asia and around the globe as well as participants from churches in Myanmar. Looking back on the history of the mission conferences organised by the CCA in the past, they have been integral to the life and witness of Asian Churches in their efforts for the contextualisation of missiological convictions and theological articulations in emerging Asian contexts. This was the fourth time that the CCA organised a major mission conference in its 60 years of history; the last Asia Mission Conference of CCA was held 23 years ago in 1994 in Seoul, South Korea. During this week long Mission Conference, participants from different continents gathered together in the Franc Auditorium in Yangon, Myanmar to worship, pray, listen and reflect on the theme and sub-themes in the formal sessions, encounter and interact with each other in discussion on Christian witness in the midst of adverse realities in Asia and the role of churches in the ecumenical movement, including listening to interreligious dialogues towards wider ecumenism.

CCA has been contributing significantly to re-vitalise the ecumenical vision and to fulfil the calling for mission and witness of God in search of light and truth in Asia. The formal and informal sessions of AMC, as well as the celebration of CCA's 60 years of ecumenical journey were significant milestones in the history of CCA. The AMC was a historic ecumenical gathering in CCA's history where various dimensions of people's experiences, enthusiasm, ideas and vision met for the prophetic witness to the Truth and Light in Asia.

Opening Plenary

The opening of the Asia Mission Conference (AMC) commenced with the celebrative worship service. The worship service which included the moving litanies of prayers, lamentation, cries and hopes from churches in different parts of Asia was performed by a group of Asian ethno musicologists and



liturgists, which was held at Franc Auditorium in Yangon, Myanmar. The worship service was led by the Moderator of CCA Archbishop Willem T.P Simarmata. During the worship, Vice Moderator of CCA Rev. Diana Tana emphasized the needs for partnership to find the new and right path, and the importance of listening to God's voice for the challenges ahead and for

liberation from oppression in her homily.

Following the worship service, the opening session of AMC brought greetings and words of welcome, introductory addresses from the Moderator and General Secretary of CCA, representatives from local host Churches: Myanmar Baptist Convention(MBC) and Myanmar Council of Churches(MCC). In his opening address, Archbishop Willem T.P. Simarmata extended his sincere greetings to the participants of AMC and hosting partners, the MBC and MCC, and expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to bring Asian people and supporters together to discuss the future of Asian Mission and to embrace diversities of Asian churches and Christians.

During the Introductory Address, Dr. Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary of CCA noted, “Every moment we realize and recognize that Christians do not have the monopoly of God’s mission. What we experience today is a mission in the midst of missions. Several Asian countries have become missionary battlefields and are experiencing aggressive missionary evangelism. This situation urges us to be seriously and constantly engaged in reflecting on God’s mission in this world. The AMC organised by CCA is a humble effort for Asian churches to come together in a common platform to contemplate and dialogue with each other on mission and witness of churches in Asia.”



AMC participants were formally welcomed to the country by the president of the Myanmar Council of Churches, Mr. Saw Patrick Loo Nee, and the

General Secretary of the Myanmar Baptist Convention, Rev.Dr. Yam Kho Pau.

Reflections on Bible Studies

Theme: Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia



During the week-long AMC, participants joined small groups for Bible study each morning. Bible study leaders were selected from the general list of AMC participants and invited to facilitate the Bible studies at the Franc Auditorium. A number of participants of Asian Ecumenical Disability Advocacy Network (AEDAN), participants of Regional Conference on Human Trafficking and AMC participants discussed their engagement related to the theme and subthemes. The passages studied were:

- John 8: 12-20
- John 14:1-14
- John 18: 28-38; 20: 21-22

The reports of Bible study group reflected powerful messages:

- Prophetic witness to the Truth and Light is the way of Jesus and it is important to multiply this spirit and witness in Asia
- We need courage to set on a journey; to proclaim the truth is to express our concerns
- Salvation by faith with works can be helpful in journeying together
- Light- shine means not only to have faith but to put faith in actions



- Different interpretation of light, ranging from being the light of Diwali and Thandinyut to dispel the darkness in India and Myanmar, the enlightenment of wisdom and not judgment in Sri Lanka and Pakistan, the light being the enforcement of social values and ethical living in Indonesia, good communication with neighbours and building bridges in Myanmar, light being the symbol of safety and hospitality and many more in Australia, while in Japan it is highly personal. With such plurality in its nature, the responsibility of Christian leaders in interpreting light rests upon bringing credibility to the principles of Christianity and its advocacies
- Authentic light Jesus Christ is self-communicative in its nature
- Interdependence, complementarity and reciprocal nature of vertical and horizontal in Christian faith and work

- Christians need to become a light and give light to others

Sub Themes:

Mission as Prophetic Accompaniment

- The Church and Christian institutions are also becoming part of the oppressive structure. Therefore, there is a need for prophetic reformation within the Church. The Church should go beyond its charitable services to become liberative and transforming agencies
- Speaking the truth in love is prophetic
- Fear of speaking the Truth relating to justice and human rights; churches have suffered with pastors and leaders being killed or imprisoned
- It is not poverty that leads to corruption, but greed that leads to poverty and corruption. We need to be the light in everyday life to do prophetic accompaniment
- Be friendly, be a companion like the Good Samaritan and address prophetic witness with love and kindness

Mission as Affirming the Servanthood

- The term ‘servant’ comes from colonial language. We should affirm identity and solidarity with those whom we serve. Servanthood should be ‘model servanthood.’ It should not be passive submission to the status quo.
- “No knowledge is a sin.” One element of servanthood is to share information. Procuring accurate information is a service and enables to seek the truth.
- To serve the poor and the needy
- Good Christians should be placed in good positions in the government

Mission as participating in the Reign of God

- The Church should be one of the instruments of building the kingdom/reign of God here on earth as God’s mission.
- The Church needs to prepare for the reign of God
- Jesus as light of the world exemplifies the values of the reign

of God. As ‘glories’ of the light and truth, Christians are to be committed to the reign of God

- Living in the reign of God in the truth of Christ
- We are able to live the way Jesus lived

Mission as Embodying the Spirituality of the Cross

- To be related to God, it is vital to have personal relationship with God so as to embody the spirituality of the Cross.
- The term “Cross” seems to glorify martyrdom. The Cross-Resurrection integral link must be explicit.
- Live as Christ lived
- In the context of where the righteous people suffered, “If you are right, you will be broken,” we need courage to embody the spirituality of the cross.

Our commitment

- God who call us to journey together is always with us and in the midst of suffering, God is identifying and taking sides with us
- As to our commitment, our free-wills play crucial roles as our relationship with God is the most important factor
- Committed to be disciples, followers, bearers of the gospel of the reign of God
- More clarification is needed before commitment
- The Churches in Asia should indeed be the light of the world in many aspects to bring light to darkness from political, social and other areas
- So the theological mission gets a completion only with the conscientious practice of a moral code of conduct of life by the leaders

Focuisng on the topic, Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia, Rev. Dr. Wesley Ariarajah presented his address on the main theme, breaking down the various elements of truth and light by exploring the theme of light in four areas: a) Decolonization of missionary

theology and practice, b) Indigenization of mission theology and practice, c) Moving away from targeting religious traditions as the object of mission, and d) Moving away from the temptation to become a majority community. He emphasized the need to ‘journey together’ in order to achieve true ‘prophetic witness’ to the truth and light in Asia.



As Archbishop Dr. Paul Kwong was unable to attend due to health reasons, Bishop Andrew Chan presented Archbishop Kwong’s paper on the theme: *Journeying Together: Mission as Prophetic Accompaniment*. The paper focused on how through dialogue and engagement, the Church in Asia could achieve reconciliation in light of today’s issues facing the Asian



context, especially the problems arising with globalization and interconnectedness.

Followed by the thematic address, a panel discussion on ‘Nurturing Inter-religious Harmony and Building Peace’ was given by Rev. Dr. Albert Sundaraj Walters, which highlighted the current situations in Indonesia and Malaysia with the rise of Muslim extremism, and examples of interreligious harmony, such as solidarity in Mindanao and during the Peshawar bombing. This was followed by suggestions for enhancing interreligious harmony, such as strengthening voices of all religions, upholding common values, promoting partnership, and enriching education committed to seeking truth, justice, peace and reconciliation.

Ms. Kathy Min Din made a presentation on ‘Building Peace’. Several issues were highlighted, stemming from globalization, and inner peace was emphasized as the most important aspect of creating sustainable peace. Religious teachings are the most influential factors on daily life- but religious teachings can also promote and develop discrimination and break harmony. All religions have the same teaching for denouncing war – this can create common ground for interreligious harmony. However, only looking at similarities can be dangerous; knowing each other and the differences are important for sustaining peace. Mutual understanding, mutual recognition and peace go hand in hand – this can help break down insecurity. If we can recognize the differences, it is important to nurture interreligious harmony to reduce social tension. The only way to reach constructive teaching is interreligious dialogue as a common platform for all people. Interreligious dialogue can help open minds and break down stereotypes, and inspire hope and trust for dealing with sensitive issues. Peace is not simply acknowledging the status quo but continually creating a community. Trust takes time and effort to nurture – as human beings, we need to share our pain, suffering, happiness and love by worshipping and celebrating together. Dialogue is a delicate process, but a demanding process in present time. One discourse – two monologues do not make a dialogue; a true dialogue needs sincerity. Interfaith dialogue is to explore the common ground and build on that. We need to focus not only on the differences, but also join forces to build a society that respects diversity through increased understanding. We need to think about challenges that need to be solved collectively – such as human trafficking, human rights, environment, etc. People long for safety and security; for this reason, peace based on fear and deterrence is not peace. Genuine peace is sustained only

when justice is upheld. Harmonious society is consolidated through thousands of daily actions that make the basis for a just and faithful society. Interfaith and intercultural dialogue is a long and repetitive process; even though it may be discouraging, it only needs greater effort. Ecumenical accountability is needed to build trust and understanding of one another.



Bishop Dr. Prem Chand Singh, shared views focused on the Indian context and the disparity between the promises of interreligious tolerance and harmony in the Indian Constitution and the true realities of a pro-Hindu administration in power. By looking at the foundational principles that enhance religious harmony, Bishop Singh focused on three factors that were missing from people's lives: love, faith and fear – these three aspects are what destroys religious harmony. He closed his presentation with a prescription for nurturing religious harmony and building peace: looking for commonalities, by finding meeting points between religions.

After the thematic presentations, the floor was opened for discussions and comments. The participants opined:

- We need program-oriented dialogue in order to promote peace and harmony. If we look back to the message in John 4, it shows that for reconciliation we need a paradigm shift and put 'human' in the center.
- Christianity still uses Western categories and Western ways of thinking. How can we reinterpret our own ways of thinking and living as to transform Christ in the Asian context?
- Mission and witness, and the search for the truth are very valuable things. Speaking from an orthodox perspective, we need pluralistic expressions of divine love and truth. We cannot separate the person, Jesus Christ, from his mission or the mission in today's context as witness. Right now there is a politicization of religion in India, we should also think of religionizing of politics.

In response to these comments and questions, panelists responded:

What is dialogue really? We are often misunderstood in dialogue. To find wisdom is to find the light. Jesus's love is not limited to Christians but to everyone in this world. If we think about it that way, then dialogue is learning to respect religion and praise the gospel.

Concerning Walters' paper, David A. Das from Bangladesh thanked the author for pointing out the situation in Bangladesh. Many Sunni extremist groups linked with Bangladesh, leading to the 2013 destruction of places of worship, and again in 2016 when a big bomb blast killed more than 23 people. The government has taken many measures to combat these groups, especially cutting off their international money sources, to good results. Due to this, moderate

and progressive Muslim groups have become stronger. On the other hand, minorities such as Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists are more secure than before and the government has been working on joint protection programmes.

Bangladesh has implemented many measures, including counterterrorism, however each Muslim majority situation is different, there's much to learn from each other. About the grassroots level – interfaith dialogue and interreligious harmony has to take place on multiple levels. That is why I said that education at all levels is important, and so dialogue also takes place at different levels. When we think of grassroots we think of lower levels of engagement, but a lot of these engagements are often at the grassroots level to begin with, it is probably not properly documented.



In a powerful message by Sr. Sudha Varghese, a Roman Catholic Nun, social activist and 2006 recipient of India's fourth highest civilian honour Padma Shri, who has been working for over over two decades among the most downtrodden and oppressed Musahar community (rat eaters), shared her struggles. Her inspiring stories also reflected on the topic, Journeying Together: Mission as Affirming the Servanthood. Starting her presentation with a short video clip that introduced her work with the Musahar, Sr. Sudha shared that her foremost concern in her 32 years of service and work

among the downtrodden in underdeveloped areas of the Bihar state had not been to preach Christianity among the Musahar people. She ended her presentation by promising to develop a community in Musahar by making these people fully human first and giving them the right to dignity, food, clothes, education, housing and so on.

On the second day of the AMC, three religious scholars from Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic faiths were invited for the hearing session on “Witness to the Truth and Light: Religious Perspectives”.

The first presentation was given from a Buddhist religious perspective, A Shin Pannajota, a lecturer at Sitagu International Buddhist Academy, made a presentation on ‘Buddhist Perspective on Truth in Life’ which focused on



understanding the problem and suffering, which from Tanha (Thirst). Striving for the Magga sacca (Noble Thirst) could solve these problems. The Magga sacca came from moral discipline, mental discipline and wisdom. By focusing on the intrinsic and noble teachings of one’s own religion, there can be true peace and happiness. He ended his presentation by sharing that life was too short and sacred to be spent in conflict.

Speaking from a Hindu perspective, Swami Navananma Jnana Thapaswi from Santhigiri Ashram in India presented his thoughts on the belief of

spirituality, and obtaining 'dharma', the way of light and truth. He emphasized the need to step out of the boundaries of institutionalized religion and to have the outlook of spirituality beyond religions, as light and truth are highly tied to spirituality. Light and truth has no change, according to religion, country, colour, language. It is unique. He concluded the talk, saying let the possibility come for peace, and peace come through unity, and unity happen through love, and love come from the truth, let truth come from the light, let us experience light through the prophetic witness of light and truth, it comes from the manifestation of light and



truth, embodiment of ultimate light and truth. Swami Navananma Jnana Thapaswi spoke on the importance of a movement such as interfaith dialogues that incorporated other religious thoughts and shared their views as they were a very healthy and indispensable need of the situation.

The presentation given from the Islamic perspective by Dr. Musdah Mulia focused on the similarities of Islam and Christianity, and the role each religion played in the creation of an independent Indonesia. Another issue broached was vulnerable women who were involved with radical Islamic terrorism in Indonesia and worldwide. She challenged the participants to talk to their governments and to find action in cracking down on the factors that created such situations and how Muslims and Christians can

work together for peace. Methods suggested were focusing on education in family life, law reform, and right religious interpretations.

In a session on ‘Groaning of Creation and Economic Injustice: Prophetic Witness’, Rev. Dr. Naoya Kawakami, General Secretary of Touhoku HELP shared the voices of Nagoya focused on the groaning of creation.

Dr. William Stanley shared how the time had come to take stock of the reality that millions of people still lived in poverty and in exploitation of market forces. Aggressive overconsumption and excessive lifestyles combined with greed and selfishness have led to unequal development, with the rich capitalists against the world’s poor. The church enjoys more than other religious institutions a powerful message and the prophetic role to bring the good news and to bring about an economically just society. Dr. Stanley challenged the participants to hear creation and to hear the crisis of people suffering, and that as Christians, we needed to acknowledge the part of churches in combating injustice in environment and economy. He concluded by saying that churches should reject any theology that promotes God for the rich, and any that supports one race, caste, class, gender over another. We believe that God calls us to answer the poor and the groaning of creation so that all will have life and die in fullness. God frees the prisoner and supports and protects the strangers, orphans and widows. Mutual solidarity in God’s faithfulness is needed in this commitment.

Rev. Dr. Ronald Laldinsuah of the Asian Evangelical Alliance, Myanmar spoke on the various meanings of justice in secular and biblical texts. He emphasized that justice was in right relationships, and how humans lived and served each other within those relationships. By using the examples of Amos and Hosiah, Rev. Dr. Laldinsuah showed how prophetic witnessing had been to point out corrupt practices in the market and enforce the biblical concepts of justice. The ultimate concern of justice was justice in relationship, which aimed to maintain and perpetuate right relationships and demanded responsibility from the responsible selves. From here, the conclusion was drawn that economic justice was to distribute equality to everyone, so that everyone had access to the grain. Biblical justice had concerns for the poor, who were often victims of various injustices. The strong were responsible for ensuring justice for the weak.

During the fourth thematic presentation, Bishop Reuel Norman O. Martigza, head of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, stated that “Participating in the reign of God requires living in tension between the despair of now and the hope that is within us; at the future deliverance and the present suffering.” Bishop Marigza affirmed that the theme of the Reign of God or the Kingdom of God was a central theme of Scripture, tying the essence of the Biblical Messages together. He also stated that “the Reign of God was a mystery; that it was not a human project but God’s project, and that God used human beings and human institutions to work out the divine purpose and will. He likened the Reign of God to the leaven used to change the whole character of dough. Like the leaven, the reign of God worked from inside. It worked unseen. The kingdom was on its way. He further added that “true religion is never dope; real Christianity is the most revolutionary thing in the world and can work revolution in an individual’s life and society. Just as Jesus was crucified because he disturbed the orthodox habits and conventions, Christianity has been persecuted because it desired to take both people and society and remake them”. Bishop Marigza invoked all to examine if we were to emphasise the teachings and mission of Christ, we were to be more kingdom-centric than church-centric. We must always be a Church in mission.

Speaking on ‘Shining a Light on Hope: Embracing and Accompanying Migrants’, Dr. Gemma Cruz, a theologian and academician from the Australian Catholic University, shared reflection on three faces in which churches understand, envision and do mission in the context of contemporary migration: mission as encounter, mission as incarnational evangelization, and mission as prophetic solidarity. She further outlined the current situation of migration in Asia, concentrating especially on migrant workers, particularly undocumented migrant workers working in unskilled labour. Dr. Cruz impressed that through awareness by moments of encounter, service-oriented action, and strategic anamnestic solidarity, there can be a shift from mission to migrants to a mission of/by migrants.

Rev. Dr. Hong Jung Lee from the Presbyterian Church of Korea focused his paper “North Korean Defectors in the Arduous March as Shackled in the Chain of Division” on those who had been victimized in the context of the division of Korea and the names of those people living in Korea crying for reconciliation in Korea. The theme, ‘arduous march’ represented the multiple ‘arduous marches’ North Korean defectors have endured

and continue to endure in their marginalized positions in the Korean and global context. He ended his presentation by sharing his hope for a unified Korea that is respectful to both North and South, and that will bring about permanent peace in the Korean peninsula, to break the chain of division and promote peace and security in Northeast Asia.

Rev. Stephen Arulampalam of Lanka Theological College in Sri Lanka presented a paper on “Embracing the Strangers and Accompanying the Marginalized from the Person of Disabilities Perspective” which stemmed from his personal experience, family experience and working experience. He explained how participation leads to gaining experience in order to form expression and is the way to further develop the theology of disability. He concluded by pointing out the need for a paradigm shift in mission, theology, use of language, understanding of the Bible, and understanding of the life of Jesus for prophetic witnessing to the plight of the marginalized and those persons with disabilities.

Jakarta Theological Seminary Professor and a missiologist from Indonesia, Rev. Dr. Septemmy Lakawa presented a paper on ‘Embodying the Spirituality of the Cross’. Sharing her encounters with victims of human trafficking, she emphasized how mission that embodied the spirituality of the cross begins at the site and witnesses the suffering that remains in the communities struck by violence and war. She challenged the participants to be ‘troublemakers’ in the face of violence and war, and that through resilience and resistance they could find reconciliation. Rev. Dr. Septemmy Lakawa focused on how the metaphor of ‘body, wound, dance’ bears the witness to the cross, and ended her presentation with a dance that told her testimony.

Closing Plenary of Asia Mission Conference

Moderated by the CCA Vice Moderator Rev. Diana Tana, the last day of AMC started with the last thematic presentation from Dr. Septemmy Lakawa. Following the thematic session, the time was given to the representatives for the reflective responses from Pre- AMC Events: Regional Conference on Human Trafficking and Consultation on Asian Ecumenical Disability Advocacy Network (AEDAN).

A team appointed by CCA General Secretary had been meeting from the

beginning of the AMC to prepare the draft of the Asia Mission Statement. The draft statement was presented on the second day of AMC and discussed among the 20 groups which was divided for a reviewing process of the statement.

Three members of drafting committee- Rev. Dr. Huang Po Ho, Professor Mammen Varkey and Rev. Dr. Septemmy Lakawa were invited by the moderator to present the final draft of the statement. After the presentation, the floor was opened for discussion on the content of the draft statement where more than 600 participants were given the opportunity to comment and respond.

The participants opined that one significant contribution of the statement was that it articulated our self-understanding of mission, missiological convictions and emerging mission concerns in Asia's pluralistic context. The final version of the Asia Mission Statement was received unanimously by the participants of the Asia Mission Conference – 2017 with joyous acclamation.

The last day of the Asia Mission Conference was closed with the sermon of Archbishop Stephen Than Myint Oo. The Yangon AMC resonated the present realities in Asia and it was a splendid opportunity for the Asian churches to revitalize the ecumenical movement at the grassroots level to be part of the prophetic witness to the truth and light in Asia by journeying together hand in hand.



‘Journeying Together : Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia’

- Rev. Dr. Wesley Ariarajah

Where are we in mission thinking?

It is said that the name most popularly given to new-born male children in the world is Muhammad, and the largest number of books written in the world are on Jesus Christ. I might suggest, without any scientific verification of its truth, that perhaps the largest number of conferences, meetings, and seminars held and statements made in the modern era on a subject pertaining to the Christian faith would be on ‘mission’. All aspects of mission have been studied at different times, in many places, and from numerous angles; the literature on mission is in abundance.

And yet, I want to suggest, that questions like “What is mission?”, “How should we go about it?”, and “What should we hope to achieve through our mission?” are issues that have been elusive, inconclusive, and divisive. As we are aware, it was the disagreements over these questions that led to the ‘ecumenical’ -‘evangelical’ divide within the ecumenical

movement, represented loosely by the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Fellowship respectively. Although these labels are now outdated and we are in a process of drawing closer together, the fundamental questions that initially divided us remain; there will always be a plurality of understanding on what constitutes “mission”.

As a person with a strong background in Interfaith Dialogue, I have never been able to speak either on the subject of dialogue or on mission without troubling or even alienating some members of the audience. However, all those occasions have been learning experiences for me and others, and I hope this will also be one of them.

Exploring the theme of the Conference

The theme chosen for our conference is “Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia”. I know that there would be other presentations on the different dimensions of this theme and hence, in this opening presentation, I would like to reflect on the four key elements that constitute the theme: ‘the Truth’, ‘Light’, ‘Prophetic Witness’, and ‘Journeying Together’– in that order. However, as an introduction to this effort, I would like to lay down four basic new orientations needed in mission thinking, without which there can be no meaningful Christian witness in the Asian context. These are not my original ideas; a number of mission consultations, including those sponsored by the CCA, have already touched on some of these, but it would be good to recall them as we begin our reflections on the theme.¹

a) Decolonization of missionary theology and practice

During the colonial era the churches in Asia were extensions of the churches in the West, supported by their human and financial resources. The Asian churches had also adopted the theology, missiology, and liturgy of the denominations that founded them. At the end of the colonial period, the CCA was at the forefront in advocating and facilitating what was called the “selfhood” of the churches in Asia. Attaining “selfhood” did not only mean becoming independent churches in their own right; what was envisioned by “selfhood” constituted the hope that the churches in Asia would also produce their own theology, liturgy, and missiology that are particular and relevant to the Asian context, based on the one Gospel that Christians from different parts of the world share.

It is heartening that in the field of theology many Asian theologians, from all parts of Asia, have produced a fascinating array of theological reflections using Asian cultural and religious resources and responding to the Asian social, economic and religiously pluralistic contexts.

Since liturgy is closely related to denominational identities, progress in this area has not been as dramatic as in the area of theology. However, there has been significant progress in adopting Asian music, art and architecture. The reluctance to radically rethink Christian liturgy has to do with the reality that more than theology it is the liturgy that gave overt denominational identity to Christian communities.

The area that has not undergone any meaningful change towards the quest for Asian selfhood is the area of mission. Although the concept of mission has been rethought in Asia and in Latin America in relation to social and economic realities, there has been a studied reluctance to re-conceive mission in Asia's religious and cultural context. Despite the many consultations and statements made, mission theology and missionary practice is still stuck in the colonial era. The general sense of superiority that Christians have over other religions, the claim to be in possession of the "whole truth", and the insistence that others would not be "saved" unless they believe what we believe, and become a part of us— all these are part of the colonial mentality, and our traditional missiology is built on these notions.

We may not be conscious of how colonial our missionary thinking is but people of other religious traditions note and resent it. The late philosopher-President of India, S. Radhakrishnan said, "Christians are ordinary people making very extraordinary claims."² Some Christians would respond that the extraordinary claims we make are not about ourselves, but about Jesus Christ. However, did Jesus' self-giving ministry have any trappings of exclusivism, or was it in any way a reflection of the colonial power of his time? Prof. Seshagiri Rao, the Hindu guest to the Fifth Assembly of the WCC in Nairobi (1975), an admirer of Jesus' life and teachings, said that Jesus was brought into Asia as the "Religious Julius Caesar"! Christian witness has no hope in Asia without decolonizing our theology of mission and radically rethinking our attitude to, and our theology of, other religions.

b) Indigenization of mission theology and practice

Second, as indicated earlier, there have been serious attempts to indigenize and contextualize Asian theology and liturgy with Asian cultural and religious resources. What about missiology then? In a recent article, I lamented that while we indigenized theology and liturgy, we have not taken any serious steps to indigenize our missiology, in spite of the fact that there are many resources within Asian religious traditions to do so.³

This is because missions are not new to Asia. In fact, I have always held that Buddhism is the most successful missionary religion in the world. I have maintained this assertion for two reasons: To begin with, since its humble beginnings in North India, Buddhism established itself as a major religious tradition in a number of Asian countries, including Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Indo-china, Tibet, China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong without having to depend on the support of a colonial power. In many of these countries, it is true that royal assent and patronage helped in the propagation of the Buddha dharma. This is because the Buddhist monks first went to the rulers and convinced them of their message and the spiritual benefits it would bring to the people and the nation. A message that was presented as “way of life” based on non-violence, moderation, and compassion was something rulers were willing to support.

In contrast, Christianity had the backing of strong colonial powers of that time. It established educational, health-care, and other social institutions; enormous amount of human and financial resources were poured into the missionary effort. Although it did much good to the people and released liberative forces into Asian cultural life, it could not persuade most of the Asian nations to embrace its message. The success of Buddhist missions in this regard is indeed remarkable.

The second reason why I consider Buddhist missions as most successful has to do with the nature of the results it achieved. In all the countries it went into, it indigenized itself so completely that today in all Buddhist-majority countries, Buddhism, which had also been brought in from outside, is treated as the “religion of the land”, while Christianity and Islam are considered “foreign religions”.⁴

Hinduism also has its missionary streams within it. The Ramakrishna Mission, known to most of us, is only one of the examples of modern missions that originated within Hinduism and gathered followers

within India and in other parts of the world. When one examines the mission-thinking and practice among Asian religious traditions, one would find four characteristics in them that would help Asian Christians to re-conceive their mission in ways that would not alienate or antagonize their neighbours:

To begin with, since plurality in itself is not seen as problematic, Asian religions are not troubled by plurality of claims to truth. While one can claim to have found the truth, be totally committed to it, and proclaim it to others, in the Asian context what is witnessed as “the Truth” is not claimed to be the “only truth” to the exclusion of others. Second, and perhaps the most important difference, is that missionary efforts of Asian religions do not seek to completely replace other religions.

Second, and perhaps the most important difference, is that missionary efforts of Asian religions do not seek to completely replace other religions. Slogans like “Evangelization of the world in this generation” or “India for Christ by 2040” undermine the Asian religious ethos. As mentioned earlier, the social benefits and instances of human liberation that Christian missions brought into Asia have been readily acknowledge but the missionary posture of displacing other religions has been seen by many as a threat. The ‘displacement model’ of Theology of Religions that undergirds Christian missions continues to be a major stumbling block for Christian witness in Asia.

Third, while there have been intensive debates, disagreements, and even periodic instances of persecution of religions like Buddhism and Jainism that had branched off from Hinduism, by and large, they gradually settled down and treated each other as “sister religions”. This capacity to allow space to one another’s religious traditions is based on the conviction that “Truth” is a mystery that cannot be exhausted by any one form in which it is grasped or experienced.

Fourth, in Asian thinking, while everyone has the right to share the message, the burden of freely responding to the message is left to the hearer. Although Christians may argue that this is also their attitude to conversions, the excessive anxiety to make others embrace the Christian faith and the organized attempts to achieve it, especially through funding from outside the country, are looked upon with deep suspicion and disdain.

Since Christian missiology was not indigenized along these lines, its colonial dimensions persist. It continues with the claim that it has the “whole truth”, and the “only way” to salvation. On this basis, at least in theory, it aims to convert all the peoples of Asia into its fold. Asian religious traditions could never understand why Christianity would not settle down and behave as yet another religious tradition that has its own special spiritual message to share with others. Christian missiology and missionary practices urgently need to be indigenized.

My intention here is not to romanticize the Asian religious traditions. Like all religions, Asian religions also have numerous beliefs and practices that need to be challenged and rejected. However, they do give some important insights on sharing one’s faith with others.

c) Moving away from targeting religious traditions as the object of mission

Those of you who are familiar with the history of World Missionary Conferences would be aware that at the first Edinburgh Conference of 1910 and the second one in Jerusalem in 1928, there was considerable pressure from Asian participants and some parts of the missionary constituency to adopt a positive approach to other religions and the spiritual life they seek to uphold. However, at the Third Missionary Conference in Tambaram, near Madras (now Chennai) in 1938, the Dutch missiologist Hendrik Kraemer argued, building on Karl Barth’s distinction between the Gospel and religions, that there is a radical discontinuity between the Gospel and religions, and that all religions participate in the fallen human beings’ rebellion against God. On this basis, he insisted that people of all religious traditions must be confronted with the Christian message and called into Christian discipleship. Ever since, despite the objections of many, religious traditions and their followers have been the target of missionary activity.⁵

This is perhaps the most serious departure from the kind of mission that Jesus practised and called on us to undertake. There were many Greco-Roman, Gnostic and Mystery religions during Jesus’ time. None of them were the object of Jesus’ mission. His mission constituted the proclamation of the Reign of God and its values, and was directed towards challenging his own religious tradition to be more faithful to its calling. Mission for Jesus constituted resisting the dehumanizing powers of evil and domination, solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, and

bringing about healing and wholeness into peoples' lives. Positively, Jesus' mission challenged people to place their trust in God and to love their neighbours as they loved themselves. The only "religion" against which Jesus spoke strongly was the "religion of Mammon"—human beings' faith and confidence in power and wealth. This, Jesus insisted, is the insidious "religion" that can distract us away from God. "You cannot serve God and Mammon," he said. "You will hate the one and cling on to the other" (Matt.6.24).

If this is the understanding of mission that Jesus had, which he performed with love, humility, and self-giving, how did we end up looking at other religions, which are also on a spiritual pilgrimage, as the targets of our mission? Religions are ways in which humans have attempted to discover the mystery and meaning of our existence and seek ways to be in touch with the Reality that lies behind it. These are expounded with the linguistic and philosophic tools at their disposal and invariably conditioned by the cultural and historical circumstances in which they originate. It is little wonder that religions differ from one another, and there is much to be rejected within all religious traditions, including Christianity, because they militate against the Divine intentions for human beings. Nonetheless, we also see in people of other religious traditions heights of spiritual attainment, profound love towards God and one's neighbour, and lives lived in selfless service. Peoples of other religious traditions are our co-pilgrims, and it is in the context of this co-pilgrimage that we share what is most precious to us in our own spiritual struggle.⁶

d) Moving away from the temptation to become a majority community

The fourth and the last preliminary comment I wish to make is perhaps the most important one for our context here in Asia. This has to do with the reality that Christians in most of the countries that constitute the CCA (with the exception of Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Philippines, East Timor, and to some measure, South Korea) are small minorities, surrounded by vast number of people who follow other religious traditions. Yet, classical missiology envisions all peoples embracing the Gospel message. Therefore, being a minority, and the prospect that Christians would continue to be a minority community in Asia for the foreseeable future should be a subject of our theological and missiological reflections. Unfortunately, we refuse to face this reality squarely by

proclaiming at many mission conferences our intention to bring everyone to Christ. This persistent missionary rhetoric creates unwarranted spiritual struggles to discerning Christians, who do not see the prospect of their neighbours embracing Christianity, and yet are unable to believe that they would be “condemned” for not doing so. Some Christians even feel guilty that this reality has to do with their own lack of enthusiasm to bring their neighbours to Christ.

I have been arguing in a number of my writings that Christianity was never intended to be a majority religion, and whenever it was a powerful majority, it betrayed the Gospel. There is no doubt that Emperor Constantine’s embrace of Christianity and later Christianity becoming the religion of the Roman Empire was the biggest misfortune in Christian history. This is the moment when, as one of our revered late ecumenical veterans, Kosuke Koyama, put it, the Christian mind changed from a “crucified mind to a crusading mind.”

Jewish people, who had a self-understanding that they were chosen to be a “light to the nations,” never sought to convert everyone to Judaism. They firmly believed that somehow their people-hood and witness to God was deeply connected to the day when God would gather all nations unto Godself. It remains a mystery to them why God would choose a small, weak, and insignificant nation of that time to heal the world, when there were the powerful Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, and other empires for the purpose. Christians also need to keep wondering why a person who died a lonely death on the cross and the small group of his followers have been given the burden of being God’s witnesses, and to hold up the hope that God would bring about fullness of life to the whole creation. Jewish people have enough hope and confidence and unwavering faith in God to accept their minority situation, and to accept it as their calling. Their hope was not pinned on numbers. In his letter to the Romans, Paul says: “Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom. 8: 24-25).

Time has come for us, Christians, to get over our anxiety to convert the whole world, and to humbly and joyfully accept that even we, as weak and tiny minorities in Asia, are part of God’s healing and redeeming work in the world. Christian witness is not about success but about faithfulness. This is not to deny that people may respond to our witness in life and may freely want to become part of our community, which we have to gladly welcome. However, we need to recapture the theological essence of being

a faithful minority in God's intention to mend the whole creation to what God wills it to be.

Evangelism, Mission and Witness

I also want to make some clarification of the three words, 'evangelism', 'mission' and 'witness', which are sometimes used interchangeably. There is general agreement that "evangelism" constitutes the sharing of the Christian message with others with the intention to invite them to become part of the Christian community; "mission" denotes all that Christians do in the world in response to their discipleship to Christ; and "witness" is what takes place when Christians live a life faithful to the message of the Gospel, among others. These are only working definitions; I am aware that there are other ways of defining these words.

With these, rather lengthy preliminary reflections, I would now turn to the four key dimensions of the theme: Truth, Light, Prophetic Witness, and Journeying Together.

Bearing witness to the truth

The conference booklet, which carries a preliminary exploration of the theme, has chosen the words, "I have come into the world— to bear witness to the Truth" (John 18:37) as the verse that might help us in exploring this aspect of the theme. St. John's Gospel attributes these words to Jesus in the context of the conversation Pilate had with Jesus during his trial. The cynical response from Pilate was: "What is Truth?" Here is a man who is being falsely accused, not willing to defend himself, and about to be sentenced to an agonizing death on the cross, claiming that he had come to "bear witness to the truth". "What, indeed, is the Truth?" Pilate must have wondered.

There is considerable New Testament literature on what "Truth" means in St. John's Gospel. The word "truth", and words related to it, is used 48 times in the Fourth Gospel, whereas there are altogether only ten references to the word in the three synoptic Gospels.⁷ Therefore one could spend considerable time exploring what the word 'truth' means in the Fourth Gospel. However, the verse on truth that has played a major role in Christian missionary efforts is John 14.6: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (New Revised Standard Version or NRSV).

Those of us who have been brought up in the Christian tradition can understand and relate to the statement, “Jesus is the truth”. There are deep Christian spiritual meditations on this assertion but as a statement, it can mean nothing to those outside the tradition. “What do you mean when you say ‘Jesus is the truth’”, they will ask and we will have to dig deep in order to say something that would make sense to them. It is significant that in the actual verse that has been chosen to explore the theme, Jesus says: “I have come to *bear witness* to the truth.” In the Asian context we too need to bear witness *to the truth to which Jesus bore witness* through his life, teachings, death, and resurrection. What is the truth to which Jesus bore witness?

Jesus lived within the Jewish tradition which proclaimed that “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it” (Psalm 24:1). The tradition was uncompromising in the belief that God is God of all the nations (Isaiah 19: 24-25), that God continued to care for all creatures on the earth (Ps.104), and that God intends to bring in all peoples and nations to a state of well-being (*shalom*) where justice and peace are established (Is.11:6-9). While Jesus challenged his own nation to be more faithful to God’s calling, he was uncompromising in asserting that God’s love and care is for all nations and peoples.

Some would point to the existence of sin and evil in the world, and the many different understandings and approaches to God that may sometimes be contrary to what we believe about God. This is indeed true, but Jesus bore witness to God’s love as unconditional love; God’s love for the peoples of the world is not dictated by human actions or inactions. Based on this affirmation about God, Jesus invited all to embrace this love by turning around towards God (repent), and to extend this love in our relationship to our neighbours. While we have put the emphasis on right “beliefs,” Jesus placed the emphasis on “fruits”: “You shall know them by their fruits; a good tree cannot bear bad fruits” (Matt.7: 16-20).

What is more important is that Jesus gave witness to God’s deeper concern for those who are poor, pushed to the margins of the society, and are rejected by religious authorities and social customs as sinners and outcasts. In Jesus’ witness, no one is outside the realm of God’s love. “Be the children of your Father in heaven,” Jesus said, “for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” (Matt. 5: 45).

There is no need to labour this point, because we have rehearsed it many times. Yet, often what we bear witness to is not what Jesus bore witness to. We attempt to bear witness to Jesus and his death and resurrection, whereas Jesus bore witness to a whole new reality of God's relationship to humankind, signified by the in-breaking of the Reign of God and the values and demands of discipleship it seeks to elicit.

The question we need to face about the truth is this: Do we, by making the messenger the message, undermine everything about the *truth that Jesus came to bear witness to*? What is the truth we want to share in our Christian witness? Is it only to what we believe about him, or is it to all that he taught, stood for, and died for? Is it to our doctrines about him or to the values of the Reign of God he announced?

What, we need to ask, are *no longer true* because the Reign of God has broken into human life; and *what is the truth* to which we bear witness because we follow him who announced the in-breaking of the Reign of God?

Following a rhetoric style used by Allan Boesak at the WCC Assembly in Vancouver, we say:

It is *not true* that God favours or saves one group of people over all others;

This is *the truth*: "God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35).

It is *not true* that wealth, power and success are the true signs of God's blessings;

This is *the truth*: Blessed are the poor, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...(Matt.5: 1-11)

It is *not true* that each human being is responsible for his or her own life;

This is *the truth* to which we bear witness: We hold mutual responsibility for each other, and we too are accountable to God for our neighbours' plight.

It is *not true* that men, in one way or another, are superior to women.

This is *the truth* to which we bear witness: God created men and women as equals and has bestowed equal dignity on them.

It is *not true* that social and economic inequalities, war, and violence are part of our human existence and predicament, and we need to learn to live with them;

This is *the truth* to which we bear witness: Injustices, all forms of violence and warfare are against God's will, and we are called to struggle against them.

It is *not true* that earth and its resources are made by God for human enjoyment and exploitation.

This is *the truth* to which we bear witness: The earth belongs to God who created it. We do not own it. We are called to tend it and preserve it.

Walking in the light

The preparatory booklet on the theme has chosen John 8:12 as the focus of the discussion on 'light': "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me, will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life". Again speaking of Jesus as the light makes enormous sense to us; we can make the spiritual connections between Jesus and what living in the light means:

- Jesus and his life shed light on who God is and how God deals with us;
- Jesus is the light in which we see the nature and purpose of our lives;
- He is the light in which we see the values and goals of the Reign of God;
- Jesus is the light in which we are enabled to see injustices and wrongs that we should confront;
- He is the light that shows us the path to the fullness of life.

Inspiring as these are, the simple statement "Jesus is the Light" would make no sense to those outside our fold. Therefore we should highlight the words that follow the statement that he is the light: "Whoever *follows me* will have the light of life." There is good reason for doing so.

Many of the biblical images of the light have something to do with “walking”. The most familiar verse that comes to one’s mind is: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path” (Ps.119:105). Therefore our Christian witness in Asia has to be about a “way”, a “way of life”; about the values of the Reign of God that would lead to life-centred social, economic and political organizations. Walking in the light, Jesus says, has to do with “following” him. It is about discipleship.

Christian missions in Asia have done much to challenge the social evils in society, to show solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, to liberate peoples from cultural bondages, and to build institutions to care for the educational and health needs of the people. However, when it came to bearing witness to Jesus Christ and his significance, we presented a Jesus wrapped up in obsolete doctrines, and spelt out his significance in symbols and images, which made sense at a particular time, first to the Jewish and later within the Greco-Roman culture, but makes no sense in the Asian context.

At the heart of most Asian religious traditions stands the teacher; and the essence of religious life is to follow him or her or the path they have shown. Religion here has to do with discipleship. It is unfortunate that the explication of Jesus’ significance in Asia is still done in doctrinal theology, and Jesus the teacher gets confined to the pulpit and the Sunday school. Membership (in a church) has displaced discipleship; and “believing in him” has swallowed up the imperative of “following him”. While Jesus’ life and teachings fascinated so many Asians, the Christ of the doctrines made no sense to them.⁸

It is important to take to heart that according to John’s Gospel, Jesus immediately followed up his statement that he is the “light of the world” with the words that it is those who *follow him* that “will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” In his first letter John says, “If we say we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...” (1 John1:6-7).

You are the light of the world

There is another dimension to the relationship between light and witness that we need to take note of. Although John confesses that Jesus is the light of the world, Jesus himself said:

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matt. 5: 14-16, NRSV)

In a real sense, this saying captures in totality the meaning and practice of Christian witness in Asia. Jesus suggests that it is the life and discipleship of the community, the values they live by, and the evils they confront that constitute Christian witness. Being a witness is not an optional extra; to be a Christian is to be a witness to God.

When I was a student in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, I had heard D.T. Niles expound this saying thus (as I roughly remember now): “When we say to people that God heals and saves, it means God needs to have a way of saying to people that what we are saying is true. The only way God can do this is to point to Christians as proof that the claim is true.” In other words, when we point God to people, God will have to be able to point us to them as his witnesses. Niles’ thinking means that when it comes to witnessing, there is no possibility to remain neutral. We, as Christians, have only one choice on the matter: our ongoing Christian lives can either be a true witness or a counter-witness to God and how God deals with humankind. Jesus’ words sum this up: “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (v.16).

“Prophetic witness” – A double-edged sword

“Prophetic witness” is that aspect of the theme on which I need not say much. The prophetic witness of calling nations and people to justice and peace, to respect the dignity and rights of all people, to work towards overcoming poverty and depravation, to respect the rights of women and children, to advocate non-violent means of resolving conflicts (and many such concerns not mentioned here) have been part of the understanding of Christian prophetic witness and mission. The ecumenical movement in general, and especially the CCA in the Asian context, has been at the forefront in exercising this ministry.

In the area of ‘prophetic witness’, we need to remind ourselves of two warnings that have been given to us over the years. First is the call to be acutely aware that we, in most instances, are also part of the structures and issues we seek to challenge with a prophetic voice, and are often part of the perpetrators and beneficiaries of the systems that we seek to confront. Therefore, there can be no “holier than thou” attitude in Christian prophetic witness.

The second warning comes from M. M. Thomas’ much quoted statement that “only the participants earn the right to be prophets.” All the prophets in the Bible made prophetic criticisms and warnings out of their own anguish of being part of the nation, or a specific group within it, that was moving away from justice and righteousness. The anguish that makes them speak out comes out of the depth of their identity with the nation.

In Asia today, in addition to the ones that we have paid attention to in the past, new ones –including religious extremism and militancy, disregard for the rule of Law, intolerance towards minority religious and ethnic groups, many forms of child abuse, refugee crises, environmental crisis, issues related to China and India becoming global economic powers, nuclear proliferation, heightened tensions in the Korean peninsula, and human rights violations committed with impunity – cry out for prophetic witness towards peace, justice, and harmony. As followers of Christ we dare not sit on the sidelines when peoples of Asia face these crises.

However, we must be aware that Christians and churches are often tempted to consider “prophetic witness” as something that Christians direct towards the world. However, if we read the scriptures carefully we will discover that prophetic witness is a two-edged sword. Most of the prophetic criticisms in the Hebrew Bible, as also in Jesus’ ministry, were directed not only to social issues, but also towards religious institutions of which they were a part.

What is the prophetic criticism that we need to direct towards Christians and churches in Asia? What are the areas of church life in Asia that cry out for prophetic criticism and witness? What are the kinds of missionary activities that we need to openly reject and witness against? There may not be general answers to these question, but those of us who come from different national churches and Christian institutions and movements know the areas and issues on which strong prophetic criticism

and counter-witness should be levelled against in order to purify and renew the churches and other institutions so that they are more faithful to God and to the message of the gospel.

“Journeying together”- Yes, but who are the partners?

One of the positive aspects of the formulation of the theme is that it rightly depicts the prophetic witness to the truth and light as a “journey”, and sees this journey as one that has to be undertaken “together”. What is recognized in this call are the many divisions that exist within the Christian community – along denominational and confessional lines, along the ecumenical-evangelical divide, over attitude to the Bible and the understanding of what constitutes mission, along the emphasis on the institution of the church and the calling of peoples’ movements, and so on. One of the early slogans used in the global ecumenical movement, “The world is too strong for a divided church,” applies more acutely here in Asia. At the religious level, we are aware that most of the historic divisions among us have been imported from the outside, and we also know that if we have love, humility, generosity, and the will, we can overcome them or deal with them creatively and undertake a journey together.

It is no secret, however, that many have moved beyond seeking unity only among Christians, although it is still a valid exercise. There is increasing clamour to seek to move together with friends and neighbours of other religious traditions, and those, for various reasons, who profess no religious faith, but are committed to addressing the problems that beset our continent. We have very few “Christian problems” that need Christian answers; what we face today are huge human problems calling for the togetherness of the human community to address them. Some have identified this as a call for a “wider ecumenism”, and this is accompanied by the deepening interest in “public theology”, where we direct our theological/social/ethical reflections and efforts not to serve any particular religious community but the whole human community in a given place.⁹

Much more can and needs to be said on the two contemporary moves towards “wider ecumenism” and “public theology”, but it is beyond the scope of this presentation. What is important, however, is that the phrase “journeying together” in our theme needs to be explored to the fullest extent possible. It is in becoming a much more inclusive community than we presently are – in many areas of religious and public life that we

can become a relevant minority. And in engaging in prophetic witness with all who share our concerns, irrespective of their religious identity, that we can enter into a fuller understanding of the truth and light to which we have been called to be witnesses. The Asian reality today demands concerted prophetic witness against the forces that seek to tear our communities apart and stand in the way of the fullness of life that God intends for all people.

We have the theological and spiritual resources to do these; what we need more are the strength, will and courage to act on them.

End Notes

1. For instance, see: Philip L. Wickeri, *People of God Among All God's Peoples: Frontiers in Christian Mission- Report from a Theological Round Table Sponsored by the Christian Conference of Asia and the Council for World Mission, November 11-17, 1999* (Hong Kong: CCA and CWM, 2000), which seeks to explore the understanding of mission from a number of perspectives.
 2. This was said in a conversation and is reported in: E.C. Derwick, *The Christian Attitude to Other Religions – The Hulsean Lectures, 1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) p.179 (my secondary source for this reference is a dissertation submitted by Dr. Sarosh Koshy)
 3. “Towards a more radically indigenized Asian Christian Missiology” in: Wati Longchar, ed., *Doing Contextual Theology in Asia – Essay in Honour of Huang Po Ho* (Taiwan: Program for Theology and Culture in Asia, 2014.)
 4. Cf: Jeremy Horner, *The Spread of Buddhism through Asia*, (New York: Goff Books, 2016)
 5. For a detailed discussion, see: S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians - A Century of Protestant Ecumenical Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), pp. 17-88.
 6. Cf: S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Your God, My God, Our God – Rethinking Christian Theology for Religious Plurality*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), p. 171 f.
 7. Cf: www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs
 8. Among the Hindu religious leaders influenced by the Gospel were Ram Mohan Roy, who published a booklet called “Precepts of Jesus” and Keshab Chandra Sen who spoke of the “Oriental Christ”. Cf: David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). It is also significant that Gandhi, while having serious reservations about the church and its mission, was deeply influenced by Jesus’ teachings, both for his personal life and for the Indian independence struggle he led. There are also many contemporary examples of people of other faiths that embrace Jesus the teacher; but have difficulties with the doctrinal presentations of his significance.
 9. For a discussion on “public theology” see: Felix Wilfred, “Asian Christianity and Public Life – The Interplay” in: Felix Wilfred, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. pp. 558-574.
- For “Wider ecumenism” see: S. Wesley Ariarajah, “Wider Ecumenism: A Promise or a Threat?” in: *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 50, No.3, July 1998, pp.327-8.



‘Journeying Together: Mission as Prophetic Accompaniment Though Dialogue and Engagement’

- Archbishop Dr. Paul Kwong

I bring you greetings from Hong Kong and from my Church, the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (Anglican Church). We are proud to be part of the Christian Conference of Asia, and I am deeply honoured to have been invited to address you at this historic mission conference.

We are called as Christians in mission. We journey together with all humanity, with all creation, as sojourners on a common journey. We walk in humility on a prophetic mission, and our task is to discern the signs of the times and bring Good News to the world, through dialogue and engagement with others. Mission is not only a task, but also a gift. We do not “do” mission. God does mission (*missio dei*) and we are privileged to play a part in this.

The Christian Conference of Asia is a regional communion of churches and ecumenical organizations, and we face many issues which defy

easy answers and which sometimes threaten to pull us apart. There is a separation between the wealthy countries and regions in some parts of Asia and churches which are in material terms, poor. This is an economic and political issue that challenges our integrity as a communion. Terrorism now has a global reach, and people and countries all over the world are susceptible to senseless, ideologically motivated attacks. There are wars and rumors of war, and Asia continues to be an area of contestation between global powers. The environment is a concern for all people and for the very existence of our planet. Governments and churches have sought to curb global warming and preserve God-given natural resources. Human sexuality and gender have challenged our churches. The list of issues could go on and on, but I do not intend to present a litany of woes, but rather to help us think about a way forward.

In this address, I will outline an approach that can take us from dialogue to engagement with one another and possibly to reconciliation as we approach the issues facing the CCA. In order to do this, I must first say something about what it means for us to live in a world of globalization and interconnectedness.

Globalization and Interconnectedness

Depending on how you see it, globalization is a very old or a very new process. Some argue that globalization began with the emergence of Christianity as a world religion. Others argue that it began with the age of modernity in the 15th or 16th centuries. Still others contend that globalization began with the end of the Cold War era and the beginnings of a world market economy. No matter which definition we use, globalization is a phenomenon that affects us all in areas ranging from economics to politics, and from culture to religion. We live in an interconnected world, and this has both disadvantages and advantages.

British journalist Martin Wolf describes the economic aspects of globalization as “the growing economic interdependence of countries worldwide through the increasing volume and variety of cross-border transactions in goods and services and of internal capital flows and also through the more rapid and widespread diffusion of technology.” Others say that “neo-liberal” economics is a process integration at the centre or centres of power which excludes and impoverishes those at the periphery. The late Samuel Huntington, an American political scientist, stressed on the cultural aspects of globalization and the so-called “clash of civilizations”

which pits Islam against the West. I disagree with his analysis, because his classification only speaks of the negative aspects of global religious differences rather than the possible harmony. Theologian Hans Kung offers a partial corrective in speaking of an emerging “global ethic” to which all religions could contribute, and which would promote civilizational harmony.

In China, the new globalization emphasis is on “One Belt, One Road”, that is a new Silk Road economic belt and a 21st century maritime silk road. This is a policy designed to enhance China’s own economic and cultural interests as well as the country’s political influence. It is also an idea that can benefit other people and cultures and promote global interconnectedness. “One Belt, One Road” can promote peace and co-operation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit, and people-to-people relationships. It is a policy from China but other countries can adopt it, at least in part, for their own benefit to address some of the issues I have just spoken of. “One Belt, One Road” is a two-way street that can enhance our relationships with China and with one another.

I do not think “One Belt, One Road” is a “cure-all” policy, nor do I wish to assert the priority of China in enhancing international exchange. I do believe, however, that China has taken leadership in promoting a form of globalization that can enhance our co-operation with one another, and promote dialogue, engagement and reconciliation across the boundaries which divide us.

An ancient Chinese saying goes thus, “A long journey can be covered only by taking one step at a time.” It is taking the first step that is important, and that begins with dialogue.

Dialogue

The word **dialogue** has been spoken of frequently in the church. Everyone seems to welcome it and no one seems to oppose it. Why dialogue at all? Why begin a conversation? We do live in a pluralist society, but there is no universal law which says that everyone must talk to everyone else. Wouldn’t it be easier simply to say “To each his own” and leave it at that? Of course, we do that – in a wide variety of situations – every day.

However, dialogue is essential in the church for the alternative is monologue. We may say that dialogue begins with God’s dialogue with us. Christian

faith, therefore, requires dialogue with one another inside the church and with those of different faiths. Dialogue can be defined in different ways. Let me suggest three complementary ways of understanding dialogue.

- 1) On a purely human level, dialogue means **“reciprocal communication”** or, more deeply, “interpersonal communion”;
- 2) Dialogue also can be taken as an attitude of **“respect and friendship”**, which is important to all aspects of the mission of the church. A recent Roman Catholic statement on the question affirmed: “The fact that Christian mission can never be separated from love and respect for others is proof for Christians of the place of dialogue within that mission.”
- 3) In the context of religious pluralism, dialogue means **“all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment” in obedience to truth and in respect for freedom.** (This is from the Vatican II document “Dialogue and Proclamation”, 1991.) This latter sense is what we mean by inter-religious dialogue. It demands freedom and openness, reciprocity and mutuality, receptivity and active communication.

In facing Asia’s problems, we must begin with dialogue whenever we can. Dialogue implies that conversation with those of other faith traditions is important for our own life, health and faithfulness. It shows the church’s solidarity with the whole human family, and demonstrates that the church cannot exist for itself. Repeatedly God has used the insight of non-Christians to challenge the church to renewal. The church, as Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple once said, is the only institution that exists for those who are not its members.

Dialogue involves the other and so we must begin by speaking of dialogue and the other, or what I want to call dialogue and difference. This is true in interfaith dialogue, where we must acknowledge and respect the differences we have with our non-Christian neighbours. At the same time, we must strengthen those areas in which we agree, ethically, religiously and with respect to global issues.

Three years ago (in 2014), we had the so-called Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, a movement in which mainly young people took to the streets

to demonstrate in favour of political reform. I am sure that you have read about it in your newspapers or heard about it on TV. For several months, this disrupted normal life in Hong Kong, and it showed us how polarized our society in Hong Kong was, between old and young, rich and poor, and promoters of democracy and upholders of the status quo. At different levels in our churches, we tried to dialogue with some of the protestors, some of whom were our own church members. We attempted to be with the demonstrators, even though we did not entirely agree with them. At that time I wrote,

The church is called to a ministry of reconciliation and pastoral care for all. In this time of uncertainty, we open ourselves to our community as we seek to promote mutual understanding in a spirit of dialogue through both recognition of differences and commitment to the common good. We seek to provide care for those who suffer injury in their spirit. We extend our love and prayers to those who take part in demonstrations, to those entrusted with maintaining public order, and to those who hold government office. We offer our unreserved assistance to those who are in need of support as we recommit ourselves to working for peace and concord of the society of Hong Kong.

The Prophet Jeremiah writes, “But seek the welfare of this city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare, you will find your welfare.” Let us work together for this territory and for our country as we seek to understand one another and resolve our differences.

I cannot say that my call for more dialogue, mutual understanding and reconciliation was entirely successful. The polarization is still with us, now three years on but I believe that the church and the Christian Conference of Asia can provide space for dialogue and coming together in a way that other social institutions cannot. In this respect, dialogue is our starting point.

Engagement

Dialogue is a starting point for addressing the issues that divide us but dialogue by itself is not enough. We must also find appropriate ways for engaging one another in common action and social service. Engagement is not simply action, but bilateral action, in which there is give and take among the partners. Dialogue must be complemented by missional engagement but such engagement can also enhance dialogue. One way of speaking about mission is engagement with social issues on behalf of the church.

You may have heard of the Amity Foundation, a charitable organization in China started by Bishop K. H. Ting in 1985 and the largest printer-producer of the Bible. The CCA has been involved with Amity through all these years. Amity's purpose is to contribute to social development in China, serve as a channel for international Christian sharing and make Christianity more widely known to the Chinese people. It does this not through dialogue alone but through engagement with social issues and with the participation of people at the grassroots. When Bishop Ting started the Amity Foundation, he did not have a clearly worked-out plan on how to proceed; the theology was not fully developed. However, through engagement with issues as varied as AIDS education, fostering programs for orphans and integrated rural development, there emerged a program and a theory on how to work. There is an old Chinese saying, "There is no pattern for making sandals. They shape themselves in the making." Similarly, there was no pattern for Amity; it was shaped through the engagement with social issues. My church, the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (HKSCH), has supported Amity from the beginning and today we continue to be involved in Amity's social service projects.

Our HKSCH Social Welfare Council has begun a new project called "Together we Build". This is a project to encourage and develop community engagement in public space transformation. The project is intended to involve church members and others in the design and construction of public spaces, such as parks, leisure facilities and homes for the elderly. We hope this will foster social integration and development, and bring creativity and healthy lifestyles to open space. Participants will help design such spaces and contribute their own money and efforts to build together. I cite this as an example of social engagement which will at the same time foster dialogue about what kind of environment we want for Hong Kong. Engagement and dialogue go together.

Education has been an important area of mission engagement for the HKSCH since the time of our founding. I know this is also the case with many CCA member churches. For more than 150 years, the HKSCH has been involved in education at all levels in Hong Kong and South China, from pre-school to the university and seminary level. At present, there are 142 schools and educational institutions related to the Church as well as the Ming Hua Theological College for the education of the clergy and laity. The Church's commitment to education is part of our contribution to society to mould students who will be good citizens of Hong Kong and the world, regardless of their religious beliefs.

All Hong Kong church-related schools are under government subvention. This means that the government provides funding but the schools are sponsored by (or in other ways related to) the churches. Such sponsorship takes a variety of forms and it has been evolving. Over the past 10-15 years, there have been tensions between the government and the churches (mainly the HKSKH and the Roman Catholic Church) over church and community representation in school councils or management committees. School curriculums are fixed by the educational authorities, and the secular and pluralist environment of Hong Kong is presupposed while doing this. Religious education is not part of the curriculum, but churches do appoint school chaplains who teach, organize voluntary religious activities and serve the students as counselors and promoters of civic education.

The 5th General Synod of HKSKH approved a mission statement as part of its School Education Policy Paper, which is excerpted below:

The Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui's Mission in Education is to promote the ethos of Christian whole-person education... Such mission shall be fulfilled through operating kindergartens, schools and educational institutions which are committed to providing students with quality education based upon the ethos of Christian whole-person education. In doing so, it is sharing God's love and the Gospel with teachers, staff, students and their families; and helping students explore their lives with meaning and purpose basing upon Christian values and the Anglican tradition.

As part of our mission outreach, the HKSKH is trying to reclaim our role in education, to promote a primary and secondary education that will include a consideration of spiritual and ethical values. This is the goal of many religious bodies in Hong Kong and throughout Asia, and the schools have an important role to play. If we speak about public theology, we need to practice this in the schools. Traditionally, the schools have been a source for new leadership in the churches but this is no longer the case. In reclaiming education, our Church is not trying to make more students Christians but rather to educate them in ways that will encourage more public-spiritedness, a dedication to community and individual integrity. This is part of our mission in the Hong Kong context. Education promotes dialogue, and involvement in education is a form of engagement with society as a whole.

I am offering examples from the HKSKH for Hong Kong is my context. You have your own churches and contexts, and I am sure that you can offer ideas that we can learn from. I know that churches here in Myanmar and

throughout Asia are engaged in programs of mission that engage society through direct action as well as dialogue. Here I have offered these few examples to show what forms dialogue may take.

Reconciliation

“In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” II Corinthians 5:19

The goal of dialogue and engagement is reconciliation, for we are entrusted with a mission and ministry of reconciliation in the world. Mission through reconciliation is our goal but we do not always seem to get there. Yet, we must remember that reconciliation is God’s initiative of bringing healing and wholeness to a broken world but as participants in God’s mission, we may not be the best ones to evaluate our own actions.

In 2005, 47 theologians from a variety of traditions met at Duke University in the United States and drafted a statement entitled *Reconciliation as the Mission of God*. They came from a variety of Christian traditions, largely evangelical. The group correctly saw that reconciliation was God’s initiative and vision, and the world in which we lived was in dire need of a reconciling Christian mission to address the issues we face.

I want to highlight two things about this statement. I believe we can learn from that.

Reconciliation is not a theory, achievement, technique, or event. It is a journey. Scripture is central to the ministry of reconciliation because it both points to the specific end toward which the journey leads, and shapes the particular path of our journey as we engage the deep brokenness of real places and lives. Without the unique stories of scripture, we cannot cultivate the imagination necessary to live into the gifts and challenges of the journey of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a journey of prophetic accompaniment, for we live in a world in which reconciliation has not yet arrived. Stories from the Bible and from our churches help to cultivate the imagination necessary to achieve

reconciliation. I would add that stories from our own cultural traditions are also essential for an *Asian* theology of mission. This is something I have learned from Asian theologians, many of whom are here with us today.

The statement quoted above also observes,

Imagination and conversion are the very heart and soul of reconciliation. Reconciliation is about learning to live by a new imagination. God desires to shape lives and communities that reflect the story of God's new creation, offering concrete examples of another way and practices that engage the everyday challenges of peaceful existence in the world. That is why the work of reconciliation is sustained more through story-telling and mentoring than by training in techniques and how to's. Through friendship with God, the stories of scripture and faithful lives, and learning the virtues and daily practices those stories communicate, reconciliation becomes an ordinary, everyday pattern of life for Christians.

Yes, we need imagination and conversion to sustain us on the journey of reconciliation. Imagination means that we must be innovative. The word conversion is from the New Testament word *metanoia*, which literally means turning around. We ourselves need to be converted or turned around so that our faith may be renewed and we may recommit ourselves to the mission of God through reconciliation in prophetic accompaniment.

However, we live in an unreconciled world. In the face of the many issues we face, there are a variety of opinions on how to address them and a diversity of religious viewpoints. On the one hand, we need to work for reconciliation, but on the other hand we have to learn to live with unreconciled diversity. That may be a new term for you but unreconciled diversity is the condition of our world. We often speak about unity without uniformity, and that is our goal. Unreconciled diversity means we may not have fully reached unity but we have the faith to continue on our journey of prophetic accompaniment together.

The Africans have a saying, which I am sure many of you are familiar with. "If you want to go fast, go alone. But if you want to go far, go together." Friends, we have a long journey of reconciliation in mission and we need to stay together. The CCA is an instrument of ecumenical unity that helps us to do this. Prophetic accompaniment will require forbearance with one another in love and a willingness to sit loosely to long-held opinions. Some say that we will need a high tolerance of ambiguity, a willingness not to

pin things down so sharply, and a spirit that allows us to move in new and creative directions.

In the Christian Conference of Asia, and in our own churches and councils, we have no choice but to go against the tide of unreconciled diversity. This has been a goal of the CCA for the 60 years of its existence. Our very purpose is to work for co-operation with one another as we seek the common ground in the church and in the world. I personally want to work for reconciliation and unity without uniformity in the CCA, and to strengthen our fellowship with one another. To be sure, our own churches have also been subject to polarization and divisiveness, for we are part of the world that we want to change. We all know that there are also tensions between churches in many parts of Asia. However, we have been given the faith, hope and love to participate in God's mission in the world, together with sisters and brothers from other churches. We have been called to dialogue and engage with other religious communities to address the issues facing our world. We cannot do any of this alone because we live in a multi-religious region where Christians are but a small minority. Indeed, Asia is the home of world religions, of which Christianity is one.

The CCA is one of the oldest regional ecumenical organizations in the world but ecumenism is being challenged in many quarters. We should review our history as we plan for the future. We must also try to come up with concrete strategies to address the issues. This is the purpose of holding this mission conference.

The CCA is a living fellowship of churches, of all in each place, and we must renew our efforts to live out the unity with one another given by God. There is much we can do together; even as we maintain our own church traditions we can contribute to one another.

During the days we are here together during this conference, we will be sharing our experiences, reflecting on the Bible and theology and working to contribute to a better understanding of mission as prophetic accompaniment. God has given us the gift of grace in Jesus Christ and a mission of reconciliation inspired by the Holy Spirit. Our gift, and our task, is to embark upon the journey together with the sisters and brothers of our churches, and alongside the peoples of our nations and cultures, to move from dialogue to engagement and toward reconciliation. This is the path of prophetic accompaniment.



Mission as Affirming the Servanthood

- Sr. Sudha Varghese

I often wonder where I am with the Church and this is a question I ask myself frequently. My efforts to help the Musahar people in Bihar state of India, one of the most underdeveloped and difficult areas to free people from their inhuman living conditions, is part of my faith, witness and mission. The Musahar people in Bihar are the most downtrodden among India's downtrodden or Dalits who subsist on rats. The Musahars are landless agricultural labourers who are never paid adequately for their work; their other occupations include cleaning toilets or brewing illicit liquor for the dominant castes. The Musahar women and children who work for the upper caste people in their homes are often sexually exploited. Schools are out of bounds for them; the ones who dared to go dropped out owing to the ridicule and neglect they faced from upper caste classmates and teachers. None of these people I have worked with during the past quarter of a century are Christians. Hopefully my selfless service and work for them convey something to them. I want them to be human beings fully, and hopefully after being educated, they will think "should I have a name", "do I want to be a Christian, Hindu, Muslim, etc." but for me, the first and most important thing is for them to have their rights to dignity, decent standard of life, good health, education and a home to live in. I am with them on this

journey and their struggle. Child marriage among the Musahars is rampant. Girls are married off at the age of 10 and have 3-4 children by the time they are 20, when they are barely old enough to look after one child. This was one of the first issues that I had to surmount when I wanted to start a school for Musahar girls.

The experiences I have had on my journey with the struggling mothers towards the kingdom where they will not be discriminated against on the basis of their caste, creed or sex are many. I was born in Kerala, a southern state in India. When I was young and in grade school, I heard about the poverty that the people faced and their living conditions in tiny huts. I had never seen such a sight in my whole life and I wanted to know how these people could live on the roadside in small huts. How could they have no home? As soon as I passed my Tenth Standard examination, I stubbornly went to Bihar. From there I joined a Convent of the Roman Catholic sisters, whose mission was to educate children, especially girls from the upper caste communities- well-to-do people. I was not interested in them. Once I finished my education and got the chance to leave the Convent, I wanted to find the people that I wanted to spend my life with, with the people who deserved it the most. In my search for that group, I met the “Musahars”. Musahar means one who kills and eats rats. I found this community in the 1980s. In 1986, I decided to move into their village and small settlements; I found the huts that I read about when I was studying in Class 8 and I settled down with them. I subsequently lived with them for 21 years and went through all the different struggles that they experienced in order to exist.

The Mushars have no land of their own and have problems cooking a meal together. In my experience, their children cry for food every day. They are forced to work and not paid proper wages. They have two jobs: clearing streets or brewing illicit liquor. They experience sexual harassment as well as other exploitations. One night, as usual, some women came to me and talked about their problems. During the day, the news came that a girl had been raped. I happened to hear about it that night. They did not know that rape was a crime. They asked what was to be done when these things happened. I said that rape was a crime and it must be reported to the police. They disagreed; they did not want to go to the police because they could not live there then. After a few days, a few women joined me and we went to the police station. We were there for three hours and the police told me, “Do you think anyone would rape a girl or woman so dirtily dressed? I don’t believe you.” At that point I had already passed my law exam and been in the courts, the policeman had seen me there before. By the time

the culprits knew a case was being registered, they started to threaten me. They started blaming me for protecting them. We put the pressure on the police. With all this, the culprit was arrested, so the women from other places asked “how come the rape case was registered?” I told them “if such incidents take place in your community as well, I would take your cases to court”. It was a fight for women to recognize their dignity, and this stretched from a year to two. I had 9 cases registered and to oust the culprits each time, we took to the roads and pressured the police station; until we pressured them, nobody would be arrested. I continued to learn more and more about them. What was their situation at that time? No child attended school due to fear of discrimination as they were made to sit at the back or the floor, and neglected. The master would teach them that they had nothing to do with this lesson; that they were nothing.

I continued to work with women and built a strong organization of women. There were many atrocities, sexual and domestic violence, and in order to fight against these injustices, women needed to be organized. Women were my biggest supporters, they would always be ready to be on the road, shout the slogans, and work together.

They were totally landless and always depended on the land of others; they were subjected to unfair wages, and often waited long periods to receive them. They lived day-to-day, and so had to live for today. In this situation, I decided to focus on the education of adolescent girls because it would be their last opportunity to get education. They were often victims of child-marriages, married at the age of 10 or 11. I started to arrange education for girls, and to my surprise, when I talked to the girls they would say, “ask my mother”. When I asked their mothers, they would say that it was already time for her marriage. I would ask them to just send the girls for even an hour to learn something. They were reluctant, but I managed to get 20 girls. I taught them how to sew, sing and other skills. They were surprised by a sewing machine. They did quite well. Luckily, this news got out to the UN. I was asked to start three more centers, and later close to 50 girls were attending the classes. I told them that education was the agent of change. The girls began to become self-aware. They began to appreciate being clean, combing their hair and wearing clean clothes. They wanted to look presentable and be like other girls. This change also began to empower them. They started to speak up. Before that, every center would have the mothers. The mothers were the backbones of the center. We noticed that small children from 3-7 were playing in the mud, catching tiny fish, left alone and doing nothing. Other children of their age from the upper castes

were studying in nursery classes with the support of the government. We started to establish Learning Centers for these less privileged children. They learned joyfully. Then, after my girls studied at the center for 3 years, we led them to the mainstream government schools. My girls could easily go into class 6 and they got admissions. We monitored their attendance and performance. While in class 9, they asked for assistance. Few centers started to offer them tutoring and study-help. After all these years, I had not been able to catch the male youth and I felt guilty. They would laze around and drink liquor, gamble, sleep, smoke tobacco. I wanted to get the youth too and so we sent two people to sit with the youth, and they were with them for 2 weeks. They said “*Bibi*, these boys don’t want to do anything; they want to gamble, drink and fight.’ I sent them back telling them to ask questions and find out what they wanted to do. The youth said that they wanted to play cricket. So I bought a cricket set for them, and instead of drinking liquor available in the villages, they played cricket. After a few months, the neighbouring team challenged them, and the youth won, getting a reward of 3000 rupees. They formed 11 teams and asked me to buy them cricket sets. I did not have that money but a bank gave me money with which I bought the cricket sets for them. The boys were so happy. They left all their boozing, and started to play seriously. There was a tournament, and we invited the Minister of Sports and Games to attend. So change took place because we went and asked them what they would like to do, and they felt like they could tell us what they wanted to do.

We started small agricultural programs for them. One young person started a small shop. On their own, they started to learn dance and music. There is a lot of poverty. The government then introduced liquor prohibition. Our people who used to sell liquor were suddenly out of business. So the boys were going to sing and dance. The women started to fight against inequality, poverty, ill-health and gender-bias. Ill-health became a huge problem. Tuberculosis, Cholera, and other serious illnesses, as well as chronic anemia and malnutrition, became problems among them. We initiated training of women for different livelihoods.

We take care of over 100 elderly people who have no one to look after them. We give them food, clothes and look after their health needs. We are fighting against child-marriages. Whenever we hear of a girl or boy getting married, we approach the parents and explain to them why the marriage should not happen as she is too young to get married. A girl at 20 would most likely already have 3-4 children, but she would not be able to feed and look after even one child, as her health would be deteriorating. Child-

trafficking is also a big problem among the Musahars. We are working to prevent trafficking as well.

We take up human rights violations, be it physical violence or other forms. I have one experience of a situation where 42 families were being chased away because the upper caste people wanted to grab the land they had been living on. We took all the information from the people who were left behind. I met the district commissioner and administrator, and asked them why these injustices were taking place. I managed to get them to move and asked them to bring the Chief administrator there to listen to the plight of these families. Eventually we won the battle and the upper castes learned that they were once somebody, but they were nobody now. The government also started caring about them.

In my 21 years of work with the Musahars, I always travelled by bicycle. Some days I travel 50 kilometers a day, and come home when it is dark or late at night. The women would bring me food at night. I witnessed their generosity and loyalty. Whenever they heard somebody saying something against me, they would give me the news in warning to keep me safe. There were elderly women there who were like our mothers and they would scold me for coming in late. They cared and loved me. I must say, I have lived many lives and died many deaths living with them, and saved the lives of a number of people who were about to be killed or beaten up. They always stood by me in times of confrontation and threat. After a death threat, I would tell my opposition, “You can kill me but your problem will not be solved. There will be hundreds of women who will stand up in my stead.”

One of the things that I have learned in my experience is to not show any fear. If you show fear, you will not be able to work in that area and among them. Others will know that that is your weak point. Don't let your fear control you, let go of it courageously. I experienced that all my people agree that we are all sisters and brothers. In my 21 years of living among them, it was a time of learning for me, and with them, my life is made meaningful and I am happy. Some people ask me if I ever want to turn away and go back, but I have never once thought of turning back. My people have always stood by me and cooperate with me. With their cooperation, I was able to live with them. This is my 32 years of living and working with them. Any women's issues, upper or lower caste, I will be with them. Women's issues are always my issues.

I have another short video of my girls. One community is 150 girls and the other is 100 girls. They look different, being clean, getting sufficient and can have regular food, and they are getting a lot of opportunities to learn, music, sports, yoga, dance, etc. And so they are in a different world. The video I am screening here will show where these Musahar people came from and where they live now.



Journeying Together : Mission as Participating in the Reign of God

- Bishop Reuel Norman O. Marigza

As a new human family, the church has become a symbol and servant of God's reign whose mission is to enter into the process of partnering in the Reign of God and furthering its movement towards the end-time community.¹

The Centrality of the Reign of God

The theme Reign of God, a.k.a. Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Christ, Kingdom of Heaven or Reign/Rule of God is definitely a central theme of Scripture. In this paper, I will use the word reign or kingdom interchangeably, for the Scripture uses the term both as reign and as realm; as kingly authority and as kingdom (see Appendix 1 on some biblical data and definitions).

Listen to how this reign is described:²

“The kingdom of God is a key thread in Scripture, tying the whole Bible together. It is not the only unifying theme, nor should it replace other themes which are clearly biblical. Yet it is a critically important theme,

especially today. And its recent resurgence in the church is, I believe, one of the most significant developments of this century.” – *Howard Snyder*

“The Messianic kingdom is not only the main theme of Jesus’ preaching; it is the central category unifying biblical revelation.” – *Richard Lovelace*

“The concept of the kingdom of God involves, in a real sense, the total message of the Bible.... To grasp what is meant by the Kingdom of God is to come very close to the heart of the Bible’s gospel of salvation.” – *John Bright*

Jesus’ message “was the Kingdom of God. It was the centre and circumference of all He taught and did... The Kingdom of God is the master-conception, the master-plan, the master purpose, the master-will that gathers everything up into itself and gives it redemption, coherence, purpose and goal.” –*E. Stanley Jones*

So important is this that Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry as recorded in the earliest Gospel, stated what would be his recurring theme: “The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15).

While this is widely recognized, the variety of interpretations and understandings of this theme has diluted its intended impact and robbed its power.

Some Affirmations on the Reign of God

1. The Reign of God is a mystery.

Listen to this description of the Kingdom: The Kingdom of God is “both present and future, both earthly and heavenly, both hidden and becoming manifest. It is as concrete and this-worldly as the dust on Jesus’ feet or the Galilean wind in his hair; it is as costly as the crucifixion; it is as heavenly as the risen Christ sitting at the right hand of the Father. ‘It is expanding in society like the grain of mustard seed ...; working toward the pervasion of society like the leaven in the lump.’ Its truth and values are those taught and lived by Jesus Christ and delivered to the body of his followers, but this Kingdom can become fully manifest only when Jesus returns to earth.”³

Theologians often speak of the paradox of the “here and still-to-come”, “the now and the not-yet” dimensions of the Kingdom. It is here now! Christ’s first recorded message was simple and forthright: “The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). He also said, “... Behold, the Kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17: 21). Yet we also believe and do declare that there is a final consummation – when God’s “Kingdom come” and God’s “will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10); when “the kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ” where “He shall reign forever and ever” (Revelations 11:15). In that future time, often described as ‘the end of the age’, Christ will judge on the throne, where the righteous shall inherit the Kingdom (Matt. 25: 31-46; specifically, v. 34).

Christ Himself talks of the Kingdom as a “mystery”. In Mark 4: 11, He said: “To you has been given the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables.” Many of the parables then contain a clue on the Kingdom.

One of the parables that Jesus used was that of the leaven. Again Jesus said, “To what will I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened.” (Matt. 13:33; Lk. 13:20-21). Notes Scottish theologian William Barclay, “Almost all scholars would agree that it speaks of the transforming power of Christ and of his Kingdom in the life of the individual and of the world; but there is a difference of opinion as to how that transforming power works.”⁴

Barclay then goes on to say: “In those days, leaven was a little piece of dough which had been kept over from the last baking and had fermented. Leaven is regularly used in Jewish thought for influence.”

There are two interpretations of this parable. From the first the following points emerge.

(i) The reign of God starts from the smallest beginnings. The leaven was very small but it changed the whole character of the dough. The kingdom of heaven starts from the dedicated lives of individual men and women.

(ii) The reign of God works unseen. We do not see the leaven working but all the time it is fulfilling its function. We cannot see the leaven working in the dough, any more than we can see a flower growing, but the work of

the leaven is always going on. It may be unseen but always the Kingdom is working and drawing [people] and the world ever nearer to God. The kingdom is on the way.

Using this view, the parable teaches that with Jesus Christ and his gospel a new force has been let loose in the world, and that force, silently but inevitably, is working for righteousness in the world and God indeed is working out the divine purpose.

(iii) The reign of God works from inside. As long as the leaven was outside the dough, it was powerless to help; it had to get right inside. It has to penetrate; like the salt that has to be rubbed on the meat to prevent it from spoiling.

The second interpretation of this parable, as proposed by the Welsh New Testament Scholar C. H. Dodd, is that the lesson of the parable is the very opposite of this, and that, far from being unseen, the working of the Reign of God can be plainly seen. The working of the leaven is plain for all to see. Put the leaven into the dough, and the leaven changes the dough from a passive lump into a seething, bubbling, heaving mass. Just so the working of the Kingdom is a violent and disturbing force plain for all to see. When Christianity came to Thessalonica (in Greece), the cry was: "They who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (Acts 17:6). The action of Christianity is disruptive, disturbing, and violent in its effect.

True religion is never dope-it never sends people comfortably to sleep; it never makes them placidly accept the evils that should be striven against. Real Christianity is the most revolutionary thing in the world; it works revolutions in the individual life and in society. "May God," said Unamuno, the great Spanish mystic, "deny you peace and give you glory." The kingdom of heaven is the leaven which fills a person at one and the same time with the peace of God and with the divine discontent which will not rest until the evils of earth are swept away by the changing, transforming and revolutionizing power of God.

There is undeniable truth there. It is true that Jesus was crucified because he disturbed all orthodox habits and conventions; again and again it has been proved true that Christianity has been persecuted because it desired to take both persons and society and remake them.

We do not need to choose between these two views of the parable, because they are both true. There is a sense in which the Kingdom, the power of Christ, the Spirit of God, is always working, whether or not we see that work; and there is a sense in which it is plain to see. Many an individual life is manifestly and violently changed by Christ; and at the same time there is the silent operation of the purposes of God in the long road of history.⁵

2. The Reign of God is not a human project.

When the prophet Zechariah was shown several visions, including the coming of many nations to the Lord and their becoming God's people with God dwelling with them (Zechariah 2:10-11); or of the vision that people will be inviting one another to sit under one's own vine and fig tree (Zech 3:10), the prophet must have wondered how these things might be brought about. The word that came to him to convey to the leaders of the Remnant was: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

In effect, God was saying that these things will not come through the "normal" or "usual" human effort at kingdom-building, like the use of military prowess or conquest, but by God's power. It was God's mighty hand that brought mighty Egypt to its knees. Other empires discovered the same, they have been weighed and have been found wanting.

However, it should also be said here that even the chosen people of God were not exempted from coming under the judgment of God. In other words, prophetic witness is also directed at them. Their being the chosen people did not exempt them from living out the values of the reign of God whose foundations are justice and righteousness and whose fruit is peace without end (Isaiah 9:7 - Note the pronouncement in this verse, "it is the zeal of the Lord that will accomplish this").

A look at the pages of history will show that nations and kingdoms have tried to put the imprimatur of God in their national causes and agenda; including their conquest of other people. It seemed important to be able to say that "our cause is righteous and God is on our side" but as someone has so wisely pointed out, it is not so much a question of whether God is on our side or not. The proper question is whether or not we are on God's side.

The Crusades was an attempt to recapture the Holy Land from the ‘infidels’ - when Christian kingdoms tried to wrest control of Jerusalem from the Muslims – but at what cost? To this day, the Crusades is pointed out as a tragic case of how human beings have tried on their own power and might to bring about the Kingdom.

The United States believed that it was by God’s Providence that they occupy the Philippines in order to Christianize ‘civilize and uplift’ the islands’ inhabitants, but it had to wipe out hundreds of thousands of Filipinos in the three short years of the Philippine-American War. In fact, they did not even consider the cause our ancestors were fighting for as a legitimate one (i.e., war or defense since America robbed them of their newly established independence from Spain), but only as a part of the pacification effort against the “insurgents and bandits”

Even the church has at one point toyed with the idea of ‘Christendom’, or a desire to put up and revive the Holy Roman Empire. One can find the worst periods of church history when the church cavorted with, or out rightly attempted to direct, world powers. As American evangelical author Philip Yancey noted in his book: “History shows that when the Church uses the tools of the world’s kingdom, it becomes ineffectual, or tyrannical, as any other power structure and whenever the church has intermingled with the state, the appeal of the faith suffers as well.”

What we must stress under this affirmation that the Kingdom of God is not a human project is that we should not identify the Kingdom with any human institution, system or ideology. All human systems, institutions and ideologies – be it monopoly capitalism, globalization, free-market economy, fascism, monarchy, democracy, Islamic or Christian fundamentalism, socialism, or communism – all stand and fall under the judgment of Christ, the Sovereign Lord of life and history.

Having said that, one system might be better than another, and by necessity, we must choose prudently which one is best for us – but we must remind ourselves that even the best one carries the fallenness of humanity and so we must be careful not to absolutize it.

Philip Yancey cautions us, when we are tempted to see the Kingdom of God as just one more power structure, that Jesus often confounded people.

Jesus honored the dignity of people, whether he agreed with them or not. He would not establish his Kingdom on the basis of race or class or other such divisions. Anyone was welcome to join his Kingdom. The person was more important than any category or label. Yancey further states that a political movement by nature draws lines, makes distinctions, and pronounces judgment; in contrast, Jesus' love cuts across lines, transcends distinctions, and dispenses grace.... "From Jesus I learn that, whatever activism I get involved in, it must not drive out love and humility, or otherwise I betray the kingdom of heaven," Yancey wrote.

3. The Kingdom of God is God's project.⁶

It is God's deed. Only God can destroy Satan, defeat death (I Corinthians 15:26), raise the dead in incorruptible bodies to inherit the blessings of the kingdom (I Cor. 15:50ff.) and transform the world order (Matt. 19:28).

The same reign of God has invaded the kingdom of Satan to deliver people from bondage to satanic darkness. The parable of the seed growing by itself sets forth this truth (Mark 4:26-29). The ground brings forth fruit by itself. People may sow the seed by preaching the kingdom (Matt. 10:7; Luke 10:9; Acts 8:12; 28:23, 31); they can persuade people concerning the kingdom (Acts 19:8), but they cannot build it. It is God's deed.

As American theologian G.E. Ladd puts it: People can receive the kingdom (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17), but they are never said to establish it. People can reject the kingdom and refuse to receive it or enter it (Matt. 23:13), but they cannot destroy it. They can look for it (Luke 23:51), pray for its coming (Matt. 6:10), and seek it (Matt. 6:33), but they cannot bring it. The kingdom is altogether God's deed although it works in and through people. They may do things for the sake of the kingdom (Matt. 19:12; Luke 18:29), work for it (Col. 4:11), suffer for it (II Thess. 1:5), but they are not said to act upon the kingdom itself. They can inherit it (Matt. 25:34; I Cor. 6:9-10, 15:50), but they cannot bestow it upon others.⁷

4. However, God often uses human beings and human institutions to work out the divine purpose and will.

As already alluded above, while the Kingdom is a God's project, God often uses human instrumentalities to work out His purpose and will. God

had called Moses to liberate His people from Egypt. God had chosen and formed the nation of Israel as a way to demonstrate the divine love and intention. God has called the church “to proclaim the excellences of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Christ had commissioned his followers to go out into the world and preach the good news and to teach them to observe all things he had commended them (Matt. 28:19-20).

As we enter Christ’s Kingdom, we become new creatures, the old things have passed away, and behold, new things have come (2 Cor. 5:17). As such we no longer have to conform to this world but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, that we might prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2).

We are called to be the salt and light of the world – staving off society’s decay and driving out the darkness (Matt. 5:13-20).

Christians are called to participate in the establishment of God’s reign and take part in the transformation of the world. We cannot and should not escape from the world. Christ did not pray for us to be taken out of this world (John 17:15). Christians possess a kind of dual citizenship. Notes Yancey, “We live in an external kingdom of family, cities and nationhood, while at the same time belonging to the Kingdom of God. In his command, ‘Give unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s,’ Jesus underscored the fundamental tension that can result. For the early Christians, loyalty to God’s Kingdom sometimes meant a fatal clash with Caesar’s visible kingdom.” Yancey then proceeds to quote the conclusion given by historian Will Durant in *The Story of Civilization*:

“There is no greater drama in human record than the sight of a few Christians, scorned and oppressed by a succession of emperors, bearing all trials with a fierce tenacity, multiplying quietly, building order while their enemies generated chaos, fighting the sword with the word, brutality with hope, and at last defeating the strongest state that history has known. Caesar and Christ had met in the arena, and Christ had won.”

From the pages of church history, the continuing saga of Christians making a tremendous dent on Satan’s reign can be noted. Shall I speak of William Wilberforce and his group who eventually worked out the abolition of slavery in England? Or of Martin Luther (German theologian who was the catalyst for the 16th century Protestant Reformation) who challenged

the (Roman Catholic) Church to debate with him, and who sparked a transformative movement that had tremendous impact not only in the Church but in society as well? Or of American Black civil rights activist and Baptist minister Martin Luther King Jr., marching in the streets with many others, to articulate a dream and assert that all are created in the image of God? In recent times, we speak of the likes of Desmond Tutu or Nelson Mandela (both South African icons of human rights and anti-apartheid movements). Many of them, at the time when they were in the thick of these transformative acts, were persecuted, harassed, slapped with all sorts of labels and tags – but the world is now a much better place because of their prophetic witness. The nations which at first persecuted them, now even have days in their honor; some have even gained world recognition.

Participating in the Reign of God

Paul in 2 Corinthians called us “ambassadors for Christ”, and said that we are “working together with God” (2 Cor. 5:20, 6:1) to witness and speak out about the good news of the reign of God. As already mentioned, this is God’s will and we are simply to be God’s instruments participating in God’s reign here on earth as it is in heaven.

1. Shifting our focus from the church to the Reign of God.

Jesus, in the Gospels, used the word “church” (ekklesia) only three times (all in Matthew),⁸ but present-day Christianity has largely focussed itself on the church. Based on the emphasis of the teachings of Jesus and the mission he gave us to participate in, we are to be more reign/kingdom-centric than church-centric. Missiology must determine our ecclesiology, not the other way around. We must always be a church in mission.

The dictum “The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning” is a well-known one. As Swiss theologian Emil Brunner puts it:

“Mission work does not arise from any arrogance in the Christian Church; mission is its cause and its life. The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning. Where there is no mission, there is no Church . . .”⁹

That mission is none other than the mission on God. Our ecclesiology must, by nature, be missiological; being the Church in Asia then means being in mission.

What is the picture of a church that participates in the reign of God? The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences' (FABC) deliberated on how it is to be the church in Asia and came up with a uniquely Asian ecclesiology. This "new way of doing church" is rooted in six predominant propositions:

- a. The Asian Church is called to be a "communion of communities" that is
- b. (shaped by, and responds to) the immense diversity and pluralism of Asia,
- c. undergirded by a commitment and service to life,
- d. inspired by an overarching vision of harmony,
- e. oriented toward a three-fold dialogue with Asian cultures, religions and the poor, and
- f. is seeking to build the Kingdom of God in Asia.¹⁰

(See also Appendix 2, which describes how one church has articulated the kingdom-orientation in its Statement of Faith).

2. The reign of God must have an outward direction and focus – that direction is outside the Church.

"God so loved the world" is the compelling cry. We can clearly see that in the mission statement of Jesus in Luke 4:18-19, derived from Isaiah 61 and Jesus had passed this on to us when he said: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). It is to the concrete world of need and pain that we are being directed to, not in building big cathedrals or in the competition for maximum membership or biggest budget.

In the Regional Consultation "Towards Revitalizing the Asian Ecumenical Movement," held on 11-12 July 2017 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, I made a presentation which included the following:

Jesus, who has called us to be one and whose mission and ministry we bear, was described as a "man for others" (by Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany). The Jesuits described their educational ministry as forming "men and women for others." I propose that the ecumenical movement be revitalized and that it be able to live out as the

church in Asia and become the channel for vital witnessing together to become a “being for others”.

A look at the ecumenical high points of CCA over the last six decades would bear out that it is when the ecumenical movement was focused on others, and not so much on itself that it was the most alive and dynamic. These were when it was:

- * identifying itself and accompanying itself with the movements of democratization against martial and/or repressive rule/regimes and dictatorships, such as in South Korea, Philippines, and East Timor;
- * organizing urban and industrial workers as well as peasants to protect them from exploitation by rapacious and greedy multinational corporations;
- * campaigning against the proliferation of nuclear weapons (or even nuclear power);
- * standing up for the environment and for the integrity of creation;
- * working for the empowerment of women, students and youth, indigenous people and others who were forced to be at the periphery
- * singing our own songs like “We who bear the human name”, “How Can Our Song this Time Be Chanted”, “Worship and Work Must Be One” and many other songs reflecting our people’s struggles and plight, and also our hopes and aspirations;
- * re-reading the Bible through Asian eyes while listening to the cries of people;
- * reflecting theologically on the realities of Asia and articulating a theology, ecclesiology and missiology that was incarnational and contextual
- * committed itself to following her Lord, who emptied himself up and became obedient even unto death

We began to lose fervour and our prophetic sharpness when we became more concerned with ecumenical politeness and ecumenical diplomacy; or when we became more concerned with our ecumenical survival; or when

we became busier focusing on our own denominational and confessional lines, than in the plight of the ‘teeming millions crowding Asian streets’.

3. Participating in the Reign of God requires knowing and attempting a critical understanding of the context in which we do our mission and ministry.

While many things have changed since the founding of the CCA, many have also remained the same.

We need to come to a common place of understanding about the realities and situation of Asia – realities and conditions which the Church and the ecumenical movement must seriously address and confront. Some of these issues have already been there, but like virulent diseases, they have mutated to unprecedented forms and levels and affected/infected a large number of the population. These include issues of migration and human trafficking, of peace-building and moving beyond conflicts, of the growing religious intolerance and extremism, and the condition of extreme poverty in a region of plenty.

It is in this context that we look at as we do mission as participating in the reign of God and where we do our witnessing together.

4. Participating in the reign of God requires living in tension between the despair of now and the hope that is within us; at the future deliverance and the present suffering.

German theologian Jurgen Moltmann proposed a theology of hope which called for a political hermeneutic of the Bible that illuminates Christian existence as bound up in the dialectical tension between the suffering of the present and the promise of future deliverance.¹¹

Likening hope to a horizon we look forward and move forward to, Rod Crowell of Western Michigan University summarizes in his 1972 honors theses on Moltmann’s theology: “This universal horizon is found in Christian eschatology, with its power of anticipation. In such a dynamic eschatology, our hope for the end of history brings a glorious vision into tension with our present reality of suffering. The world is seen in the light of the “not-yet” and the great difference between vision and reality provides the point of tension in which (a person’s) identity can truly be said to reside. The contradiction between future and present is the contradiction which Christians are called to recognize and strive to overcome for one cannot await such a universal future passively. (They) must be in correspondence with it in the liberation of the oppressed and in the renewal of all life.”¹²

APPENDIX I

Some Biblical Data and Definitions

Occurrence.¹³ “The kingdom of God” occurs four times in Matthew (12:28; 19:24; 21:31; 21:43), 14 times in Mark, 32 times in Luke, twice in John (3:3, 5), six times in Acts, eight times in Paul, and once in Revelation (12:10).

“The kingdom of the heavens” occurs 33 times in Matthew, once in a variant reading in John 3:5. “Kingdom” occurs nine times (e.g., Matt. 25:34; Luke 12:32; 22:29; I Cor. 15:24; Rev. 1:9); also “thy kingdom” (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:10); “his kingdom” (Matt. 6:33; Luke 12:31; I Thess. 2:12); “the kingdom of their [my] Father” (Matt. 13:43; 26:29); “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. (Matt. 13:19); “the sons of the kingdom” (Matt. 8:12; 13:38); “the kingdom of our father David” (Mark 11:10). Twice “kingdom” is used of the redeemed (Rev. 1:6; 5:9).

“The kingdom of God” and “the kingdom of the heavens” are linguistic variations of the same idea. Jewish idiom often substituted a suitable term for deity (Luke 15:21; Matt. 21:25; Mark 14:61; I Macc. 3:50; Pirke Aboth 1:3). Matthew preserved the Semitic idiom while the other Gospels render it into idiomatic Greek. See Matt. 19:23-24 for their identity of meaning.

The kingdom of God is also the kingdom of Christ. Jesus speaks of the kingdom of the Son of man (Matt. 13:41; 16:28), “my kingdom” (Luke 22:30; John 18:36). See “his kingdom” (Luke 1:33; II Tim. 4:1); “thy kingdom” (Matt. 20:31; Luke 23:42; Heb. 1:8); “the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13); “his heavenly kingdom” (II Tim. 4:18); “the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 1:11). God has given the kingdom to Christ (Luke 22:29), and when the Son has accomplished his rule, he will restore the kingdom to the Father (I Cor. 15:24). Therefore, “the kingdom of the world” is to become “the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev. 11:15). There is no tension between “the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ” (Rev. 12:10).

Usage. The Secular Use. The Greek word “**basileia**” is first the authority to rule as a king and secondly the realm over which the reign is exercised.

The Abstract Meaning. In Luke 19:12, 15, a nobleman went into a far country to receive a “kingdom,” i.e., authority to rule. Rev. 17:12 speaks of ten kings who have not yet received a “kingdom”; they are to “receive authority as kings” for one hour. These kings give over their “kingdom,” their authority, to the Beast (Rev. 17:17). The harlot is the great city which has “kingdom,” dominion over the kings of the earth (Rev. 17:18).

The Concrete Meaning. The kingdom is also a realm over which a reign is exercised. The idea of a realm is found in Matt. 4:8; Luke 4:5; Matt. 24:7; Mark 6:23; Rev. 16:10.

W.E. Vine’s Greek Dictionary concurs with the G.E. Ladd’s usage above when it stated that **basileia** is “primarily an abstract noun, denoting ‘sovereignty, royal power, dominion’ e.g., Rev. 17:18, translated ‘(which) reigneth’ lit., ‘hath a kingdom’ (RV marg.).” But it is “also a concrete noun, denoting the territory or people over whom a king rules, e.g., Matt. 4:8; Mark 3:24.”¹⁴

The “kingdom of God,” therefore, means primarily the reign or rule of God, the divine kingly authority.

Old Testament Usage. The Hebrew word **malekut** [or **malkut**], like **basileia**, carries primarily the abstract rather than the concrete meaning. A king’s reign is frequently dated by the phrase “in the...year of this malekut,” i.e., of his reign (I Chronicles 26:31; Daniel 1:1). The establishment of Solomon’s malekut (I Kings 2:12) meant the securing of his reign. The reception of Saul’s malekut by David (I Chr. 12:23) is the authority to reign as king. The abstract idea is evident when the word is placed in parallelism with such abstract concepts as power, might, glory, dominion (Dan. 2:37; 4:34; 7:14).

When malekut is used of God, it almost always refers to his authority or his rule as the heavenly King. See Psalms. 22:28; 103:19; 145:11, 13; Obadiah 21; Dan. 6:26.

New Testament Usage. Likewise, the kingdom of God is the divine authority and rule given by the Father to the Son (Luke 22:29). Christ will exercise this rule until he has subdued all that is hostile to God. When he has put all enemies under his feet, he will return the kingdom, his messianic authority, to the Father (I Cor. 15:24-28). The kingdom (not kingdoms) now exercised by men in opposition to God is to become the kingdom of our Lord and of

his Christ (Rev. 11:15) and “he shall reign forever and ever.”

This abstract meaning is apparent in the Gospels. In Luke 1:33 the everlasting kingdom of Christ is synonymous with his rule. When Jesus said that his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36), he did not refer to his realm; he meant that his rule was not derived from earthly authority but from God and that his kingship would not manifest itself like a human kingdom but in accordance with the divine purpose. The kingdom which [people] must receive with childlike simplicity (Mark 10:15; Matt. 19:14; Luke 18:17), which [people] must seek (Matt. 6:33; Luke 12:31), which Christ will give to the disciples (Luke 22:29), is the divine rule.

APPENDIX 2

The UCCP Statement of Faith on the Reign/Kingdom of God

This is an example of how one church, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) tried to put the reign/kingdom of God central to its Statement of Faith. The UCCP, in its Statement of Faith, declares and affirms its adherence to the reign/kingdom of God in the following sections:

Fifth Article : The Primary Mover as well as the Locus of the Kingdom. “We believe God is at work to make each person a new being in Christ, and the whole world, God’s kingdom – in which love, justice and peace prevail.

The kingdom of God is present
where faith in Jesus Christ is shared,
where healing is given to the sick,
where food is given to the hungry,

where light is given to the blind,
and where liberty is given to the captive and the oppressed.”

Sixth Article : Our Declaration of our Christian Hope: “...we look forward to His (Christ) coming again in all fullness and glory to make all creation new and to gather all the faithful under God’s kingdom.”

Second Article : The Mandate for Kingdom-Building. That persons “being entrusted with God’s creation” are “called to participate in the establishment of a just and compassionate social order”.

End Notes

1. *Rephrased from the pre-AMC booklet, p. 6*
2. *Howard A. Snyder, A Kingdom Manifesto: Calling the Church to Live under God's Reign.*
3. *Howard Snyder, The Community of the King, pp. 16-17*
4. *William Barclay, Gospel of Luke in the Daily Bible Study Series, Revised Edition*
5. *ibid.*
6. *G. E. Ladd in Walter A. Elwell's Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*
7. *ibid.*
8. *The word "ekklesia" appears elsewhere in the New Testament 111 times (so a total of 114 times)*
9. *Emil Brunner, The Word and the World (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1931 p. 108.*
10. *"A New Way of Being Church in Asia: The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) at the Service of Life in Pluralistic Asia". Available: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258171850_A_New_Way_of_Being_Church_in_Asia_The_Federation_of_Asian_Bishops%27_Conferences_FABC_at_the_Service_of_Life_in_Pluralistic_Asia*
11. *Rod Crowell, "Jurgen Moltmann's 'Theology of Hope': A Brief Purport" (1972), p. 2 in http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2879&context=honors_theses*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Data taken in this section are from the contribution of G. E. Ladd in Elwell's Theological Dictionary*
14. *W.E. Vine's New Testament Greek Grammar and Dictionary*

‘Journeying Together: Mission as Embodying the Spirituality of the Cross’

- Rev. Dr. Septemmy Lakawa

To live without justice, to die without justice.¹

During the Writing Trauma Workshop, I participated in recently in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara (Nusa Tenggara Timur/NTT), Indonesia, I met one of the most resilient women I have ever encountered in my life. Her name is Dortia, and she is a young survivor of human trafficking. Her poem *embodies* her *disembodiment* caused by the years of torture and abuse that she had to endure during her plight in a neighbouring country. Her soft voice ruptures the common claim that Christian communities are called to fight for justice for the poor, the marginalized, the discriminated against—*the living*. She reveals the unspoken dimension of our theological venture that our struggle for justice should also be for the dead—so that they will die with and/or for justice.

I met another courageous young woman, Yuli Benu, at the same event. Yuli, along with friends who are also graduates of the theological school of Artha Wacana Christian University in Kupang, are volunteers who accompany survivors of human trafficking and their families through various programs, including advocacy, by Jaringan Perempuan Indonesia Timur/JPIT (the Network of Eastern Indonesian Women). Yuli read her poem, “We Are Just Corpses,” which is a reflection on the recent event of the arrival of the deceased bodies of victims of human trafficking and migration in East Nusa Tenggara. This past year, the region has witnessed the return of the bodies of victims of human trafficking and migration from countries that are neighbours of Indonesia, mostly from Malaysia. The bodies were sent in caskets and were picked up by their family members or volunteers at the local airport. Their cold bodies speak of the unspeakable,

and testify to the wounds that are inflicted on their families, communities, and even the nation of Indonesia.

I have translated Yuli's poem² with the hope that, although it is limited, my interpretation can convey her powerful testimony.³

Kami hanyalahmayat-mayat Tanpaidentitas yang jelas Tanpaalamat yang jelas Tanparumah yang jelas Akan kemanakah kami? Kami hanyalahmayat-mayat Yang terbuangdarinegeriini Yang masihdipertanyakanstatusnya Yang itu "legal atauillegal?" Haruskah kami menjawab?	We are just corpses Without clear identity Without clear address Without clear home Where will we go? We are just corpses Wasted from this land Being questioned about our status Legal or illegal? Should we answer?
Kami hanyalahmayat-mayat Yang menolaksetiappennindasan Tapi . . . apalahdaya kami? Yang berteriaksekuatennaga "tolong" TapiMengapabibir kami takbergerak?	We are just corpses That resist every form of oppression But, what power do we have? We scream out loud, "Help!" But why aren't our lips moving?
Teman . . . biarkankuberbisikdalamdiam Masihbanyak saudara-saudariseperti kami Di negeriseberang, negeri yang katanyapermai	Friends, let me whisper in silence There are still many sisters and brothers like us In the neighbouring countries, the lands said to be prosperous But, they are filled with tears and sorrow
Namun, negeripenuhdukadan air mata Kami hanyalahmayat-mayat . . .	We are just corpses . . .

Another story told during the workshop was by Lilliya Wetangterah, another committed volunteer, and advocate for the human trafficking cause and a bright young woman theologian. She testified about the mother of a deceased victim of human trafficking. After picking up the body of the victim at the airport, Lilliya accompanied the family as they mourned the death of their daughter—whose body had been brought home with the bodies of other victims of human trafficking. Lilliya was sitting next to the mother on the burial day as the body was lowered into a hole in the ground at the cemetery. The mother, throwing small stones into the grave,

whispered to Lilliya, “I remember, every time I walked home I would see from afar the smoke from our humble kitchen. I knew then that my daughter was home. But I will never see that scene anymore. She’s gone.”

The poems of the two women as well as the sound of the little stones thrown by the mother into the grave of her daughter and the image of smoke rising from her kitchen—these are stories of the trauma of the survivors, their family members, and of the volunteers who accompanied them. The stories of these three women overlap their hopes, laughter, and dreams of a more just and peaceful world. The stories, however, challenge and complexify the “traditional” theology of the cross that looks at the cross as a singular site of redemptive suffering or as a double-edged site of suffering and liberation.

The primacy of the cross in Asian theological discourse and practice is undeniable. It has shaped most of the Asian missiological responses and discourse, at least in the 1970s and 1980s, on the questions of suffering and poverty. However, as a theological perspective, it has not been constructed to respond theologically to the question of trauma. Asian theological discourse on trauma remains an uncharted territory in most of our theological responses to the landscape of violence in Asia today. What happens to our theology of the cross when it is constructed from the site of trauma? What happens to trauma when it is responded to theologically from within Asian histories and narratives of suffering and liberation? What does it mean to witness to the wounds in our memory as Asian churches and Christian communities that have walked through the violence of hatred, of indifference, of discrimination, of human trafficking and forced migration, of wars, and of various forms of natural disasters and communal violence, as well as the everyday violence in our private and public spaces?

Using two definitions of trauma (or wound) interchangeably—as “the voice of the wound”⁴ (Cathy Caruth) and as “the suffering that remains”⁵ (Shelly Rambo)—I invite you to witness—to listen, to sense, to touch, to imagine, to embrace, to breathe, to see, to walk through, to respond—to the call to journey together with our Christian sisters and brothers and all people of good will through the wounds of violence and war in our histories and in our everyday life. Through this journey, I offer the perspective of looking at the cross as a multifaceted site of wound, rupture, resilience, and resistance that contests the understanding of the cross as merely the *site* of suffering or as a dualistic site of suffering and/

or liberation. In this presentation, I will focus particularly on the social and historical dimensions of trauma.

Today we talk about mission as an embodiment of the spirituality of the cross. The image of embodiment is a ruptured image that demands a language of rupture, a hermeneutic of rupture, because the *embodiment* is taking place from within *disembodied* lives. The stories of the three women above testify to the failure of the one-sided or dualistic theology of the cross to relate to, to witness to, experiences of trauma. The cross should not *be seen* as a finished symbol of the compassion of God for the suffering people. It is in and through its ruptures that we can listen to the voice of the wound—the voice that comes out from the wound, that speaks of the unspeakable. It is the voice of Dortia, and of victims and survivors of human trafficking and forced migrations. It is the voices of the victims and survivors of violence and continuing discrimination because of gender and sexual orientations, the voices of the victims of hatred toward our various forms of differences because of the religious doctrines that separate instead of connect people, the voices of refugees, the voice of the uncertainty caused by the arrogance of the political and military powers around the world that may place our earth, our only dwelling place in the entire universe, on the brink of extinction.

Mission as embodying the spirituality of the cross begins at the site of the disembodied lives of the victims, survivors, and witnesses of traumatic violence and continues to witness to the voice of the wound that comes out of *the suffering that remains* in the lives of individuals and communities because of violence and wars. Here, mission is a journey of witnessing prophetically to the possibility of life and healing that ruptures the powers of hatred and violence, that is resilient in the midst of injustice, and that resists all forms of violence.

Mission that embodies the spirituality of the cross begins at the site of the disembodied lives of the victims, survivors, and witnesses of traumatic violence and continues as churches and Christian communities bear witness to the trauma that affects the lives of individuals, communities, and even society because of the history of violence, injustice, discrimination and war. From within this site, I define the spirituality of the cross as a risky witnessing to the wounds caused by violence and structural injustice that is enacted by resisting all forms of violence and injustice and by embracing

the possibility of healing for the victims and the survivors of violence in everyday life. Here, mission is a journey of witnessing prophetically to the possibility of life and healing in a way that ruptures the powers of hatred and violence, that is resilient in the midst of structural injustice, and that resists all forms of violence.

Embodying the Spirituality of the Cross—A Site of Rupture

He was standing in the pulpit in front of his congregation; he was wearing his stinky, unwashed robe, the outfit his congregation wanted him to wear during the days of being on alert, together with members of his congregation, to the possibility of an attack by radical groups of Muslims on their village. He stretched his hands out, shouting “*Eli, Eli, lamasabakhtani*” as the sanctuary of his church filled with smoke from the Molotov cocktails thrown by the violent crowd that was shouting “Allahu Akbar.”⁶ Many survived the violent attack on his church, Nita Church, that day, but hundreds were wounded and died. The attack inflicted trauma in the memory of the survivors, witnesses and in the collective memory of the congregation. This is the story of Rev. Smith Dungir. I recorded his story during my dissertation research in Duma village, North Halmahera.⁷

This event took place on June 19, 2000. It marked the final day of the brief communal violence in the region of North Maluku, Indonesia. Although the violence was relatively short-lived (about six months), in comparison to communal conflicts in other regions of Indonesia, it is considered one of the bloodiest conflicts that has ever taken place in modern Indonesia. The conflict started over issues of land ownership and natural resources and then became a local political conflict and finally took the form of religious communal violence in which religious symbols and slogans along with cultural invectives were used by both the Christian and Muslim communities. The conflict in North Maluku is one among the thousands of narratives of religious communal violence in Indonesia in the period of 1995-2005, a time when the nation experienced a multilayered crisis at the national level as it shifted from an authoritarian to a democratic form of government. Riots, pogroms, and jihad occurred in many areas of the country. This was also the period when the interreligious landscape in Indonesia—the presence of various worship places and religious symbols in public spaces that symbolized the nation’s long history of inter-religious harmony—was ruptured. The changing landscape—the damaged houses of worship, the narratives of victims and survivors of mass violence—

brings into question the nation's longstanding claim of being a harmonious pluralistic nation.

This history of religious communal violence suggests the importance of inter-religious conversation on trauma in the period after communal violence. The stories of violence against the religious other are not foreign to many Asian and other communities around the world. Many of us in this hall may have experienced this form of violence personally and/or collectively. In our own respective countries and in the global context, we have witnessed violence that has inflicted trauma in the lives of religious communities and the wider communities because of radical interpretations of religious teachings and practices, yet trauma is still barely part of the inter-religious dialogue and discourse. Using trauma as the new site of inter-religious dialogue provides a different way of understanding the depth of the trauma that affects inter-religious relationships in the aftermath of violence and that requires a new inter-religious response.

Trauma studies inform us about the complexity and the various dimensions of the vulnerability of human lives in the aftermath of traumatic violence. Witnessing trauma requires us to ask a different or even a new question. What are we witnessing to? If we witness to the suffering that remains, to the wound that is inflicted in the memories of individuals and communities because of violence, this means that we are entering the unspeakable, the incomprehensibility of human experiences that are shaped by a history of violence. Witnessing trauma means that we are witnessing to the *gap*—the space between the event of violence and its aftermath— or to experiences that we cannot fully grasp, to the reality that is not fully available to us. What does Christian witnessing mean in the aftermath of trauma if the *event* that we are witnessing to is not fully available to us? What are we witnessing to if the depth of suffering that remains in people like Dortia, Yuli, Lilliya, and other survivors of violence can only be accessed through different realms that we are not familiar with—through their embodied language, images, and symbols that rupture any Christian claim of certainty?

The churches and Christian communities in Asia and beyond are called to embody the spirituality of the cross by witnessing to the trauma of the long and complex histories of violence in our respective contexts and in the global context of our world today. Looking at the cross as a site of rupture requires us to be willing and able to listen to the voice that

is embedded in the trauma of human communities because of all forms of violence, such as when people are uprooted from the only land that they can call home because of their inherent difference and an unjust power structure; when people are trafficked, sold, and violated; or when people are discriminated against because of their different abilities or their differences.

The church can become both a ruptured community—because of the continuing violence and trauma that take place in the life of Christian families, church structure and leadership, and across Christian traditions—and a community that ruptures any forms of ignorance, indifference, and violence in the face of traumatic violence and its aftermath. Cynthia Hess reminds us of this double-sided dimension when she states that, “As a site of rupture, the cross becomes a mirror for the church and for Christian communities in Asia, enabling us to bear witness to the complex history of trauma that shapes the lives and deaths of people and communities across this continent.”

The stories of Dortia and many of the victims and survivors of human trafficking and forced migration are sites of rupture that demand a witnessing community, not only in Indonesia but also in neighbouring countries such as Malaysia and Singapore and even beyond Asia. It is from within this site that the churches and the Christian communities in these countries are called to embody together the spirituality of the cross by listening to the voice of the wounds that emerges from the living stories of the victims and survivors and their witnesses. Bearing witness from within this site is a risky practice because it also involves the public voice and action of the church and Christian communities to channel the voice of the wounds in order to shatter the multilayered powers—the network of human traffickers, the corporations, and the states—that profit from this global phenomenon. Cynthia Hess reminds us that “the church may fail to witness to the reality of trauma because... the cost of witnessing can be high. Bearing witness to traumatic violence involved exposing oneself to terror and tremendous loss, and while this exposure remains crucial to the survivor’s healing, it places the hearer at risk.”⁸

As a site of rupture, the cross reminds us that suffering remains thus our witnessing practice. Our theology cannot gloss over the suffering and respond to it with a kind of “everything will be okay” theology, a

theology that says that time heals wounds. Trauma ruptures theology by disproving many traditional claims that suffering is a reality that will be overcome easily. As a site of rupture, the cross stands as a stark reminder that suffering remains. The question, therefore, is how do we witness to the suffering that remains, to its remaining in the lives and memory of people and communities?

Embodying the Spirituality of the Cross—A Site of Resilience and Resistance

Early January this year, my seminary, the Jakarta Theological Seminary, and the Boston University School of Theology in the United States jointly held a Travel Seminar on Trauma, Theology, and Interreligious Healing in Indonesia. Prof. Shelly Rambo and I took classes for a small group of master's and doctoral students from the two institutions during the seminar. The classes were held at the Jakarta Seminary and we also visited local churches in several areas in Indonesia. We visited Muslim and Christian communities in Bandung, West Java, the province with the highest number of cases of religious intolerance. We were hosted by the synod of Gereja Kristen Pasundan/GKP (Pasundan Christian Church), which provided us with the time to listen to the stories of women and youth of various religious groups that have been working together to prevent as well as to overcome prejudices that have divided religious communities. The testimonies of the women and youth about their inter-religiously oriented programs and strategies remind me of the need for the church to persist, to imagine together with other faith communities a society that is open and just. The work of the interfaith network in Bandung reminds me of many communities in Indonesia and in rest of Asia that contest all radical interpretations of religious teachings as well as the political misuse of religion in the public sphere that have played a significant role in maintaining mistrust, fear, and even hatred of the religious other.

During our seminar, we also travelled to Ambon, the capital city of Maluku province. For many years since early 1999, Ambon and many other areas in that region witnessed one of the longest and most violent communal conflicts in Indonesia. During our two-day visit hosted by the Indonesian Christian University of Maluku (Universitas Kristen Indonesia Maluku/UKIM) in cooperation with the synod of the Maluku Protestant Church (Gereja Protestan Maluku/GPM), we were able to meet with and listen to the stories of women, youth, and local interfaith communities and

networks that had played an important role in the reconstruction process of peace and reconciliation. During our meeting, Rev. Jacky Manuputty, a pioneer of the Peace Provocateur movement that brings together Christian and Muslim youth as well as religious leaders from the two communities, responded to my question as to why he was engaged in this difficult process of reconciliation. He stated that he believed that there is a seed of peace in every person. At another meeting with the Christian and Muslim women pioneers who had started the earliest process of reconnecting the two communities, Rev. Dr. Margaretha Hendriks Ririmasse, the former vice-moderator of the World Council of Churches and herself from Ambon, stated that although the work that they have started by reconnecting the Muslim and Christian women through several programs has touched many lives and brought about some significant changes in the lives of the women, the issue of trauma of the women and the communities has not been responded to thoroughly.

The above stories reflect another dimension of the spirituality of the cross, which is resilience and resistance. It is embedded in the willingness of these people to take a risk and work for the process of reconciliation in their communities. This willingness to take a risk—what I see as a combination of both being resilient and resisting all forms of violence—is embodied in the lives of these witnesses. Their love and care for their communities beyond the boundaries of doctrines, faith, ethnicities, and so forth unveil a dimension of the spirituality of the cross. Their stories remind me of the parable of the widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18:1-8. The widow shows a spirituality of resilience and resistance when she keeps coming to the judge and demanding that she be granted justice. It is because of her resilience and her persistence in coming, in asking, that the judge grants her her rights. It is not because the judge is just but because he feels uncomfortable in the face of the repeated demands of the widow. Her persistence in resisting the unjust system reminds me of so many individuals in Asia and beyond who have committed their lives to the cause of justice. Their lives become a site of resilience and resistance through which we can encounter the different layers of the spirituality of the cross.

At the site of resilience and resistance we will encounter troublemakers. The widow in the parable of Luke 18 is a troublemaker who caused the unjust judge to feel uncomfortable and thus grant her justice. Perhaps this approach is what we need now. To be ‘troublemakers’ means to be ‘peacemakers.’ From this site, embodying the spirituality of the cross means to be troublemakers when justice disappears, when kindness

and goodness are overcome by hatred and evil. To be in mission in Asia now means to embody a spirituality of resilience and resistance—to be troublemakers for peace, justice, and healing.

The story of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), the former governor of DKI Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, reveals the risks of being a troublemaker. He was sentenced to two years in prison in May 2017 after being accused of religious blasphemy against the Islamic community. Millions of people from around the country and even outside Indonesia—across religious boundaries—rallied to demand justice for him, to no avail. Most Indonesian people know that Ahok is not guilty. The only “crime” he ever committed was being a troublemaker by shaking the very foundation of the corrupt system of the bureaucracy by creating a clean and anti-corrupt system that will prevent the misuse of power and money, creating safe public spaces for children, women, and people with different abilities, and many other similar measures. He is loved by people across socio-economic and religious differences. He is supported by visionary members of the younger generations, inter-religious activists, and people across political lines. He was the first Chinese governor of Jakarta who was also a Christian. His identity stands as an anomaly in the wider political landscape of Indonesia, which is a majority Muslim country.

Ahok’s sentence testifies to the increasing influence of religious radicalism in the public sphere. The *religionization of politics* and the *politicization of religions* shapes the public discourse on religious pluralism. The radical interpretation of religious teachings, the various forms of violence and the feminized face of terrorist attacks, and the widespread use of hate speech and fear using religious symbols and texts are the dimensions that complexify any claims that Indonesia is a space of inter-religious harmony.

This past weekend (early October 2017) was supposed to be the end of Ahok’s first term as governor. His vice governor and best friend, a devout Muslim, who replaced him and faithfully accompanied him throughout this travail, was invited by their supporters to mark the end of their leadership in the huge public space of the Indonesian National Monument (Monas) in central Jakarta. The hashtag of the event was *#Kita TidakLupa* (We Don’t Forget). The people resist the unjust process that has used religion as its prime legitimater in punishing Ahok, a troublemaker—a witness to justice and peace—while appreciating the leadership of the current President, Jokowi (Joko Widodo), who was the governor of Jakarta before he was elected to the presidency and then replaced by Ahok as the governor of Jakarta.

#We remember is a hashtag for mission as an embodiment of the spirituality of the cross in Asia today. We remember the injustice and all forms of violence, and therefore we will keep resisting violence and injustice like the widow, like Ahok, like all the people of good will who themselves are bringing about change in their own communities. Embodying the spirituality of the cross from the site of resilience and resistance is a call to churches and Christian communities to be a community of troublemakers—a witnessing community whose life is oriented toward shaping, creating, and participating in a just and peaceful community across boundaries.

Embodying the Spirituality of the Cross—Body, Wound, Dance

The central metaphor I use in this final part is dance—dance is a metaphor of mission as an embodiment of the spirituality of the cross. Although Asian countries are well known for their rich cultural practices, particularly in the arts, the most common artistic forms of doing theology, besides singing and various forms of music and symbols are paintings. Moreover, even though dancing is part of the daily life and rituals of most Asian nations and ethnicities, it has not yet taken a central form in the church and in the theologizing process of Christian communities. In this presentation, I offer another site for embodying the spirituality of the cross by connecting the symbols of body, wound, and dance.

Starting in 2007, I informally introduced dance as a form of collective theologizing at Jakarta Seminary. However, it was not until four years later, based on my research on the interconnectedness among mission, trauma, and aesthetics, that I initiated a more serious process of using dance in my theological practice and discourse. Dance is a form of witnessing to the unspeakable, to the event of trauma that is not available to us. In its indirectness, dance allows us to see through, to touch, to sense, to embrace the incomprehensibility of the violence and trauma that shape the very foundation of our lives today. Katherine C. Zubko states that “dance exemplifies an experience that can be felt or sensed as well as something which is communicated.”⁹ Zubko’s work reminds us of the importance of the performative and imaginative dimensions of theology. In fact, the ancient religious tradition of martyrdom (*witnessing/witness*), particularly that of Christianity, is well known for its performative and public dimensions that are intertwined with the acts of violence.

As a form of Christian witnessing to violence and trauma, dance also symbolizes the role of the arts and of communities in trauma healing. The human body expresses the experiences of trauma through a voice that does not communicate directly in familiar ways—the voice of the wound. Through the use of the arts, particularly dance, we are invited to “see” the voice of the wound, to sense the presence of the wounds that have haunted our lives because of the history of violence, of natural disasters, and so forth.

In my previous work titled *Mission as Risky Hospitality*, I offered five images of mission—*journeying, creating space, remaining, breathing, and extending hands*. These are movements in a dance. The dance can be done individually or collectively.¹⁰ The dance is also a form of witnessing—the holding together of the suffering and trauma in order to resist the unjust structure and all forms of violence and catastrophe that cause them. It is an artistic form of embodying the spirituality of the cross—it is a broken symbol, the beauty that testifies to the wound.

Throughout her dance, the dancer testifies to the presence of the Holy Spirit through her breathing in and breathing out. This image opens up a new conversation between a theology of the cross and pneumatology from a different site in our mission theology in Asia today. Shelly Rambo constructs this site as a figurative site in the middle—a site of witnessing. The middle, the Holy Saturday, the space between Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, can be seen as a space from within which our embodiment of the spirituality of the cross is testifying. Therefore, the embodiment of the spirituality of the cross is focussed not only on our narratives of the cross but also on our narratives of the Holy Spirit as we await, struggle for justice and peace and imagine the possibility of healing as it is symbolized by the resurrection.

Let us dance with churches, communities across differences to witness to the possibility of life, justice, peace, and healing in our own contexts and beyond. It is a dance of rupture, resilience and resistance, and healing that is created by troublemakers—peace makers, healers, and witnesses—who are willing to take risks by embodying the spirituality of the cross in their daily lives. May the God of dance continue to dance with us, invite us to participate in the divine dance (*perichoresis*) as we witness to the wounds of our world today and to bring justice, peace and healing throughout our journey together with all people and God’s beloved creation.

End Notes

1. "Hiduptanpakeadilan, mati pun tanpakeadilan" (an excerpt from a poem by Dortia, a survivor of human trafficking, Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia). I met Dortia in Kupang during the Writing Trauma Workshop held by the Association of Theologically Trained Women in Indonesia, Mission 21, and the Synod of the Protestant Church in Timor (GMIT), Kupang, 28 July 2017.
2. The poem was written in Bahasa Indonesia (the Indonesian language).
3. I first shared the stories of these two courageous women in my presentation on *Misiologi Luka* (Missiology of the Wound at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Indonesian Theologians, Malang, August 9, 2017).
4. I used Cathy Caruth's concept of trauma in her discussion on "voice and wound." The voice of the wound is "a sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound". Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, 2.
5. I also used Shelly Rambo's definition of trauma as "suffering that remains." For more information, see her book *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).
6. See the more complete version in Septemmy E. Lakawa, *Risky Hospitality: Mission in the Aftermath of Religious Communal Violence in Indonesia* (ThD diss., Boston University, 2011), 301.
7. It is worth noting that during this period of violence, there were cases in which Christian groups attacked Muslim communities. See the detailed discussion in Christopher Duncan, *Violence and Vengeance: Religious Conflict and Its Aftermath in Eastern Indonesia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013).
8. Cynthia Hess, *Sites of Violence, Sites of Grace: Christian Non-violence and the Traumatized Self* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 105.
9. Katherine C. Zubko, *Dancing Bodies of Devotion: Fluid Gestures in Bharata Natyam, Studies in Body and Religion* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 16.
10. Lakawa, *Risky Hospitality*, 357.



‘Nurturing Inter-Religious Harmony and Building Peace’

- Rev. Dr. Albert Sundaraj Walters

The challenges we face in fostering inter-religious harmony and building peace are quite overwhelming. By recognizing various issues and obstacles in Asian society, all people of faith should strive to enhance mutual understanding and empathy through dialogue. It is imperative to shoulder the common responsibility of upholding peace and justice through cooperation, and fostering intra- and inter-religious harmony and also harmony between the religious community and wider society. The use of religion for the wrong purposes should be opposed and religious extremism should be guarded against. In the pursuit of peace and harmony, religious diversity and differences should be upheld and celebrated.

Introduction

Inter-religious harmony and peace-building are instrumental in forging a better world. Four out of five people on this planet align themselves with one religious tradition or another. Religious teachings and beliefs affect the values, actions, choices, and views of people all over the

world. However, it is interesting to note that in the 1960s social sciences generally predicted that religion would decline and be marginalised to the fringes of society or would disappear altogether through the processes of rationalization, economic development and modernization. Despite this prediction, over the past 40 years or so, religions have been thriving like never before, and they play a prominent role in world politics and international relations.¹ The relationship between religion and violent conflict, peace-building and fostering of communal harmony have been topics of intense discussion, particularly in the wake of the events of 9/11 and the ongoing threat of terrorism.

To the surprise of social scientists, it has been religion rather than secular ideology that has increasingly mobilized people in many developing countries. Scholars even concede that religions around the world are becoming stronger. This global resurgence of religion is transforming interfaith relations and cooperation. However, with this revival, there is also increasing religious intolerance, conflict and politicization of religion in many parts of the world. Such attitudes pose serious obstacles and challenges to communal harmony, religious cooperation and peace-building in Asia and there is an urgent need to struggle against politicization of religion and religious hatred. This is an ongoing process and a perennial task. Yet it is crucial and imperative that new methodologies and strategies are developed to counter such damaging outlooks and activities.

In our globalized world, there are growing exchanges and interactions between religions and also a stronger inclination towards religious diversity. These connections are bringing about new opportunities and challenges to inter-religious relations. As exchanges among different religions are becoming more frequent, more opportunities are provided to religions to conduct mutual learning programmes and strengthen cooperation. In the history of all humanity, particularly in some countries and regions in Asia, we have already accumulated ample experience and wisdom in regard to cultural diversity. However, challenges such as religious disputes or even conflicts are rising even as the trend towards religious diversity is driving forward exchanges and cooperation. In some countries and regions, religious distrust is growing almost as a result of religious diversification, aggravating people's worries over new religious conflicts.

The objective of this paper is to examine the rather vexing problem of intolerance, religious disputes and conflicts in Asia, and the issues and

challenges involved. Although few, some positive stories of interfaith solidarity will also be highlighted. The paper will focus on fostering peace and religious harmony in the context where Islam is a majority religion. We will also attempt to suggest a workable formula for nurturing inter-religious cooperation and peace-building as a way forward.

Definition of Terms

For a better appreciation of the objectives of this paper, it is perhaps expedient that we attempt definitions of some key terms such as nurturing inter-religious harmony and peace-building.

Nurturing has to do with training and upbringing. Peaceful coexistence and inter-religious harmony require that adherents of various religions are guided and educated to live together in peace rather than in constant hostility. Harmony is about co-existence, which means live and let live. It is a way forward towards peace and, perhaps, prosperity - both urgently required in a world of growing political and economic dissonance. Interfaith harmony is a conceivable condition, signifying peaceful coexistence among practitioners of various religious beliefs, aimed at eliminating the possibility of discord, violent or non-violent. Religious and racial harmony is vital for peace, especially in a multi-racial and multi-religious one.

Peace-building² is an elastic term, encompassing a wide range of efforts by diverse actors in government and civil society at the community, national and international levels to address the immediate impacts and root causes of conflict before, during, and after violent conflict occurs. Peace-building ultimately supports human security—where people have freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from humiliation. Peace-building efforts aim to manage, mitigate, resolve, and transform central aspects of conflict through official diplomacy, civil society peace processes, and informal dialogues, negotiations, and mediations.

Peace-building addresses root causes of violence and fosters reconciliation to prevent the return of instability and violence. Peace-building efforts seek to change beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours and to transform dynamics between individuals and groups toward a more stable, peaceful coexistence. Peace-building also helps create structures

and institutions that provide platforms for the non-violent resolution of conflict and stabilize fractured societies.

Issues and Challenges that Hinder Inter-Religious Harmony

1. Perceptions (and Misperceptions) of the Religious Other

One of the main issues that often plagues inter-religious harmony in the depiction of the religious other is ignorance and prejudice. This leads to misconceptions and distrust, which is a recipe for racial and religious discord. Islam and Christianity, for instance, have had a mixed relationship over the centuries. These two traditions have often taken an exclusivist position portraying the other in negative terms. Muslims and Christians have often lived in tension with each other over many issues such as mission and dawā, political and religious oppression as well as mutual vilification.

2. Religious Intolerance and Politicization of Religion in Asia

Religion and politics are two inseparable institutions in the human social psyche and structure. The interaction between the two has been a subject of continuous debate among religious scholars, political scientists and sociologists. The politicization of religion would mean “giving a political tone or character to religion”.

Religion, through its presence in the political arena, receives public and political attention and moves towards the centre of the public sphere. As a consequence of the public interaction between religion and politics, both actors are influenced by each other. While religion is politicised, politics also becomes ‘religionised’. As religion moves to the centre of the political debate, institutions and actors which speak in the name of religion or are perceived as doing so become discussion partners. As religion is conflated with culture and ethnicity, religious arguments enter discussions which do not necessarily fall under the domain of religion, but which are social, economic or political in nature.³

It is almost impossible to turn on the news today without witnessing scenes of hatred, violence and intolerance perpetrated in the name of religion or belief. According to a recent report by the Pew Research Centre, violence and discrimination against religious groups by governments and rival faiths have reached new heights in all regions except the Americas.⁴

Religious intolerance, it seems, is a divider of nations, the harbinger of war, an obstacle to harmonious coexistence and one that breeds ill will, animosity and contempt. As such, the Asian region is also increasingly showing signs that the tradition of strength through diversity is fast eroding.

Indonesia, for instance, has long been seen as a religiously moderate country. However, radical Islamism continues to grow, posing a threat to the country's long tradition of religious pluralism and peaceful, tolerant Islam. Sunni Muslim militants are attacking minority religious communities across the country. Christians have been confronted and a number of churches have closed down. Non-Sunni Muslims – particularly from the Ahmadiyya and Shi'a communities – are facing severe persecution. Indonesian law protects religious freedom but mobs reign on the streets and the government does little to stop the violence.

There is a strong and growing trend of intolerance towards religious minorities in Indonesia. The Setara Institute, a Jakarta-based organization that monitors religious freedom, reported an increase in acts of religious intolerance from 236 in 2015 to 270 in 2016, while religious freedom violations rose from 197 to 208.⁵ For years, Indonesian human rights organizations, including the Jakarta-based Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras), have warned that religious intolerance is the second-most common cause of human rights abuses in the country. The Jakarta-based Wahid Institute has also noted with alarm the rise of unchallenged “hate speech”. One of the reasons for the government's inaction is that discrimination against religious minorities is deeply entrenched in the state bureaucracy.⁶

In Indonesia, there is no doubt that Muslim leanings have shifted to a more intolerant state from what it was 10 years ago. The politicization of divisive religious sentiment by opportunistic politicians and the lack of interfaith dialogue have significantly contributed to this shift. One of the key components of the system that bears responsibility for engineering a suitable climate for the fermentation of religious intolerance is the obsolete Blasphemy Law No. 1 of 1965, as well as Article 156a of the Criminal Code.⁷

In the past two decades, the blasphemy law has been increasingly used to prosecute and imprison members of religious minorities and of

traditional religions. The most recent high-profile target of the blasphemy law is Jakarta's first Christian and ethnic Chinese governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (also known as Ahok). He was sentenced to two years in prison in May 2017. He was alleged to have made comments regarding what he believed to be a misinterpretation of certain verses of the Quran. He was found to be "convincingly guilty of committing blasphemy".⁸ In countries with a history of sectarian violence, blasphemy and apostasy laws make achieving inter-religious harmony an even more formidable task, as they are too often used by individuals to justify violence in the name of their religion or to settle personal grievances.

As for Malaysia, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak was applauded in 2010 when he proposed at the United Nations the idea to build a "global movement of moderates" from all faiths to reclaim the agenda for peace and pragmatism so as to marginalize extremists. However, after his ruling party won the general elections in May 2013, Najib moved to appease Malay Muslims by pledging greater economic support for them, and emphasizing the government's role as defender of the Islamic faith. Later that year, he said Malaysia symbolised "the greatness of Islam". Such statements appear to feed the agenda of Islamic extremists and further fuel fear among Christians and other religious minorities in a country once hailed as a beacon of multiracial and multi-religious harmony.

Furthermore, in April 2015 a group of about 50 Muslims protested against the placement of a cross atop a church in Kuala Lumpur. The protesters in Taman Medan, a Muslim-majority suburb, said they feared the cross would cause confusion among residents. The church removed the cross and peace was restored but the affair left a sour taste, particularly as it came in the wake of a string of similar incidents.⁹

A Malaysian pastor, Raymond Koh, disappeared on February 13, 2017. A group of masked men abducted Koh on a public road in broad daylight while he was driving alone to a friend's house. Koh ran an organization called Harapan Komuniti – or Hope Community – in Kuala Lumpur. It helps the poor, drug addicts, and single mothers. The World Council of Churches has urged Prime Minister Najib Razak to intensify efforts to find Koh, adding that his disappearance was fuelling fear and mistrust among Malaysia's religious minorities. Malaysia's reputation for religious intolerance has sunk to a new low over the past decade, with

Muslim fundamentalists attempting to assert their brand of Islam over the rest of the country and in particular religious minorities.¹⁰

The Christian community is not the only religious community that is feeling victimized in Malaysia. The government has now mooted a proposal to curb the spread of Shia ideology. It intends to redefine the word 'Islam' in the Constitution to apply only to Sunnis, which in effect would outlaw non-Sunni Islamic practices and strip such religious believers of their rights as Malays.¹¹ Malaysia has banned 56 "deviant" interpretations of Islam, including Ahmadiyya, Ismailiah, Shia, and Baha'i.¹² Recently, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) defended the religious freedom of Ahmadiyya followers in the state of Selangor amid reports that they were facing threats. The small community is living in fear following intimidation against their members made at a press conference hosted by the Muslim Consumers Association of Malaysia (PPIM).¹³

It is obvious that Malaysian society has drifted toward more extreme forms of political Islam. "Malaysia has become steadily more intolerant, and this has been a top-down government policy," said Dr. Zachary Abuza, a professor at the National War College (Washington D.C.), who focuses on Southeast Asian politics and security issues.¹⁴ Thus, there are calls to foster harmony, understanding and mutual respect among the various races and religions in Malaysia by reviving the National Harmony and Reconciliation Bill.¹⁵ Asli Centre for Public Policy Studies chairman Ramon Navaratnam said the Bill is vital to curb discrimination and to counter extremism in the country.

In Bangladesh there are new moves by Islamic fundamentalist groups such as the Hefajat-e-Islam to introduce 13 demands for enacting Islamic principles, including points of *Shariah* law and a ban on Christian mission in the country. The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC), when briefing an ecumenical delegation representing CCA as well as the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the WCC said: "The minority religious communities in Bangladesh are facing threats to their survival and are victims of systematic attacks. They are the main target of endangering Bangladesh to become a 'zero minority country' in future at the behest of the extremist groups."¹⁶

Although Bangladesh has been considered a moderate Islamic country, there have been clear instances of violence against religious minorities, targeting especially Hindus and Buddhists. In recent clashes, more than one hundred people lost their lives, and personal property belonging to the minority religious groups was destroyed. According to BHBCUC, 89 Hindu and Buddhist places of worship were demolished in March 2013 alone. The climate of intolerance is breeding fanatics in Bangladesh.

Interestingly, in the midst of the darkness of religious strife, we find inspiring and unheralded acts and positive stories of interfaith solidarity.

Positive Interreligious Engagements: Some Examples

Religion very often is abused by extremists using it to incite violence and hatred, by unscrupulous leaders manipulating sectarian differences for their own ends, by those seeking to exploit victims of poverty and to violate human rights, and by instances in which media scapegoats religion in situations of conflict.

However, even under constricted circumstances where blasphemy and apostasy laws apply, courageous people standing up for those of other faiths can make a difference. For example, in July 2015 in Lahore, Pakistan, a group of people accused a Christian man of blasphemy for allegedly burning pages of the Quran. Three Muslim leaders reacted swiftly, physically standing between the angry mob and members of the local Christian community until the crowd dispersed. Interventions such as these have helped prevent violence in more than 40 cases in Pakistan recently.¹⁷ Another inspiring positive act was what happened following the deadly Peshawar church bombing in September 2013. Resilient Muslim community members formed human chains around churches during services in a show of solidarity and to stand up against senseless violence.

Recently, Muslims decided to forego the Muharram procession to support cancer treatment of their Hindu neighbour in West Bengal. “Muharram procession can be organised every year. But we must save the life first,” said Amjad Khan, secretary of the Samaj Sangha Club.¹⁸ Another very fascinating write-up appeared in the *Times of India* on October 2.¹⁹ A Hindu family from Odisha, India, in a rare example of communal harmony,

continued its 350-year-old tradition of observing Muharram. They take out a *tazia* (a replica of the tomb of Imam Hussain, the martyred grandson of Prophet Muhammad), and carry it in processions annually during the Shia festival of Muharram. The Padhiary family organises the event without any help. The family makes the *tazia* by themselves, and neighbours join in the parade. The city sees in the family an example of communal harmony.

This *tazia* story speaks about the importance of inter-religious cooperation and communal harmony at grassroots level rather than on doctrines and social issues. This dialogue of life highlights the mutual respect, love and appreciation Hindus and Muslims in Sambalpur, Odisha, have for each other.

In May this year, some 50 progressive Muslims and Christians came together to break the fast at sundown in a symbolic show of unity amid growing Islamophobia and the conflict in Marawi city (Mindanao, Philippines) in the month of Ramadan. Dubbed “Duyog Ramadan,” Christians joined Muslims in a solidarity *iftar* meal. “Duyog” means “to accompany” in the Cebuano language spoken in the Philippines. The tradition of Duyog Ramadan begun in the late 1970s in Muslim-Christian communities in Mindanao, where Christian churches sponsor meals for the whole community, in solidarity with Muslims breaking their fast at sundown. The tradition caught on even in the metro Manila, where various Christian denominations – Aglipay, Protestant, Roman Catholic – promote unity with Muslims through Duyog Ramadan.²⁰

It is true that such instances of harmonious interfaith relations are few and far in between, but some of the pointers in these stories are relevant to our discussions here. Such instances should be multiplied and stimulated across Asia. Such positive and inspiring activities must also be actively publicized, promoted, and celebrated in the public discourses and practices of the state, civil society groups, political parties and religious organizations. It is necessary that they are all projected as examples of communal harmony or communal amity.

Religious communities and people of goodwill should be engaged even more to help achieve solutions for peace, security, human development, and respect for fundamental human rights that undergird these solutions. Interreligious cooperation should become a useful method of engagement, because it builds public collaboration and focuses on the common good.

In order for religious communities to work together, they must be able to operate freely in society.

Enhancing Interreligious Harmony: Some Suggestions

Firstly, one very crucial step towards communal harmony is the strengthening of voices of peace in every religion. Sharing experiences, information and ideas between people facing similar challenges, albeit in different contexts, is one valuable way of reinforcing those voices of religious freedom and accord.

Secondly, all people of goodwill should recognize that the common values they hold far outweigh the differences they have. The U.N. General Assembly, the WCC, CCA and many other organisations have initiated a number of programmes to highlight this point. For instance, the U.N. World Interfaith Harmony Week observed in the first week of February is one such creative move adopted in October 2010. This initiative calls for Muslim and Christian leaders to engage in a dialogue based on two common fundamental religious Commandments: Love of God, and Love of the Neighbour, without compromising on any of their own religious tenets. These two commandments were then extended by adding 'Love of the Good, and Love of the Neighbour'. This formula includes all people of goodwill - even those of other faiths, and those with no faith.

Thirdly, the U.N. Decade of Inter-religious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace, a 2011-2020 project, was launched in September 2010. It is aimed at promoting partnership between U.N. member states, U.N. agencies as well as religious communities, spiritual movements, organizations representing indigenous traditions and other pertinent value-based civil society organizations to advance sustainable peace.²¹

Fourthly, education should be a value-based curriculum and teaching methodology. True religion cannot be the basis of hatred and division, and education is key to promoting inter-religious harmony, religious freedom, and respect for people of different traditions. For a country to be truly great there must be an understanding and appreciation of each other's differences and strengths. Such an approach to education should involve not simply an intellectual knowledge of other traditions so as to overcome ignorance but, even more so, an appreciation of the

other that leads to genuine listening and respect. It will be most effective when it becomes a channel for interpersonal encounter among religious persons. Education should endeavour to reach the grassroots so that future generations can avoid the mistakes of the past. The task must begin at home with the very young and continue throughout life. Above all, education must be committed to seeking truth, justice, peace and reconciliation.

The challenges we face in fostering inter-religious harmony and building peace can be daunting at times but when we work together we can accomplish things that none of us can accomplish alone. We enrich ourselves not only in learning about others, including those with whom our lack of understanding had long bred mistrust and alienation. Paradoxically, in our exchanges, where we must explain clearly our own traditions to others and test our long-held assumptions by the new perspectives we encounter in others, many of us can deepen our understanding of our own faith traditions. In the very act of meeting and sharing and talking and working together to bridge the divides and enhance the cooperation, we are modelling the kind of world we dream of and strive to create.

Elements of Living in Peace and Harmony in Christianity

The Bible contains many examples of communities in conflict and also expresses people's longing for peace. In our world today, Christians and other faith communities are well placed to help prevent conflict and to promote peace and reconciliation. Jesus said: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God' (Matthew 5:9).

Christians are called to seek peace with one another and, by implication, between their respective communities. This command to create a world filled with a holistic sense of peace, *shalom*, does not mean turning a blind eye to injustice, be it personal or structural. Indeed, another imperative, that of *mishpat* (justice/judgement) requires all people, as bearers of God's image, to work for the restoration of the shattered and distorted social order in which we live. The achievement of justice is a necessary prerequisite for the establishment of peace, but the justice to be worked for cannot simply be identified with the demands of any one class or party grouping – it must be truly impartial, without bias to the rich or the poor.²²

In Christianity, there are a number of teachings related to religious tolerance and harmony. Christianity vigorously preaches and spreads

love among human beings. The Bible demands all Christians to love their neighbours and other human beings even though they might be their enemies. For example, in Luke 6:27 Christians are taught: ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.’

Similarly, Paul when writing to Christians in Rome says: ‘Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all’ (Romans 12:16-18). Again in Romans 14:19 he advises: ‘Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual edification.’

Good human relations, especially interfaith and inter-community relations, are not an optional extra. The restoration of right relationships is the only basis on which peace can be established. Peace in turn is the basis from which all other objectives can be achieved. In order to restore relationships, there needs to be a process of forgiveness, a relational process which involves a transaction between two or more parties (be they individuals, communities or national groups). Conflicts are destructive and divisive. They also distort community structures and inhibit the freedom essential for the healthy growth of all institutions – be they religious, state, family and the range of voluntary associations and enterprises – which collectively make up what is called ‘civil society’.

The aim of peace-building is to sow seeds for a harmony which includes all people and communities within a just and workable framework for the future by finding common ground and then setting clearly defined and realistic goals. These goals need to be determined after a careful consideration of all the relevant aspects of the situation being addressed.

Concluding Remarks

We do recognize that in our shared history we have often experienced painful encounters rather than harmonious living together. We have frequently misunderstood one another and this has resulted in suspicion and lack of positive commitment from either side.

More concerted efforts through interfaith relations should help people in Asia transcend cultural, racial, linguistic and religious barriers. Through encounters and interactions and by harnessing the rich cultural

and religious heritage creatively, people could shape a new identity. Differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity.

The destinies of all people of faith are interlinked and there is a long journey ahead. The hope is that the infusion in society of wide-ranging faith values will go a long way towards developing a common vision for Asia. Religious harmony should entail affirmation of faiths, where people of various religions live together in peaceful coexistence as one united people. The invitation to practise the dual commandment to love is a bold step towards fresh perspectives in interfaith relations. It also serves as a catalyst for new initiatives to move beyond tolerance and mere coexistence to accepting the other in love and respect.

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Nurturing Inter-Religious Harmony and Building Peace

- Bishop Dr. Prem Chand Singh

I am extremely privileged to be part of this Asia Mission Conference. I am thankful to the organizers, especially Dr. Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary of CCA, for extending an invitation to address this plenary session on “Nurturing Inter-Religious Harmony and Building Peace”.

The task given to me is to speak from the perspective of a Christian who is engaged in God’s mission in a Majority-Hindu society and especially our role in nurturing inter-religious harmony and building peace. According to the 2011 Census of India, 79.8% of the Indian population practises Hinduism and 14.2% adheres to Islam, while the remaining 6% adheres to other religions (Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and various indigenous ethnically bound faiths). Christians are less than 3% of the population but the total number of Christians is estimated to be more than 40 million.

The present government in India, ruled by a political party influenced and supported by a right-wing Hindutva ideology, is not religiously tolerant. Fundamentalist religious groups support and nourish the Hindutva ideology. They believe that India is a Hindu nation and it belongs to the adherents of the Hindu religion only. This attitude had in the past generated much violence against the minority religions in the country. There have been many instances of atrocities against Christians in the villages and towns of India. Hinduism is traditionally a tolerant religion. *Loka samasta sukhino bhavantu* (let the whole world live in harmony and peace) is the main principle of the Hindu way of life. However, religious extremism and politicization of religion have changed and/or affected the social fabric of Indian society. The emerging Hindutva fundamentalism gives no value to this core principle. Nevertheless, most adherents of the Hindu religion in India cannot be branded as supporters of the Hindutva ideology or practitioners of religious intolerance.

India is the largest democracy in the world. The Preamble to its Constitution states “WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens: JUSTICE, social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; EQUALITY of status and of opportunity.” India has special constitutional provisions for the protection of religious minorities. However, these laws are not heeded in practice currently.

Despite these limitations, there are many inter-religious organizations in India working for religious harmony and peace. Many Indian inter-religious movements are still successful in building up communities of peace.

Now let us look into some foundational principles of humanity which will enhance religious harmony:

1. Life originated first. Religions came much later. Therefore, our unity in life helps us to overcome all our differences on the basis of religion, race, culture, language, gender and/or disabilities. Primacy of life has to be always affirmed.
2. Plurality is a gift of God. This world is like a garden of flowers in many colours. It is our differences that make each one of us unique. Respecting plurality is respecting creation.

3. God is working in all religions and so there is a need to respect all religions. Religious theologies may be different from one another and lifestyles may vary according to cultural norms but we need to accept things which we can and respect those which we are unable to accept.

4. We cannot ignore the fact that religion is the second oldest institution, next to family. It governs the social as well as individual behaviour of people by providing guidelines, laws and principles relating to their interactions with fellow beings. I believe that this is one of the strongest forces which used to maintain peace in any society.

One of the main aims of religion is to promote and nurture peace and justice. Since justice is one of the main pillars of peace, the elements of peace and religion are same. Peace can be achieved only when there is law and order, and prevalent among the followers of all religions is a state of harmony and mental calm. From the beginning, religion has existed to help individuals, groups and communities to achieve justice and peace. If we look at history, we will find many examples where religion compels individuals, groups and communities to follow the path of peace and avoid conflict.

Coming from a land of rich traditions of major religions of the world co-existing for centuries, I would like to quote certain examples where religion compelled individuals, groups or communities to promote peace.

In the 3rd century BCE, the Indian Emperor Ashoka the Great sought to live in a way that contributed to world peace; he left his violent life after being greatly influenced by Buddhist monks. Subsequently he ruled his kingdom based on Buddhist principles.

I do agree that we have differences but we should not ignore them; on the contrary, we should discover them and become better aware of each other and enhance our understanding of one another. The Almighty has created human beings as different races and nations so that they can be tested on how just we are to those whom we consider “others” or how we can live together with our myriad differences. It is comparatively easy to be kind and just to one’s own people; the challenge comes when the same justice has to be extended to other people. Regrettably, humanity is failing this test.

I have no doubt that there will be complete peace and tranquillity in this world if the followers of different faiths live up to the high principles set before them by their respective religions; then the world will move from 'Clashes of Civilizations' to 'Dialogues of Civilizations'.

Personally, I believe that in the present age, three things are missing from people's lives (i) Love (ii) Faith and (iii) Fear. If a person loses these three things, he/she becomes fearless, even violent. Love for humanity and God keeps a person humble and happy; the faith that God will ensure everything is all right keeps a person going; and fear of God keeps one humble and kind.

Religion is one of the strongest institutions that helps a person to simultaneously believe in these three aspects which are important to control human behaviour. I would like to conclude by stating that religion has not only promoted peace but also worked for ages in conflict prevention and resolution. We must respect followers of all religions with equal dignity because we share the same life and the same journey. Age, gender, economic status or disability should not affect our mind in a way that creates discrimination. All of us are fellow pilgrims; in pilgrimage we share each other's burdens because they are our common burdens. We need to support the weak and make them strong because a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Before concluding, I wish to share some practical action we can take to nurture religious harmony and build peace:

Instead of condemning each other, we need to look for meeting points and commonalities in the scriptures of our religion and of other religions. In that sense, there are many meeting points and commonalities between Christianity and Hinduism. One scriptural meeting can be cited.

Asato ma satgamaya (Lord, lead me from untruth to truth)

Thamaso ma jyothirgamaya (from darkness to light)

Mrithyormaaamrithamgamaya (from death to eternal life)

This is a famous Hindu Upanishadic prayer.

Don't we see a great parallel in the teachings of Jesus – "I am the light of the world"; "You are the light of the world"; "I am the way, truth and life";

and “I am the resurrection and life”?

To identify the meeting points in the scriptures of Christians and Hindus, the most practical way is to make an attempt to search the scriptures of both religions in inter-religious group meetings. Along with this, we can find occasions for praying together.

In closing, I wish to make a profound statement: Harmony and peace cannot be built; they will emerge when we work together for common purposes.



‘Groaning of Creation and Economic Injustice: Prophetic Witness’

- Rev. Dr. Naoya Kawakami

Abstract and Key Words:

1. Introduction to our activities in the affected areas;
The triple disaster, World Council of Churches, International Solidarity for Hibakusha
2. Drawing on the Asian heritage; our tradition of Christianity since the 16th century in Japan;
Crypto-Christians, “To lay down one’s life for one’s friends,”
People of the land (am hā·’ā·reṣ)
3. Question: “Simple lifestyle?” From the context of the Japanese people suffering from poverty, we have to look for an answer to economic injustice;
Culture of Deflation, Francisco de Xavier, Promotion of Enterprise Based on Weaknesses.

4. Challenges for interfaith activities, from the crematorium and Fukushima, based on the Hibakuchi (site contaminated by radiation);
Interfaith activities, prayer and ritual as a pathway to the transcendence, signification of the Site.
5. Groaning of Creation at Fukushima; The theology of the cross beyond Fukushima Mothers, Paper Folding Crane, the Spirituality of the Cross.

1. Introduction to our activities in the affected area:

Keywords:

The triple disaster, World Council of Churches, International Solidarity for Hibakusha

Firstly, I would like to share a video about our activities made for the 10th WCC (World Council of Churches) General Assembly held in Busan, South Korea in 2013.

I am the General Secretary of Touhoku HELP, the Sendai Christian Alliance Disaster Relief Network. I would like to share some information about our organization.

In Miyagi prefecture and the Sendai area, its capital and central hub, an alliance was established between Buddhism and Christianity in the 19th century while a further alliance was nurtured in the late 20th century among the Catholic and Protestant churches, and also non-church entities; they jointly did activities like holding services.

In 1989, the “Sendai Christian Alliance” was formed and followed in 2011 by “Touhoku HELP”, which is its disaster relief division. The impetus for the former was the fear of danger in the freedom to practise one’s religion (Christianity), while the latter was established to respond to unprecedented disasters.

The Sendai Christian Alliance hosts a “New Year Service Sermon/Union Prayer Meeting” in January and a “Christian Joint Prayer Meeting for

Peace” in August every year. On March 18, 2011, the Sendai Christian Alliance established a “Disaster Relief Network”, later renamed “Touhoku HELP” for short. Ever since, Touhoku HELP has partnered with other religious bodies and administrative organizations in relief projects.

Thanks to this effort, we have learnt and appreciated ‘what churches can do.’ We will now explain more about the relief projects of Touhoku HELP.

Our Mission: Be “the salt of the earth, and the light of the world”

- a. As the salt of the earth, support the local communities.
- b. As the light of the world, collect and share information.
- c. As both the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world,” act locally and link globally.

Support Projects

- a. Spiritual Care with interfaith activities.
- b. Non-Japanese Disaster Victims Support.
- c. Measurement of Radiation Levels in foodstuffs and soils.
- d. Short-term recuperation for Fukushima mothers.

The conferences in which Touhoku HELP was involved and their results:

a. August 2012: We visited churches in Christchurch and Auckland in New Zealand and agreed to participate in a joint booth exhibition at the WCC General Assembly (WCC-GA) in Busan.

b. 17th September 2012: Touhoku HELP conducted the “Holy Convention of Japanese and Korean Christians for Faith Recovery” in Sendai, in which executives of NCKK (the National Council of Churches in Korea) met with pastors of the Fukushima Christian Conference. Rev. Kim Jong-Hoon, the keynote speaker, emphasized that the duty of all those involved was to “remain rooted to the spot, based at Fukushima where unprecedented tragedies would happen, and become witnesses to God’s works performed there.”

c. 29th September 2012: Touhoku HELP served as a member of the local executive committee of “Nuclear Plant and Article 9 of the Constitution,” a joint symposium of religious leaders held in Sendai city. The symposium referred to the Preamble to the Constitution of Japan and declared that nuclear power plants are life-threatening, cause “fear and want”, and jeopardize “the right to live in peace.”

d. 8th October 2012: Touhoku HELP coordinated a testimony meeting in Sukagawa city, Fukushima Prefecture to talk about the earthquake disaster in Fukushima and subsequently promoted publishing a book of testimonies and theological interpretations from the pastors of Fukushima.

e. From 1st to 4th November 2012: We participated in a Consultation on Ecology, Economy and Accountability hosted by the Christian Conference of Asia in Indonesia. We pointed out that the nuclear power plants were the focal point of the conflict between environment and economic issues. For the resolution of the same, we focussed on the problem of marginalization of the rural community and the key for the resolution is held by churches which are community-based and directly linked to the world.

f. From 4th to 7th Dec. 2012: Touhoku HELP organized the local executive committee of “The Inter-Religious Conference on Nuclear Issues,” a joint conference of religious leaders held in Aizu, Fukushima Prefecture. With this preparation, Touhoku HELP stressed that this conference had to be accountable to the local people. In this conference we confirmed that “the key elements of nuclear power plants and nuclear weapons hardly differ” and subsequently, in response to the presentation by Dr. Jang Yoon Jae at this conference, Touhoku HELP raised a serious question. We agreed that we had to find Christ on the Cross among people suffering from radioactivity just as Dr. Jang said in his address. In addition to that, however, we had to seriously look for the answer to the question, “how could we pray with the sufferers in this desperate situation?”

g. From 14th to 18th Feb. 2013: As an executive committee member, Touhoku HELP took part in a tour named “Building Missionary Cooperation and Communication Between Japanese and South Korean Churches.” During this tour, 14 pastors from the field affected by the triple disaster shared their testimony with the Korean churches. We could also deepen the relationship in order to cooperate with the church leaders who were preparing to host the WCC Assembly in Busan.

h. 27th Mar. 2013: Touhoku HELP supported and participated in “The Second International Theological Symposium on the East Japan Great Disaster” held in Tokyo. Through the discussion with Dr. Richard Mouw and Dr. Keisuke Nakazawa, we reconfirmed the question of “how to pray” as the issue of theodicy. We also argued that in addition to “Christ on the cross” our Lord shall call churches to testify on “Jesus resurrected” at the field of calamity. It was the answer to the question we had at Fukushima in December 2012.

i. 13th May 2013: Touhoku HELP took part, as a local executive committee member in the “Fukushima religious people Round Table meeting”, in a joint meeting of religious leaders held in Fukushima city. Together with the members of the World Conference on Religions for Peace Japan (WCRP), we gathered the voices of the religious leaders involved in Fukushima disaster relief and the evacuees themselves. We appealed for the need to summarize and review the statements announced by each religion against nuclear power plants.

j. From 18th to 25th June 2013: Touhoku HELP conducted a preparatory meeting for WCC in Busan. We confirmed that the issue Fukushima was facing was the first experience of the world on “exposure to radiation in a big city”.

k. From August 29, 2013: We conducted a week-long preparatory meeting in Seoul for the WCC-GA, including coordination with the churches and organizations in Korea and Taiwan.

l. From 4th to 7th Oct. 2013: We conducted a four-day event, “Jericho Tour with Fukushima”, inviting the leaders of Korean and Taiwanese churches. We learnt in depth about radiation issues at Fukushima, the radiation-exposed field, in preparation for WCC-GA at Busan.

m. From Oct. 31 to Nov. 8, 2013: Touhoku HELP participated in the 10th WCC-GA at Busan. We had a booth with the Inter-Church Forum of Christchurch, New Zealand. At this booth we had the “Advocacy Meeting with Hibakusha (the people affected by radiation)” every day. We participated in the Busan Network Café to contribute to the Public Issues Statement named *Towards a Nuclear Free World* prepared by the Public Issues Committee of WCC. We spoke out about the issues of Justice and Peace from the view point of Fukushima at some official meetings

through the General Assembly. From the discussions at these meetings, we found the definition of Justice as “We can only subscribe to Justice as anti-injustice. Justice is always an urgent issue, not an abstract one.”

In addition, the WCC central committee adopted the *Statement towards a Nuclear-free World* based on these discussions at the WCC-GA. The keynote of the statement was how to listen to the voiceless voices of the Hibakusha of the world, voices from the site of Uranium Mining, Nuclear Bomb Testing, Nuclear Power Plant and Nuclear Waste.

n. From 15th to 16th Feb. 2014: We supported and participated in the “The Third International Theological Symposium on the East Japan Great Disaster” in Tokyo. We discussed the right to evacuate and the right to stay of people living in the contaminated areas. We applied the definition of Justice which was used at the 10th WCC-GA in this discussion.

o. 7th March 2014: Touhoku HELP conducted a meeting with the Inter-Church Forum of Christchurch, New Zealand and the Fukushima Christian Conference at Fukushima city. They shared the story of New Zealand becoming a nuclear-free country. One of our colleagues who lived in Fukushima said that we found the hope for the future from the path taken by New Zealand.

p. From 11th to 14th March 2014: We supported and participated in the “International Conference on the East Japan Disaster” by The United Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ). We the participants made a statement together confessing our guilt in accidents for the world and our future. We might also be the victims of accidents and affected by the actions of big companies in a country where the government remains irresponsible. The conference urged that we confess that we are also one of the assailants, and we pray to our Lord for mercy on all of us.

q. 2nd July 2014: Touhoku HELP participated in the ceremony “Mururoa tatu (Mururoa, the radiation-affected island because of the nuclear bomb testing, is to be with us)” in Tahiti. We gave two glass stones from Fukushima to the people of Tahiti; they have a memorial monument where stones from the radiation-exposed areas of the world are placed. Through this ceremony, we could join with the International Solidarity of the Hibakusha.

From 2014 to 2017

Since 2014, we started providing counselling support for Fukushima mothers who have deep anxiety over radiation. We have counselled over 700 people including 208 families. Unfortunately, over 80% of them have said that they found some physical ailments as well as cancer in their families.

2. Drawing on the Asian heritage; our tradition of Christianity since 16th century in Japan;

Keyword:

Crypto-Christians; “To lay down one’s life for one’s friends”; People of the land (am hā·’ā·reş)

Now I bear the task of sharing the witness from my country. According to the AMC Statement, the witness is to be “the truth and light drawing on the Asian Heritage.” I would like to dwell on the Japanese Christian Heritage since the 16th century. This heritage was inherited by a group of people called “Kakure Kirishitan” (Crypto-Christians or hidden Christians). Some of you might have seen the movie *Silence*, directed by Martin Scorsese, which gives a good image of Crypto-Christians and their struggles during the period of Christian persecution in 17th century Japan.

On 4th October 2017, I observed a secret ritual in a suburb of Sendai city. The day was 15th August in the Lunar calendar, and it was the day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. During the course of the night, people from the neighbourhood came in one by one carrying candles to place before a figurine of Virgin Mary in a small hall. Some others who were not Christians turned off the lights in their houses and slept very early. According to researchers of local history, the people of this region have kept this secret ritual since the 16th century.

As you know, the government of Japan banned Christianity in the country towards the end of the 16th century. The prohibition lasted about 250 years. During this period, there were no pastors. Unfortunately, the descendants of these people are not the members of the church now but they have partially kept the Christian lifestyle of their forefathers.

In 1873 C.E., the ban on Christianity was lifted because of pressure from the Western world. Many Crypto-Christians were “discovered” by Western churches. To their surprise, the churches could hardly recognize the Crypto-Christians as Christian. They tried to “convert” them back to Christianity. I will refer to a word from the Bible here -- “am hā·’ā·reṣ (People of the land)”, who hardly followed the orthodoxies in the Hebrew context unlike the Pharisees, but Jesus loved them as His friends.

I would like to share the story of Crypto-Christians with you. In the early 17th century, during the Christian persecution in our country many Christians were massacred. The national government prohibited people from mourning for the Christians. They made a pernicious propaganda that “a Christian is not a human but a demon” and many people came to believe it to be the truth. In fact, people were tabooed from touching the dead body of an executed Christian. Surprisingly, however, the people living in Sendai area held a funeral and secretly made three monuments for 120 martyrs in the mid 17th century. Someone had tipped off the government about the Christians there, and 120 Christians were executed to root out the remnants of Christianity. Despite this the surviving Christians erected three monuments as a memorial and secretly preserved them from generation to generation. Local history researchers discovered these three monuments and the story behind them in 1952.

I remember the words of Jesus in this context: “Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Though the Crypto-Christians might have lost some orthodox theology because of their isolation, they could keep the crucial dogma, the love for one’s neighbors. They might be like the “People of the land (am hā·’ā·reṣ).” So, when we listen to them, we could find something groaning from creation, the earth or the harmed land.

3. Question: “Simple lifestyle?”

Keyword:

Culture of Deflation; Francisco de Xavier; Promotion of enterprise based on the weaknesses.

Looking at the groaning from creation, we begin to think about “Economic Injustice.” The AMC Statement calls us to pay attention to “the constant effort to follow a simple lifestyle.” I have another view about this.

I have taken part in “anti-poverty network” programmes with lawyers, social workers and social activists since 2011. In the support activities against poverty, we deal with the challenge of following a “simple lifestyle.” For this, we must refuse to make any lavish expenditure. This is in accordance with the tradition of the church. However, the efforts to follow a simple lifestyle take you into a state of near poverty. Simple lifestyle puts pressure to suppress not only prices but personnel expenses in society. We Japanese see this phenomenon as a “culture of deflation.” Simple lifestyle puts the stress on the weak people in society. It might be similar to the problem of carbon dioxide emissions reduction. While we acknowledge that we must reduce carbon dioxide emissions, we see the reduction leads to an unfairness between developed and developing countries. I think we have to look for an alternative.

We could find clues from the Asian and Japanese traditions of Christianity. I would like to reexamine the activities of Jesuits in Asia in general and Japan in particular, especially that of Francis Xavier. I believe the Jesuit movement was also a Movement of Reformation. Their spiritual program named “Exercitia Spiritualia” was designed to serve abandoned people. Xavier, as one of the founders of the Jesuit movement, tried to serve the abandoned people of India, Indonesia (Jakarta) and Japan. According to a recent study, his activities were organized in four stages.

- 1) To support anyone who has nothing.
- 2) To recover their dignity with the Gospel.
- 3) To establish an organization for their mutual aid.
- 4) To promote enterprise based on weaknesses.

Now we will focus on No. 4. Francis Xavier and his colleagues established hospitals, orphanages, as well as care houses for the terminally ill, and welfare workshops for variously challenged people. Abandoned people and their weaknesses were the focal point of these organizations and their activities. We could learn something from it to get around the problem of economic injustice.

For example, in a tsunami-affected city, we established a new groceries welfare shop which is managed by challenged people. Many Christian people, organizations and churches support it through their daily life activities. It brings a direct connection between the affected city and other cities. Using this connection, we develop new products. Now we start to challenge it. I think the challenge is to put challenged people at the centre of the enterprise.

Or for instance, at a radiation-affected village in Fukushima, we started discussions with scholars about establishing a new project. There are huge forest areas which are deeply contaminated by radiation. We have to fell uncountable trees and decontaminate the fields. It is a daunting task. So we wondered if we could change the contaminated trees to bio-pellets and use them as fuel without any spread of radiation. If it is possible, we could recover the forests, which is our ancestral heritage after some decades. Now we start to take up this challenge. I think the challenge is to put the radiation-affected forest at the centre of the revival from the nuclear catastrophe.

4. Challenges for interfaith activities

Keyword:

Interfaith activities; Ritual as a pathway to transcendence; Signification of the Site.

To overcome economic injustice, we have to look for an alternative. We could find the alternative when we look at our own weaknesses. I could testify that interfaith activities became significant when we feel our own weaknesses. Before this testimony, I would like to discuss the meaning of our interfaith activities in comparison with interfaith dialogues.

Last August, I took part in a dialogue meeting with Muslim and Buddhist monks at a Buddhist temple in Hiroshima.

At the end of the long dialogue, we concluded that any dialogue loses its significance without the site of sufferings. Only the voiceless voices from the groan of creation or the “People of the land (am hā·’ā·reš)” could empower interfaith dialogue and change it to interfaith activities, we concluded. Last Sunday, with a member of our church we started to organize a committee to have some workshops and raise money for the Rohingya people by next December. A member of our church felt that she should do something to mitigate the suffering of the Rohingya people but she did not know what she could do. She felt her weakness deeply and consulted me. Soon I talked with a Muslim friend who was my counterpart at the dialogue meeting in August in Hiroshima. We are now preparing to invite him to talk about the sufferings of the Rohingya people and to contribute to a Buddhist community chest. In this case, I think we can see the meaning of interfaith activities as the fruits of interfaith dialogue. We religious leaders have an advantage in standing with the weak because we can see beyond the weaknesses. Interfaith activities could be fruitful if

we can stand with or at the site of weakness, and if so, interfaith dialogue should become meaningful. The crucial point is the site of weakness.

What is the meaning of interfaith activities? I think that with interfaith activities we find ritual and prayer as the pathway to transcendence amidst the weakness. I believe we could see the presence of God in that situation.

I would like to share my experience of Japan's triple disaster (earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster of 2011), which is the story of "funerals for unidentified bodies."

When the triple disaster happened, there was great loss of life and because of the sheer numbers involved it meant the dead had to be cremated without funerals. Religious figures stood up to help deal with the grief. Christian pastors and Buddhist monks shared responsibility in an act of cooperation. For example, since Christians are directly connected to nationwide and global networks, we could directly consult with senior governmental figures.. On the other hand, Buddhists have local supporters and in-depth awareness of local networks. It means that momentary changes in the concrete on-site situation can be immediately passed on via this network. Here, the close contact with local areas is interlinked to the direct nationwide connection in the wider world. There, it paved the way for great potential. The bearing was the "funerals for unidentified bodies".

An earthquake disaster suddenly claimed the lives of many close relatives. This then triggered a risk of copycat suicides among those who sought to assuage their insidious feelings of guilt. Experts in suicide prevention advised us that religious figures holding funerals would help ease this risk. The experts particularly requested such funerals for "unidentified bodies". Vast numbers of people were seeking their "missing people" in the "unidentified bodies". The experts requested that such funerals continue to support those people. In response, till date we have continued holding funerals for unidentified bodies as a joint project involving people of all religions.

The project of "funerals for unidentified bodies" got underway as follows:

Three weeks after the earthquake disaster, the local government gave us permission as religious people to conduct, through broad cooperation with all religious people, volunteer activities at the state-owned crematorium

after carefully checking that such activities would not benefit certain groups alone. Armed with this permission, we established a “counselling room for soul” to provide consultation as religious figures on funerals at the crematorium. It had the cooperation of health professionals, counsellors, social workers and lawyers. Our role involved receiving requests for holding funerals and accompanying corpses prior to cremation. On one occasion, unidentified dead bodies were sent to us, accompanied only by police and crematorium staff. In all quiet with no one else around, about three to eight dead bodies were to be burnt simultaneously. When the incinerator was closed and the cremation started, the funeral service was started in front of the incinerator. Echoes rang out, the name of Buddha here, Shinto prayers there and a hymn somewhere else. The empty crematorium became a venue encompassing a symphony of various religions, which is something I will never forget. They stood there powerless, but there was prayer.

What on earth did we do there? Nothing but give funerals. We couldn’t do anything more – unable to keep body and soul together or provide counselling and advice on rebuilding lives. All we did was perform rituals and pray but at least we managed to do that by cooperating, which was a major achievement.

Death is inevitable. People pass away and we cannot stop that. Worse still, death usually comes suddenly. Whether it is a sick person treated with every possible therapy, or a person who falls victim to the tsunami, death comes suddenly all the same. We cannot even prepare ourselves and await it – the grim reality of death leaves our limits starkly exposed. It leaves us facing newer questions as to the meaning of life, while despair steadily takes hold.

However, what we can do is pray. We can call out for something beyond the tangible reality and feel as if we are hearing a voice in response. It may look comical but this is how we resist despair. Moreover, to muster up every last drop of resistance, we perform rituals, chant passages from the sutras and sing hymns and we remember transcendence in the process. Prayer and rituals help put us on the pathway to transcendence.

So what are we doing by conducting prayers and rituals? When we do them, we are staying beside people facing looming despair. That is something absolutely crucial.

Despair tends to infect others, which normally prevents people from accompanying those facing despair, leaving the latter isolated. People

gripped by despair lose their will to live. The only solution is that someone accompanies a person facing despair... but how? That is where our role as religious figures becomes significant.

Limits may be exposed, but we are still here. That is a miracle. Someone may exist here. While limits are exposed, we find ourselves reaffirming the reality of “being made to exist still” and in so doing, we can also confirm what we refer to as transcendence. However, it goes unnoticed when you are isolated. Conversely, with someone alongside, however powerless, the existence of transcendence is shown by the mere presence of that person. Remembering “this person can be here, so I can too”, the person finds a branch to cling to in the effort to resist despair.

Religious people can remain alongside a person in the depths of despair. Prayers and rituals are skills needed for being there. By performing prayers and rituals, remaining powerless and exposing limits, religious people remain alongside those facing despair.

Religious people could indicate transcendence on the edge of despair, for when despair looms, transcendence becomes apparent. What religious people could do at the disaster site was perform funerals, but to make this possible, cooperation was crucial. With this cooperation, religious people did what they could.

We would now like to reconfirm the above amid the new reality of radiation exposure and move forward. We are consumed with worry, anticipating major and unseen damage over an extended period (but as some intellects say, eagerly hoping the worry will prove groundless!) Amid such worry, there is nothing I can do here. Again, standing here powerless... that is the reality of Fukushima. Despair is prone to pervade easily here, but in here, the role of religious people emerges. Hang in there with people and resist despair. Pray, groaning out, performing rituals (funerals), with comicality on show. Perform, thanking something or someone higher for making it possible. Have the vision of opening a passage to transcendence offered amidst powerlessness.

To pass on the events we experienced in the disaster areas to the next – that is the responsibility of survivors. The day when we are called upon to take responsibility is already here. Specifically, the need for all religions is to cooperate, perform prayers and rituals to resist despair and pave the way for transcendence. We believe that is required now, especially in Fukushima.

5. Groaning of Creation at Fukushima; The theology of the cross beyond the suffering for the resurrection.

Keyword:

Fukushima Mothers; Paper Folding Crane; the Spirituality of the Cross

What is the recent situation of Fukushima? I would like to share some basic data.

- a. According to the U.S. Army, the children who lived on the west side of Tokyo were exposed “12 μ Sv” in their thyroid from 12 March 2011 to 11 May 2011. According to international health standards, the annual allowable exposure is “1 μ Sv.”
- b. According to the data released by the national government of Japan, there was a huge “insecure” field on the map at the end of 2012.
- c. There is a video made by a U.S. journalist to show the situation in 2014.
- d. According to the Fukushima local government, the incidence rate of pediatric thyroid cancer in Fukushima in 2015 became at least 20 times more than it was before 2011.
- e. According to international research, pre-natal mortality increased by 15.6% around Fukushima (according to a broadcasting in Oct. 2016.)

Now we have to listen to the voiceless voices. I am going to share a 2016 newspaper translated from Spanish to English. There are so many voices of Fukushima mothers; I believe it is the groaning of creation.

A lot of sisters and brothers continue to be with the sufferers in Fukushima now. Going by their testimonies, I have to say that unfortunately the problems of Fukushima have been increasing. In fact, so many people especially the Fukushima mothers need to feel that the calamity is now a thing of the past. Last week, I listened to the story of a Fukushima mother who evacuated with her children from a contaminated field. She told me over telephone that she met a mother who lives in a contaminated area and who had a short-term recuperation last summer and whose child contracted cancer last spring. This mother blamed herself totally, and she said, “I was not able to protect my child.”

Now I have to remember the old story of Hiroshima. As you know, people see the “Folded Paper Crane” as a symbol of peace. Now let us recollect the story of the “Folded Paper Crane”.

There was a girl in Hiroshima in 1945. Her name was Sadako Sasaki. She was born in 1943. When she was two years old, she was affected by the nuclear bomb that the U.S. dropped on Japan. Fortunately, she was not wounded by the heat rays nor by the big wind caused by the bomb. She was 1.7km away from Ground Zero. She grew up until the age of nine without experiencing any adverse effects on her body but suddenly in 1955, she developed leukemia and she died at the age of 12. Until her last breath, she continued to make “Folded Paper Cranes” at the hospital. She never gave up the will to live. She tried to live.

So the “Folded Paper Crane” became the symbol for the brave against the Nuke and for peace.

I would like to make my sisters and brothers of the world understand the real situation of Fukushima. Though the tragedy seems to be a past event, an ensuing calamity could happen in the near future. According to a survey made by the U.S. and Japanese governments, so many places have been affected which are just like the 2-km radius from Ground Zero of Hiroshima. Most of the people there, however, could not escape from places of danger because of the population density.

This is the seventh year since the 2011 disaster. We have to remember the story of the “Folded Paper Crane” and we have to pray for the girls and boys of Fukushima, and their mothers and fathers. God shall save them! I would love to share this prayer request with the world.

Now we have to remind ourselves about “the Spirituality of the Cross.” The AMC statement focusses on the “site of wounds, the site of death... the site of violence.” I believe these are the sites of the Cross of Jesus. These “sites” are one. Beyond the place and time, Jesus, as our omnipresent Lord is at these sites on the Cross. At these sites we have to fall on our knees and see the crucified Jesus. God shares the sufferings with the victims! It is awful but we must not escape from these sites. With the support of the Holy Spirit, we stay at the sites and take bread, share bread,

and look forward beyond the sites, while at the site. I believe the ritual is the pathway to transcendence. We shall see the rising sun beyond the darkness so that we could sing the old hymn with our sisters and brothers on earth and in heaven:

Let us break bread together on our knees
Let us break bread together on our knees
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
Oh Lord have mercy on me.



‘Groaning of Creation and Economic Injustice: Prophetic Witness’

- Dr. William Stanley

Reading the Signs of the Times – Groaning of Creation and Economic Injustice: Prophetic Witness

Introduction: The time has come before we slip into the next millennium to take stock of our scientific and technological achievements, developments and growth. Paradoxically, the given reality is that millions of people continue to live in poverty, ill health, and oppression through well-knit exploitative market forces. We need to analyze the causes and also demerits of human development. Our international treaties, policies, and agreements should be reviewed carefully so that we don’t make a mistake again, so that we don’t sin against humanity and creation but repent for a just global world --‘one world’, ‘one humanity’.

A market-driven ideology has aided global capitalists in overriding factors that promote the sustainable bio-resources of our fragile planet Earth and its people. Aggressive over-consumption and destructive lifestyles combined

with unscrupulous greed and selfishness has led to an unsustainable development path. The neo-liberal economic agenda is a conspiracy and a project of the corporates, the rich and the capitalists against the worlds' poor.

The impact of economic globalization, a legacy inherited from colonizers, is here for us to see. Let me mention a few – drought, desertification, environmental degradation, climate change, rapid loss of green cover, growing poverty, starvation, agrarian crisis and farmers' suicides. These issues need to be addressed. Most of the impacted people belong to indigenous communities, and the rural and urban poor. There are many country-specific and eco-system based community indicators but who will question economic terrorism? Who will take up the responsibility? All countries are going through unpredictable events that can erase humanity forever.

A Need for Global Questioning : The church, more than any other religious institution, can deliver a powerful message and play a pro-active, political and prophetic role in establishing a just and ecologically sound civil society. If we look at the models of development used by rich nations, we can see that most of them are Christian nations. Their actions towards development are contradictory to the faith they believe in.

The International community, particularly the church and her constituencies, has to lead and face the challenges of wrong development models and inhuman, destructive interventions. Therefore, let us provide a space to review our theology in line with God's Vision.

Let us prepare ourselves to stand for justice and promote a humane development. We are generally busy with various activities and in the process, forget that our role in society is to engage and advocate policies concerning genuine development and question any anti-people, anti-environment, anti-development policies around us. We need to acknowledge the commitment of many churches and their leaders who have played and are playing an active role in questioning such unjust development.

Church's Priority: Transformative education is considered to be one of the effective means of social and political change. Empowerment of the marginalized communities and sensitizing the rich has proved to be essential components of action in the present context of development

processes and approaches. This makes churches take up issue-based activities with direction to bring change in power equations and to influence policy-making authorities and institutions through democratic means. On a daily basis, we come across campaigns, struggles, and marches against wrong developmental interventions that destroy people and environment.

Excerpts from the Accra Confession: We have heard that creation continues to groan, be in bondage and is waiting for liberation (Romans 8:22). We are challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the wounded state of creation itself. We see a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation.

The signs of the times have become more alarming. The root cause of massive threats to life is above all an unjust economic system defended and protected by political and military might. Economic systems are a matter of life or death. We live in a scandalous world that denies God's call to a life for all.

The annual income of the richest 1% is equal to that of the poorest 60% and 24,000 people in the world die every day from poverty and malnutrition. The debt of poor countries continues to increase despite having repaid their original borrowing many times over. Resource-driven wars claim the lives of millions, while millions more die of preventable diseases. The majority of those in poverty are women and children, while the number of people living in absolute poverty -- on less than US \$1 per day -- continues to increase.

The policy of unlimited growth among industrialized countries and transnational corporations' drive for profit have plundered the earth and severely damaged the environment. If in the year 2000, one species disappeared each day, by 2016 it was one every hour. Climate change, depletion of fish stocks, deforestation, soil erosion and threats to fresh water are among the devastating consequences. Communities are disrupted, livelihoods are lost, coastal regions and the Pacific islands are threatened with inundation, and storms increase. High levels of radioactivity threaten health and ecology. Life forms and cultural knowledge are being patented for financial gains. This crisis is directly related to the development of neoliberal economic globalization, which is based on the following beliefs:

- Unrestrained competition, consumerism, and unlimited economic growth based on greed and accumulation of wealth is best for the whole world;

- The ownership of private property has no social obligation;
- Capital speculation, liberalization and deregulation of the market, privatization of public utilities and national resources, unrestricted access for foreign investments and imports, lower taxes, and the unrestricted movement of capital will achieve wealth for all;
- Social obligations, protection of the poor and the weak, trade unions, and relationships between people are subordinate to the processes of economic growth and capital accumulation.

This is an ideology that claims to be without alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and creation. It makes the false promise that it can save the world through the creation of wealth and prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance, which amounts to idolatry – the eminent domain.

We need to recognize the enormity and complexity of the situation. We are not seeking simple answers. As seekers of truth and justice looking through the eyes of the powerless and suffering people, we see that the current world (dis)order is rooted in an extremely complex and immoral economic system defended by empire. The term “empire” here denotes the coming together of economic, cultural, political, and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests. Under neo-liberalism, the purpose of the economy is to increase profits and returns for the owners of production and financial capital while excluding the majority of the people and treating nature as a commodity.

The churches need to work together with other communions, the ecumenical community, the community of other faiths, civil movements, and people’s movements for a just economy and the integrity of creation, and call upon our member churches to do the same.

We see the dramatic convergence of economic crisis with economic globalization and geopolitics backed by neoliberal ideology. This is a global system that defends and protects the interests of the powerful but it affects and captivates us all. In Biblical terms such a system of wealth accumulation at the expense of the poor is seen as unfaithful to God and

responsible for preventable human suffering and is called Mammon. Jesus had said that we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Luke 16:13).

We believe that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalization. We need to reject the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, because they defy God's covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable, and the whole of creation from the fullness of life. We shall reject any theology that claims that God is only with the rich and that poverty is the fault of the poor. We shall reject any form of injustice, which destroys right relations—gender, race, ethnicity, class, disability, or caste. We need to reject any theology which affirms that human interests dominate nature.

We believe that God calls us to hear the cries of the poor and the groaning of creation and to follow the public mission of Jesus Christ who came so that all may have life and have it in fullness (John 10:10). Jesus brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind (Luke 4:18); he supports and protects the downtrodden, the stranger, the orphaned, and the widowed. By confessing our faith together, we covenant obedience to God's will as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and in accountable relationships. This binds us together to work for justice in the economy and the earth in our common global context as well as our various regional and local contexts.

The churches need to work together with other communions, the ecumenical community, the community of other faiths, civil movements, and people's movements for a just economy and the integrity of creation, and call upon our member churches to do the same. Now we proclaim with passion that we will commit ourselves, our time, and our energy to changing, renewing, and restoring the economy and the earth, choosing life, so that we and our descendants might live (Deut. 30:19). *(Source: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, meeting in Accra, Ghana, 30 July-13 August 2004).*

Jesus said, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel.(Mark 16:15)

What can churches do?

- The Southern and Northern partners can jointly facilitate a process of identifying issues concerning humanity.

- Provide conceptual clarity in understanding justice as a way of life.
- Facilitate the prioritization of issues diffused by the global rich and governments in power.
- Identify international institutions which are addressing the issues — poverty, environment, child labour, women and gender issues, patriarchy, casteism, untouchability, racism, communalism, fundamentalism, human rights violations, lynching of dissenters and minorities, human trafficking, plight of people with disabilities, exploitation, marginalization, oppression, discrimination, militarization, terrorism, development, displacement, environmental degradation, ecological debt, climate change, etc and work towards a just sustainable development.
- Provide periodic interface between churches and the so-called rich both in the South and the North so as to make them aware about the need to bring about change in their development philosophy and reordering of the mind. Transformation from Gospel of Prosperity to Liberation – changes in the theological narratives.
- Government companies of the North which are in business with the South need to be identified. Let the churches in the North involve themselves in identifying private and logical support and solidarity with the people of the South who are victims of developmental intervention unleashed by the corporates.
- Arrange capacity-building programmes for church representatives and seminary students to effectively counter the rich and their development policies that make the people and the earth poorer both in the North and in the South.
- Engage in adaptation and mitigation activities and build climate-resilient communities.
- Promote and engage in alternative energy sources that are renewable and life-giving for agriculture.
- Engage with other faith-based communities towards justice and sustainable development.
- Identify people's struggles and movements in the country context and find ways to assist and accompany them in their struggles.

- Raise resources for such activities on a long-term basis to bring desirable changes both in the South and in the North as alternatives to the current dominant development models of economies.

Notes from the NPR report, August 2017:

Global Temperature and Climate Extremes hit records in 2016

The year 2016 was the warmest on record for the planet as a whole, surpassing temperature records that date back 137 years, according to an annual report compiled by scientists around the globe.

Last year also witnessed new records for greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane.

“The annual increases in methane and nitrous oxide were pretty much in line with their decadal trends, but the rise in global carbon dioxide of 3.5 [parts per million] was the largest year-over-year increase observed in the 58-year measurement record.”

“This brought the global average carbon dioxide concentration for 2016 to 402.9 ppm,” surpassing 400 ppm for the first time in modern records or ice core records that go back nearly 800,000 years.

“- At any given time, nearly one-eighth of the world’s land mass was in severe drought. That’s far higher than normal and “one of the worst years for drought,” said a report of the United Kingdom Meteorological Office.

“- Extreme weather was everywhere. Giant downpours were up. Heat waves struck all over the globe, including a nasty one in India. Extreme weather contributed to a gigantic wildfire in Canada.

“- Global sea level rose another quarter of an inch (3.4 millimetres) for the sixth straight year of record high sea levels.

“- There were 93 tropical cyclones across the globe, 13 percent more than normal. That included Hurricane Matthew that killed about 1,000 people in Haiti.

“- The world’s glaciers shrank — for the 37th year in a row — by an average of about 3 feet (1 metre).

“- Greenland’s ice sheet in 2016 lost 341 billion tons of ice (310 billion metric tons). It has lost 4400 billion tons (4000 billion metric tons) of ice since 2002.”

NPR’s Christopher Joyce reported, “The report notes that these changes are consistent with projections of human-caused climate change.”



Groaning of Creation and Economic Justice: Prophetic Witness

- Ronald Laldinsuah

Greetings to you all in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Welcome to Myanmar! I am deeply privileged to be part of the Asia Mission Conference. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the organizers for extending me an invitation through MECA to address the plenary session on *Groaning of Creation and Economic Justice*. Today I will discuss the basic idea of justice both from philosophical and biblical spheres with a view to draw out some normative biblical principles for our teaching of justice today.

What is “Justice?”

Classical Philosophy

Every major work on ethics, from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* to Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, has held that justice is part of the core of morality in Western civilization. I will briefly, in passing a selection of classical philosophies, highlight the notions of justice.

A brief survey of six classical works provides us with several basic principles of justice, and the differences of emphasis are remarkable. They are more or less the bases of contemporary forms of justice which will be elaborated further on. (1) Justice, according to Plato, is harmony in society where each individual minds their own work, fulfilling the role for which they are best suited. (2) Aristotle grounds justice in distribution in accordance with merit and restoration of balance when unequal distribution occurs. (3) John Stuart Mill's utilitarian view recognises that justice is determined in proportion to the extent it produces happiness, and in fact denies that there are absolute rules for justice. (4) Based on the notion of autonomy as essential, John Rawls locates justice in the rights of and fairness to the individual, especially those of the "least advantaged." (5) Robert Nozick's entitlement theory defines justice as protecting the fundamental rights of property and choice for each individual and locates justice in fairness in individual exchange. (6) Reinhold Niebuhr's faith-based approach looks for a balance of power so that the weak are protected from the strong. In brief, the diverse theories of justice elucidate the multifaceted nature of justice. No single theory is sufficient to encompass all the requirements of justice.

Contemporary Forms of Justice

Against the backdrop of these classical theories, we will look at five contemporary forms of justice: commutative, social, distributive, retributive and restorative justice.

(1) Commutative justice occurs in situations where the exercise of reciprocal rights between individuals has been protected and regulated by just procedures with equal respect to all persons.

(2) Social justice occurs in contexts where the rights of every member of the society are safeguarded, distribution of goods is carried out with just procedures and individual members also maintain equality and solidarity of the community by contributing towards those who are in need.

(3) Distributive or Economic justice occurs in circumstances where people receive their due, treating unequals equally.

(4) Retributive justice does not merely mean revenge, but aims to punish the guilty in proportion to the seriousness of their wrongdoings.

(5) Restorative justice occurs in situations where distorted relationships have been amended, aiming to restore the victims, offenders and the community involved.

It is noticeable that all the different types of justice are interconnected. None of them will work for every case. For instance, a society solely focused on egalitarian justice will not be a free society; a society engrossed with libertarian justice will not be just; a society fixated with blindfolded justice will not be healthy; a society focused exclusively on restorative justice will not be ordered and a society obsessed with retributive justice will not be harmonious. Thus, the applications of justice must take a context-conscious approach to see what type of justice will be most suitable in a given context. Arguably, there is an underlying principle behind each classification of justice to create a harmonious and just relationship between individuals and between individuals and their larger society. This principle is none other than “right relationships.”

Biblical Concepts of Justice

Again, we will scan through biblical concepts of Justice. Arguably, any consideration of justice in the Old Testament must engage with the three main, well-recognised terms ‘hqdx’, ‘dsj’ and ‘fpvm’. A well-integrated analysis of these words provides us the biblical perspective of justice.

In general, qdx means what is right, just, normal, righteous; hqdx, is used with social, ethical, forensic and religious meanings. However, hqdx primarily refers to a condition of a person who is relationally faithful. hqdx is a highly relational term which fulfils the claims arising out of actual relationship between two entities: between humans and between humans and God. It refers to a behaviour in accord with some implied norms as well as a unique fidelity to relationship that goes beyond the call of duty. Its core aim is to perpetuate a persistent, right relationship.

Like hqdx, the conceptual term dsj is comprehensive and has a strong relational aspect, which can only be defined by a cluster of several words. Generally, dsj means “loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, love and mercy.” The fundamental idea of dsj in the Scriptures involves a voluntary action of one person to (and for) another. It consists of an inward disposition of love (right motives) and an outward expression of love (right actions). In other words, it refers to a moral and ethical behaviour corresponding to a mutual

relationship as well as a compassionate deed, which is grounded on divine dsj, aiming to maintain true and right relationships.

The most significant term in exploring the biblical concept of justice is fpvm. Broadly speaking, the noun fpvm can refer to several features such as divinely-given laws or ordinances, divine justice, judgment, authoritative actions, decision, court, cause or case, executing justice, rights, custom, manner and even path. Its wide-ranging use oscillates around three domains: the forensic, religious and ethical. The underlying essence of the concept is its relational aspect. Even in a forensic context, the primary aim of fpvm is not so much about fair play in terms of judicial procedure, but rather about protection and sustaining a relationship for coexistence. Essentially, it refers to an action of any given authority that preserves relations and restores the disturbed order and hurt individuals in the community. It includes the legal demand but goes beyond it. Its key aim is to regulate a right relationship in a particular circumstance. Unlike the modern notion of justice, which is based on *iustitia distributiva*, the biblical concept of justice (fpvm) is *iustitia salutifera*. In this, fpvm is closely associated with other relational concepts such hqdx, dsj and <jr. Like those concepts, fpvm demands a commitment, whether legal, ethical or religious, to sustain right relationships between God and his people and between people and their fellow human beings.

Relational Justice

It is now clear that the essential concern of all notions of justice, whether secular or biblical, is justice in relationship. Injustice, therefore, is the loss of right relationship. Humans exist as selves in relation to others and therefore the ultimate goal of justice is to maintain and perpetuate that “right relationship.” Justice, in this sense, assumes mutual trust and loyalty as an original (just) position and aims to build and sustain right relationships. In the life-lived-with-others, every human person is responsible for their actions and thus what justice demands is responsibility from the responsible selves. Philosophical discussions on the significance of shared responsibility under the rubrics of commutative, social and distributive justice fall within this category.

The relational justice also involves a correction when the assumed right relationship is distorted. It imposes penalty with a view to reconstruct the right relationship of the original position. It carries both the sense

of retribution and restoration, and denounces anything that disturbs the relational equilibrium by imposing punishment on the perpetrator and by asserting the victim's right. In other words, justice includes the notion of retributive justice, especially with its biblical flavour.

Moreover, relational justice aims to build a new relationship from that which has been distorted. Justice, in this sense, assumes a commitment based on a bond relationship in which a break in the chain is inexcusable. It not only asserts the victim's right but also withholds, at times, due punishment of the perpetrator in the hope of restoring right relationship. It moves to a situation where the irresponsible selves are absolved. By transcending human logic, it provides forgiveness to the unforgivable, the pinnacle of relational justice. In a nutshell, our discussion on Economic justice should be grounded on the relational aspect of justice.

Economic Justice

Distributive justice refers to the idea of sharing benefits, resources and burdens in ways that are fair and just. By assuming procedural justice as a condition, it supervises the distribution of benefits and burdens to its individual members "by ensuring that each person receives an equitable share of the common goods of a society."¹ There are four theories to explain how a just mechanism of distribution can function.

First, *egalitarian* justice says that justice can only exist within the sphere of equality. It demands equality of opportunity and equality of outcome. Nonetheless, this does not mean that all people get whatever they want or desire, but "no external factors will prevent people from fairly competing for the rights and goods available in a given society."² This approach advocates similar treatment for similar cases, i.e., "not all human beings are in comparable situations... but all those who are in a comparable situations should be treated equally."³ Rawls' approach to justice can be plausibly associated with this egalitarian understanding of justice.

A second theory advocated by socialism is *need justice*. This approach says "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need."⁴ The underlying notion is that "what individuals are owed is based primarily on their concrete needs in a given sphere."⁵ This approach advocates a blindfolded fairness. It presupposes that equality must be at times sacrificed to respond to the specific needs of an individual or to groups of people

in the community.⁶ Rawls' second principle also falls into this category, which aims to guarantee benefit to the least advantaged in the society.

Third, *libertarian justice* says that “from each as they choose and to each as they are chosen.”⁷ All persons have the freedom to choose and are certainly free to pursue their own good in their own

way as long as they “do not deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it.”⁸ Everyone is the rightful owner of their own bodily, mental and spiritual health.⁹ By embracing a minimal role for government, libertarian justice in effect calls for a right to life, a right to freedom of speech, press and assembly and a right to property.¹⁰ Noticeably, a key problem with this approach is a tendency to ignore that true justice, at times, limits someone else's freedom, especially in relation to retributive justice or to equality in distribution.

Finally, *meritorious justice*, espoused by capitalism, says that benefit should be distributed according to the value of the contribution an individual makes to the economy of a society. This view focuses on what is owed to a person by virtue of their performance.¹¹ People should be rewarded for being proactive in contributing, provided that fair procedures are in place within a given sphere. Again, Nozick's notion of ‘whatever happens from a just situation by just procedures is just’ fits well with this approach, because merit is deemed the best way to reward people for actions, effort and impact on productivity. A number of Christian scholars reflect this philosophical influence.¹² However, justice understood as merit alone will not provide a just distribution in a society, because by its very nature, merit justice attempts to ignore the disadvantaged social classes, such as impaired children or the handicapped elderly.

Economic Justice in Biblical Contexts

Distributive justice, with its diverse emphases, finds support from the Scriptures. God himself distributes justice to everyone (Deuteronomy 10:18–19; Palms 33:5; Matthew 5:45). The concept of receiving what is due to people is best reflected in the distribution of land in Numbers 26:5–56 (cf. Ezekiel 47:13–48:20), where larger groups are to receive larger inheritances of land.

There are substantial biblical references to egalitarian and need-based justice in the Old Testament law. Needless to say, God has a special concern for the poor (Palms 140:12; Proverbs 14:31; 19:17). God identifies with the poor and demands the people share God's concern for the poor.

A notion of reward or merit to the righteous is alluded to in many narrative stories. For instance, Abraham was promised a great reward for his good deed (Genesis 19:11). Reward is a common motivation to promote just character (Palms 19:11; 59:11; Proverbs 11:18; 22:4). Paul's statement reflects the idea of merit, "Anyone unwilling to work should not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10) and Jesus also echoes the same idea by saying, "Labourers deserve their food" (Matt. 10:10; 25:14–30).

A biblical understanding of freedom does not negate the idea of pursuing our own good in our own way. However, it locates liberty in a relationship with Yahweh by choosing life (Deut. 30:19), serving him (Josh. 24:15) and doing his precepts (Ps. 119:45). The New Testament echoes the same tone that true freedom is found in Christ (Jn. 8:36) and living out his word.¹³ Wealth gained in just ways is not negated in the Scriptures but God judges the rich by their actions toward the poor (James 5:1).

A biblical understanding of rights refers not only to a right not to be harmed, but also more importantly, to take responsibility towards others. It involves restoration of the essential benefit rights for dignified coexistence in the community (Leviticus 25:35). Biblical justice is associated with right living in all areas of life, where God measures every deed.¹⁴

Prophetic Voice: Covenant enforcing

The primary role of the prophets was to enforce the covenant, urging the people of God to obey his law and commands. The prophets regularly denounced the moral sickness of the people of God. To the prophets, the infidelity of social relationship became the acid test of the welfare of the future of Israel. Hundreds of supporting examples can be found in the Bible, but a few will suffice.

For Amos and Hosea, a stark difference between the rich and the poor marked the absence of justice. The growth of urban centres, militarisation and extraction of surplus in the name of national expansion meant injustice and corruption. Amos' accusation, "you impose heavy rent on

the poor and exact a tribute of grain from them” (Amos 5:11) brought to light the awful effect on the peasants. Hosea’s indictment “you have loved the wages of a prostitute on every grain-threshing floor” (Hos. 9:1) targeted the source of exploitation, namely the depraved moral fibre of the people. The prophets’ parting shots were aimed at the corrupt practices in the market. Amos described the conduct of the greedy and oppressive merchants whose heartfelt joy was to “trample the needy, do away with the humble,” by selling grain and cheating “with dishonest scales” (Amos 8:4–5). Hosea echoed the same concern when he says, “A merchant, in whose hands are dishonest scales, loves to oppress” (Hos. 12:7). These few instances demonstrate that the role of the prophets is primarily to enforce the biblical principles of justice found in the wider covenantal context of the Scriptures.

Implications

The ultimate concern of justice, whether secular or biblical, is justice in relationships. Justice aims to maintain and perpetuate right relationships and demands responsibility from the responsible selves.

Biblical justice distributes equality to everyone. Justice demands that every person has access to the land, the basic capital of income in early Israel’s agricultural economy.

Biblical justice has a special concern for the poor, who are often the victims of various injustices. By imitating God’s character, the strong are responsible to ensure justice for the weak.

A biblical concept of justice allows everyone to pursue their own good in their own way, but judges them by their actions toward the weak.

In the ‘life-lived-with-others’, biblical justice aims to create a community where all live together in *Shalom*.

End notes

1. Paul J. Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 224.
2. Dennis P. Hollinger, *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 227.
3. Richard Higginson, *Dilemmas: A Christian Approach to Moral Decision Making* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1988), 173.
4. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme: With Letters from Engels and the Gotha Programme* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1972), 18.
5. Hollinger, *Choosing the Good*, 231.
6. As Pope John XXIII declared, “all people have a right to life, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, education and employment.” *Bishops, Economic Justice for All*, xi.
7. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 160.
8. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (2nd ed.; London: John W. Parker & Son, 1859), 27.
9. Mill, *On Liberty*, 27.
10. See The United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).
11. Hollinger, *Choosing the Good*, 226.
12. See Ronald H. Nash, *Social Justice and the Christian Church* (Milford: Mott Media, 1983), 57 and E. Calvin Beisner, *Prosperity and Poverty: The Compassionate Use of Resource in a World of Scarcity* (Westchester, Ill: Crossway, 1988), 54.
13. “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31–32; cf. 2 Cor. 3:17).
14. Deut. 28:20; Ezra 9:13; Isa. 1:16–17; 26:7; Jer. 4:4, 18; 18:11; 25:5; 44:22; 20:43–44; Hos. 4:9; 5:4; 6:6; 7:1–2; 9:15; 12:2; Amos 8:7; Mic. 3:4; Zec. 1:4; Matt. 16:27; Jn. 3:19–20; 5:29.



Embracing the Strangers and Accompanying the Marginalised

- Dr. Gemma Tulud Cruz

The Plight of Asian Migrant Workers

Asian migration significantly changed in the past few decades largely due to the effects of contemporary globalization. First, Asian migration changed in terms of volume. A United Nations report, for example, states that in 2013 Asians represented the largest diaspora group residing outside their major area of birth, accounting for about 19 million migrants living in Europe, some 16 million in Northern America and about 3 million in Oceania. The same report provides evidence that Asians are moving overwhelmingly in search of work. Compared to other regions of destination, Asia saw the largest increase of international migrants since 2000, adding some 20 million migrants in 13 years, and this growth was mainly fuelled by the demand for foreign labour in the oil-producing countries of Western Asia and in South-Eastern Asian countries with rapidly growing economies such as Malaysia and Thailand.¹ In 2012, for example, more than 1 million Filipinos left their country to work in a country of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in Singapore or in Hong Kong. An Asian Development Bank Institute Report, meanwhile, notes that more than 250,000 workers

from Sri Lanka and 100,000 from Thailand have also been leaving their country every year since 2008.²

The large-scale migration of workers within Asia is largely attributed to two developments, namely the oil boom of the mid 1970s, which induced immense investment in infrastructures by the Middle Eastern countries, and the emergence as well as expansion of the so-called Asian tiger economies from the original four – namely Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea – to about six, with Thailand and Malaysia in the mix. These countries' increased economic development coupled with industrialized Japan's needs and Western countries' increasing need for replacements for their diminishing pool of workers (due to a high level of ageing population and low level of fertility rates) created a massive demand for labour which Asian workers readily filled.

In keeping with the trajectories of international labour migration, particularly as created by the current process of globalization, a significant proportion of the Asian migrant workforce are in unskilled work and move on a temporary basis from less developed to industrializing or developed countries. These workers, particularly the unauthorised (a.k.a. undocumented), constitute the underclass among Asian migrants, in general, and Asian migrant workers, in particular, for a couple of reasons. First of all, they are often confined to the so-called SALEP (shunned by citizens except the poor) jobs or 3D (disdained, difficult and dangerous) jobs and are unfairly regarded as “needed but not wanted” cheap labour. Second, they bore the brunt of the three dominant and problematic attitudes toward migrants in key destination countries in Asia: 1) migrants should not be allowed to settle; 2) foreign residents should not be offered citizenship except in exceptional cases and; 3) national culture and identity should not be modified in response to external influences.³ The Hong Kong court's rejection of the appeal of foreign domestic worker Evangeline Vallejos for permanent residency status, having lived in Hong Kong for about 27 years, illustrates the marginalisation of this particular class of migrant workers. Hong Kong's Basic Law provides that people who are “ordinarily resident” in the city for at least seven years are entitled to permanent residency. Hong Kong's immigration ordinance, however, says that no matter how many years people live in the city as contract workers, they do not count as “ordinarily resident” during those years.⁴ If most Asian destination countries are already tough when it comes to gaining permanent residency, one can imagine the tougher restrictions when it comes to access to citizenship.⁵

The Middle East, which is home to millions of Asian migrant workers, particularly from South and Southeast Asia, is also known for its *khafel* or *khafala* system, a highly restrictive immigration policy toward foreign workers, which sometimes force those who are authorised to go unauthorised. In this system, workers are able to enter only through sponsorship by *khafel*⁶ and are often required to surrender their passports to the *khafel* as soon as they enter the country. The *khafel* must give clearance before the worker can leave the country. In addition, workers are prohibited from changing employers and are, therefore, literally at the mercy of the sponsor(s). Turning to unauthorised employment then often becomes a means of escaping from a situation of bondage, especially for those in unskilled work, thereby creating an underclass within the underclass, that is, the unauthorised migrant worker in unskilled work.

Indeed, such restrictive immigration policies and arguably low regard for foreign workers in unskilled work provide means and, to a certain extent, justification for exploitative and abusive practices on the part of employers and recruiters. Photographer Philippe Chancel, for example, describes migrant construction workers in the United Arab Emirates, who are mostly South Asians, as “the new slaves”⁷ of the Gulf. Their situation is not very different from Asian workers in the fishing industry in Taiwan and Thailand, particularly Cambodians who live in slave-like conditions, some of whom are victims of human trafficking. A BBC report’s quote from Yim Bun Then, a 34-year-old Cambodian rice farmer who was one of 1,000 Cambodian men recruited by a Taiwanese-managed agency to work on mostly Taiwanese-owned fishing boats, illustrates these slave-like conditions.

“I never imagined I could return home because working on a fishing boat in the high seas, we only saw water every day. I couldn’t even communicate with my family. My working conditions were like that of a slave.... I was forced to work almost 24 hours a day and never got paid my full salary. I was often whipped by my captain when I was sick and could not work or worked slowly.”

According to NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and the men themselves, they were promised \$150 a month, but were paid about half that. They were sent to waters off Africa as well as Japan, Fiji, Qatar and Malaysia. Mr. Yim also said that workers were not given enough food and during his two years at sea, the boat reached port just once – in 2012 in Dakar, Senegal. Transport boats took the catch to land. There are many

more tragic stories reflecting unjust working conditions such as those of Filipina domestic worker Thelma Oyasan Gawidan who was starved over a period of 15 months by her Singaporean employers such that she lost 20kg (44 lbs), about 40% of her body weight, and Indonesian migrant domestic worker Erwiana Sulistyaningsih who, two years after her ordeal of physical abuse at the hands of her employer, says, “I still have the scars.”⁸ While Erwiana is referring to her physical scars, she may very well be expressing the deep emotional scars such ordeals can mark one for life. So how do we embrace and accompany such estrangement and marginalisation in the context of migration? How could we understand, envision and do mission in the face of such living conditions?

Faces of Mission in the Context of Contemporary Asian Labour Migration

In this age of migration when more than 200 million people live outside their country of origin and millions more are on the move as refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), the challenges embedded in contemporary human mobility put the spotlight on how churches embrace and accompany migrants as strangers and marginalised peoples. I present and reflect here three faces or ways in which the churches may understand, envision and do mission in the context of contemporary migration.

Mission as Encounter

A sense of mission in the context of migration arguably begins with awareness of the issues surrounding migrants today. While awareness on the issues of migrants can be gained by reading about them or watching news stories and documentaries about them, meeting actual migrants is oftentimes more effective in raising one’s awareness. Canadian theologian Mary Jo Leddy points to the vital role and power of encounter:⁹

“As I have listened to frontline church workers, [migrant and] refugee advocates, and immigration lawyers, two realities seem to emerge as constants in their experience: the first is that many of them are rooted in some church tradition; the second, that most of them got involved in “[migrant and] refugee work” through a personal encounter...”

Leddy, who traces her work among people on the move to an encounter with a refugee in great need, describes this ethical moment as conversion –

the change of mind and heart and moral imagination – through a personal relationship. Sometimes, we encounter someone and we are never the same. This is the ethics of the face. This “face-to-face encounter” is an ethical moment, for the human face, especially the faces of those whom Jesuit priest and philosopher Ignacio Ellacuria calls the “crucified peoples”, summons us; they call us into giving and serving the other.¹⁰ Leddy posits that this ethical moment is the moment when we are “summoned, addressed, and commanded. This is the time of annunciation and visitation...For many, the encounter with a real person called [migrant] or “refugee” evokes feelings of profound compassion that leads to practical forms of kindness. It is within this reach of mercy that the necessity (and near impossibility) of justice begins to emerge.”¹¹ Indeed, sometimes all it takes as a first step is to meet, listen, and talk to a migrant face to face for the issue to become clearer and the person behind the issue more real.

Mission as Incarnational Evangelization

In his book *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* Korean-American theologian Jung Young Lee notes how mobility, particularly immigration, is “the most vivid and profound symbol of marginality.”¹² It is in view of this and the many other forms of dislocation that migrants experience, that the churches’ mission among migrants takes the form of incarnational evangelization. In this understanding and practice of mission, accompaniment becomes witness as *withness*.

Religion’s enduring role and power in the lives of human beings has often been attributed to the way it serves as “the fire around which people gather.” To most adherents, religion provides not just a sense of identity but also a semblance of security on a daily basis as well as in moments of crisis. Support from religious leaders and institutions is, therefore, an important resource before, during, and after migration. One common form of pastoral care is the provision of a chaplain, particularly one who has the same cultural background as the migrants. For example, the Japanese Church provides religious service in Portuguese for its Brazilian migrants in the same way as many churches offer services in Indonesian, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese.¹³ In some cases, religious leaders from the migrants’ countries of origin regularly conduct pastoral visits. In the early years, meetings between representatives of Cambodian Catholic communities in Australia and New Zealand often coincided with the visit of Bishop Yves Ramousse or one of the French priests who had worked in the Cambodian Church before 1975.¹⁴ Then there is the valuable work being done by different FBOs (faith-based organisations) across Asia. For

instance, there is the Mission for Migrant Workers in Hong Kong, the Hope Workers' Centre in Taiwan, and the Yiutsari Jesuit Migrant Centre in South Korea. The 2014 publication of the Hong Kong-based Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants titled *Faith in Action*,¹⁵ which profiles more than 70 faith-based programs and institutions for migrants in the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East reflects the manifold and immense ways and means in which the churches, including migrants themselves, try to embody witness as *witness*. In a sense, the establishment of ethnic churches and pastoral centres as well as the creation of migrant-specific programs and institutions provide, for migrants, what could be a lifeline and the single most important source of continuity in their world that has changed in so many ways. For many Asian migrants the church is not just the principal site of celebration for ethnic identity and community. It is their refuge in times of crisis and their home when they want to shout for joy. An incarnational approach to mission in the context of migration thus means that the roles for the clergy and the Christian community, in general, would tend to be more service-oriented or strongly informed and guided by practical needs.

Mission as Prophetic Solidarity

Contemporary migration has often spawned divisive language and political rhetoric, particularly in destination countries, where the use of problematic language such as “boats” reinforce the “us and them” attitude and minimise, or render invisible, migrants and their plight. Fake news and scare tactics by politicians who capitalise on, or exploit, migration and migrants for political points then stoke anti-immigrant sentiments among local population, particularly those who have become weary and wary on the issue and are, therefore, more vulnerable to misinformation. In addition, common language refers to the migrant as the guest or the stranger, and the local population as the host. From a Christian perspective, however, basic to making ourselves neighbour to the uprooted is the fundamental recognition that everyone, not just the migrants, is a stranger. The Bible provides some rich clues for such a perspective. Being a stranger is the primary condition of the people of God (Exodus 23:9; Deuteronomy 24:18) and migration is woven into this “stranger condition.” “The land is mine” says the Lord and we “are but strangers and guests of [His]...” (Leviticus 25:23). As David acknowledges in prayer: “All comes from you; what we have received from your own hand, we have given to you. For we are strangers before you, settlers only, as all our ancestors were; our days on earth pass like a shadow...” (1 Chronicles 29:14-15). God even commanded the Israelites to love the stranger, as they were also strangers in Egypt (Deut. 10:19). In fact, many other Old Testament laws were put in place to protect the

stranger¹⁶ (Exod. 22:20; Lev. 19:33-35; 24:22; Deut. 14:28-29; 16:14; 24:14; 26:12-15; Numbers 15:15-16; 35:15) to the point that anyone who does not respect the rights of the stranger will be cursed (Deut. 27:19). The New Testament, and Jesus himself, who took on the conditions of a stranger, also have very specific exhortations to show goodness to the stranger, e.g. Matthew 25:35 “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”¹⁷

Thus, insofar as the Bible and the Christian tradition reminds us of our fundamental identity as strangers and our primary responsibility to care for the stranger, mission in the context of migration is about solidarity of/ among strangers. It is about an amnesic solidarity. However, given that not all migrants are treated equally, mission as solidarity in the context of migration must also be strategic solidarity. There needs to be a preferential option for the more vulnerable migrants such as migrant workers in unskilled work with unauthorised status and, in particular, those who languish in dehumanizing conditions. Consequently, such solidarity must be prophetic. It must not simply address the effects by providing economic, physical, and psychological assistance but also target the causes, including those with a more political nature.¹⁸ It is akin to what American theologian Christine Pohl regards as subversive hospitality¹⁹ or what Evangelical Lutheran Church pastor Rev. Alexia Salvatierra calls “prophetic hospitality”²⁰. Acts of charity need to be complemented by works toward social justice, which may entail embracing what American professor Sharon Welch calls an ethic of risk. Indeed, in the context of the tragic and, in particular, horrific effects of human dislocation, meaningful mission may mean costly incarnation. The WCC document *Together Towards Life* itself reminds us “this may entail advocating justice in regard to migration policies and resistance to xenophobia and racism” (TTL, 70). As American Professor of Mission Jonathan Bonk bluntly puts it,

To be a Christian entails recognizing and resisting the terrible reductionisms of all self-serving nationalisms, tribalisms, and racisms—and their ever-attendant legalisms—that undervalue or even dismiss the stranger, the refugee, or the immigrant, or the enemy. When we cooperate in such systemic reductionism we subvert our own identities as men and women created in the image of God, since we yield to Caesar something to which Caesar has no ultimate claim—human beings, including ourselves. *Legality*, for Christians, can never be an acceptable substitute for *justice*.²¹

Since the tentacles of misery and injustice inflicted on migrants do not respect international borders, it goes without saying that mission as prophetic solidarity in the context of migration must also be borderless. Moreover, it needs to employ digital means. In this digital age, the potential and possibilities for mission provided by the Internet and

other communication technologies cannot be ignored and must be used wisely and effectively to reach migrants wherever they may be. Many, if not all, migrants rely on digital technology to mitigate, even resist, the problematic conditions of their experience of migration. Hence, an online presence, online advocacy, and online means of contact, among others, are vital. Last but not least, networking across borders is critical. While one might say borderless mission and mission through networking are not new given the international character of Christian organizations and missionary endeavours, especially since the European expansion, what is being argued for here is transnational networking,²² particularly through collaboration and sharing of resources between and among Churches across denominations at various levels and by various actors. Such networking should not also be simply between and among religious leaders, institutions, and organizations but must involve all Christians and people of goodwill, including local, national and transnational NGOs, governments, and migrants themselves and their various organizations, many of which have transnational links. Migrante International, a global alliance of overseas Filipinos, is a case in point. When I taught a class this year in the Netherlands on religion and migration, someone from Migrante Australia helped in arranging for someone from Migrante Netherlands to come and speak to my class. Indeed, networking for and on behalf of migrants across borders must not just be the responsibility of churches or institutions and organisations in the countries sending and receiving them. Mission is a call for all and we are the keepers for our brothers and sisters whoever they are and wherever they may be. Insofar as migrants are not simply passive recipients but agents in the transformation of oppressive conditions, mission in the context of migration is not just about mission *to* migrants but also mission *of/by* migrants.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion shows us that embracing and accompanying migrants as a missionary imperative in today's world is about shining a light on hope. On the one hand, it is about bringing hope by addressing the loneliness, isolation and the various forms of social injustice that plague those who move and the families, communities and countries they come from. At the same time, it is about shining a light on the role of hope in migrants' lives. To be sure, the search for greater opportunities and a better life binds all people on the move. This hopeful quest for well-being is the enduring theme of wave after wave, generation after generation, of migrants worldwide. Ultimately, mission in the context of migration is about being Easter people, about witnessing to a courageous hope deeply rooted in the truth that in God's great economy of salvation hope, not death, is the last word.

End notes

1. See “232 million international migrants living abroad worldwide – new UN global migration statistics reveal”, <http://esa.un.org/unmigration/wallchart2013.htm> accessed 9 September 2017.
2. Asian Development Bank Institute, *Labor Migration, Skills, and Student Mobility in Asia* (Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute, 2014) 4. The phenomenon of 1 million Filipinos leaving the country annually to be OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) has been happening since 2006. See MarujaAsis, “Philippines”, *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 17 Nos. 3-4 (2008): 367.
3. Stephen Castles, “The Myth of the Controllability of Difference: Labor Migration, Transnational Communities and State Strategies in East Asia”, <http://www.unesco.org/most/apmr-cast.htm> accessed 4 September 2017.
4. Keith Bradsher, “Hong Kong court denies residency to domestics”, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/26/world/asia/hong-kong-court-denies-foreign-domestic-helpers-right-to-permanent-residency.html> accessed 8 September 2017.
5. In fact, the highly restrictive policies on permanent residency and citizenship in Asian destination countries when it comes to migrants, particularly migrant workers in unskilled work, have serious consequences on children of migrants born and raised in destination countries. One unfortunate result is the phenomenon of stateless children among migrants. I have not explored this dimension of international migration in my research but it is said that this issue is real especially for children of unauthorised workers in unskilled work in countries such as South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Japan. The problem is particularly acute among Filipinos, especially those in the Middle East and other Islamic countries such that last year one congressman or lawmaker had pushed for an investigation. To make matters worse, these children are not issued Philippine passports because a birth certificate, which is non-existent in Islamic countries, is required for the purpose. Maricel Cruz, “Solon pushes probe of stateless Filipinos”, <http://manilastandardtoday.com/news/-main-stories/top-stories/214916/solon-pushes-probe-of-stateless-filipinos.html> accessed 4 September 2016.
6. The *khafel* system is a sponsorship system for recruitment, a form of franchise to import foreign labour granted to loyal subjects, which thrives on bringing in ever-increasing numbers of foreign workers willing to pay money for their jobs.
7. Tim Hume, “Photographer captures ‘new slaves’ of the Gulf”, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/11/11/world/meast/emirates-workers-art/index.html>> accessed 4 September 2017.
8. See Cindy Sui, “Exploitation in Taiwan’s 2B fishing industry”, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27498048> accessed 8 September 2017. See also Ian Urbina, “Sea Slaves: The Human Misery that Feeds Pets and Livestock”, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/27/world/outlaw-ocean-thailand-fishing-sea-slaves-pets.html> accessed 8 September 2017.
9. Thelma was given only bread and instant noodles to eat. See Shafiq Idris Alkhatib, “Jail and fine for couple who starved maid causing her to lose 20kg,” <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/jail-and-fine-for-couple-who-starved-maid-causing-her-to-lose-20kg> accessed 8 September 2017. For Erwiana’s case see Phila Siu, “I still have the scars: Indonesian maid Erwiana attends Hong Kong documentary screening, describes life as a university student”, <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education-community/article/1931046/i-still-have-scars-indonesian-maid-erwiana> accessed 8 September 2017.
10. Mary Jo Leddy, “When the Stranger Summons: Spiritual and Theological Considerations for Ministry”, *New Theology Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (August 2007): 6.
11. Emmanuel Levinas and Philippe Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity* (Philadelphia: Duquesne Univer-

- sity Press, 1985), 95, 98, 119. See also Paul Marcus, *In Search of the Good Life: Emmanuel Levinas, Psychoanalysis and the Art of Living* (Karnac Books, 2010), 16.
12. Leddy, "When the Stranger Summons," 6-7.
13. Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995): 110-111.
14. KananKitani, "Brazilian Migrants in Japan: Welcoming New Christian Members to Society and Its Potential Impact on the Japanese Church", *CTC Bulletin* Vol. XXVIII, No. 1 (2012), 90.
15. Andrew Hamilton, S.J. "Catholic Cambodian and Laotian Communities in Melbourne," in *Crossing Borders: Shaping Faith, Mission and Identity in Multicultural Australia*, eds. Helen Richmond and MyongDuk Yang (Sydney: UCA Assembly and NSW Board of Mission, 2006), 169.
16. See Asia-Pacific Mission for Migrants, *Faith in Action: Faith-based programs and institutions for migrants in Asia-Pacific and the Middle East*. Available at <http://www.apmigrants.org/articles/publications/Featured%20Researches/Faith%20in%20Action.pdf> accessed 10 September 2017.
17. See Aida Besancon Spencer, "Being a Stranger in a Time of Xenophobia", *Theology Today*, Vol. 54 (April 1997-January 1998): 464-469 and "God the Stranger: An Intercultural Hispanic American Perspective", 89-103. See also A. Lacocque, "The Stranger in the Old Testament," in *World Council of Churches and Migration: WCC Fifth Assembly Dossier No. 13* (Geneva: WCC Migration Secretariat, 1981): 49-59 and Frank Crusemann, "'You Know the Heart of the Stranger' (Exodus 23:9): A Recollection of the Torah in the Face of New Nationalism and Xenophobia", *Concilium* 4 (1993): 95-109 for a more detailed discussion on this.
18. Philippians 3:20 also reminds us, "our citizenship is in heaven."
19. See, for example, Christian Conference of Asia, *Uprooted People in Asia: Conference on Migrant Workers, Refugees and Internally Displaced Communities in Asia*, Hong Kong, 22-26 November 1993 (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1995).
20. See Christine D. Pohl, "Responding to Strangers: Insights from the Christian Tradition", *Studies in Christian Ethics* 19.1 (2006), 82. A more substantive treatment could be found in Pohl's earlier work *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999).
21. See Alexia Salvatierra, "'Do Not Neglect to Show Hospitality': Sanctuary and Immigrant Justice", in L. Dykstra and C. Myers (eds.), *Liberating Biblical Study: Scholarship, Art and Action in Honor of the Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 213-220. See also Ched Myers, "Our God is Undocumented: Sanctuary and Prophetic Hospitality", in Ched Myers and Matthew Colwell (eds.), *Our God is Undocumented: Biblical Faith and Immigrant Justice*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2012), 53-72.
22. Jonathan Bonk, "Whose head is this and whose title?" Presidential address delivered at the International Association for Mission Studies, 13th Quadrennial Conference, Toronto, August 15, 2012. Available at <https://sites.google.com/a/iams2012.org/toronto-2012/> accessed 5 July 2017.
23. See "Networking is the new approach to mission", <http://globalsistersreport.org/news/networking-new-approach-mission-48781> accessed 15 September 2017.



Embracing the Strangers and Accompanying the Marginalised

- Rev. Dr. Lee Hong-Jung

Korean People Shackled in the Chain of Division

In the history of North-East Asia, we can see that the Korean people have been caught in the violent vortex of hegemonic struggle among imperial superpowers resulting in a series of foreign invasions and colonial dominations which eventually led to the tragic national division of Korea. In the unfolding of history, the Korean people suffered as forced migrants, direct war victims, refugees, and as geometrically and ideologically divided people. In the course of the globalization of the neo-liberal market economy system, the Korean people suffered doubly and triply because of the geo-political and geo-economic dynamics ensuing from the division. The Korean Peninsula has sunk into the quagmire of global military posturing of regimes possessing weapons of mass destruction on an apocalyptic scale. There has emerged the imminent danger of a third world war thanks to the “mad dogs” brinkmanship that could see thermo-nuclear weapons ready to be triggered in the Korean Peninsula.

The 1945 division of Korea was the most reckless compromise between the United States and the former Soviet Union based on a short-term tactical expediency rather than a long-term strategic vision for the suffering Korean people. In the course of fulfilling the liberation, based on the Cold War rivalry frame, the Korean people on both sides suffered from the tragedy of the three-year Korean War and the ensuing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The Korean War ceased only with the Armistice Treaty in 1953, irreversibly fixing the Cold War-driven division structure on the Korean Peninsula. During the last 64 years of maintaining a ceasefire, the Cold War-based, nation state-driven security system and policy has been strengthened both in the North and South at the expense of people's security for life. People in the North and South have become antagonistic strangers to each other, and have been ideologically distorted and collectively marginalized in the world system. In this regard, the Korean people can be characterized as the "Queen of Suffering" in an arduous march shackled in the chain of division.

Konanŭi Haenggun, the Arduous March, as Archetypal Metaphor for North Korean Military and Socio-Political Struggle

One of the paradigmatic cases of people in an arduous march while shackled in the chain of division was painfully manifested during the North Korean great famine from 1993 to 1998. The North Korean regime officially mandated to phrase the great famine as *Konanŭi Haenggun*, meaning the Arduous March, for the third time. By using the term *Konanŭi Haenggun*, it once again brought back one particular memory of the Anti-Japanese armed struggle of the late Kim Il-Sung, the founder of North Korea, to the people in an extreme existential crisis. The newspaper of the North Korean Labor Party, *Rodong Sinmun*, urged the North Korean citizenry to invoke the archetypal memory of the young Kim Il-Sung's legendary military struggle for the evasion and escape from the Japanese Army's suppression operation from November 1938 to March 1939 in China, as *Konanŭi Haenggun*. This was the first time the term was used. Later Kim Il-Sung brought this archetypal legendary memory back to his Anti-Sectarian Struggle for self-determination from February 1956 to September 1961, calling it *Konanŭi Haenggun* for the second time. *Konanŭi Haenggun* has become the archetypal metaphor for North Korean military and socio-political struggles.

The great famine, the third *Konanŭi Haenggun*, was a central event in the country's history which forced the North Korean regime and its people to change in unanticipated ways. The floods of the mid-1990s were the

immediate cause. The devastating floods in 1995 caused by torrential rains ravaged the country; it destroyed arable land, harvests, emergency grain reserves, socio-economic infrastructures, and so on. Economic mismanagement and the loss of Soviet support after the collapse of the former Soviet Union caused food production and imports to decline rapidly. The North Korean regime and its centrally planned system proved too inflexible to curtail effectively the repetitive natural disaster and its exogenous shocks.

Consequently, the North Korean regime had to accept food and humanitarian aid from international societies including South Korea and the U.S. To overcome the tragic crisis, on the one hand, it further militarized their economy by using the collective labour system in the spirit of *Konanŭi Haenggun*, and on the other hand, allowed the spread of people's limited market activities through *Jangmadang*, meaning market grounds. *Jangmadang* as private markets in the form of informal economy evolved from local communities involving mutual-help arrangements of various workplaces, relatives and neighbours, and vitalizing private trade with China. In recent years, the North Korean regime has become more lenient towards *Jangmadang*, trying to regulate the growth of market economy in the North. Currently a majority of the North Korean people are dependent on market economy for their survival. North Korea's state trading companies also emerged as an alternative means for conducting foreign economic relations. One of the notable facts was that even during the period of the great famine the North Korean regime eagerly maintained a military-first policy for strengthening its national security; this was to protect the country from the U.S. military threat which it did by developing various nuclear missile devices that can now possibly reach the U.S. inland.

North Korean Defectors in the 'Arduous' March

One of the social consequences of the great famine was the defection of the North Korean people. They managed in earnest to defect for various reasons, crossing the northern border with China, and becoming *Talbungmin*, meaning North Korean defector. According to a survey, approximately 30,000 people defected to the South, as of December 2016. The number of North Korean defectors reached its peak in 1998 and 1999 due to the great famine, but declined thereafter because of strict border patrols and inspections, forced deportations, rising broker costs for aiding defection etc.

For North Korean defectors, the typical route to the South is by crossing the ***Tumen*** River on the border into Jilin and Liaoning provinces in northeast China in camouflage, and then taking the train secretly across China. In China, they can either work illegally, though they are often exploited, or attempt to travel to the South through South-East Asian nations or Mongolia. Generally speaking, Thailand seems to be a safe destination for North Korean defectors escaping through China. While North Koreans are not given refugee status in Thailand and are officially classified as illegal immigrants, the Thai government will deport them to the South instead of back to the North. This is because South Korea recognizes native Koreans from the entire Korean Peninsula as her citizens. A much shorter route than the standard China-Thailand route is straight to Mongolia. The Mongolian government tries to maintain good relations with both North and South Korea, but being sympathetic to North Korean defectors, it sends them to the South. No matter which route they take, the journey of North Korean defectors can be characterized as a ***Konanŭi Haenggun***, an arduous march for survival.

China, being the most influential of the few economic partners of North Korea during the decades the latter has been under U.N. sanctions, is also the largest and continuous source of aid to North Korea. According to the Chinese State Department, 30,000 to 50,000 out of a larger number of North Koreans hiding in the country have the legal status of refugees. In recent years, to avoid worsening the tense relations with the two Koreas, China refuses to grant North Korean defectors refugee status and considers them as illegal economic migrants. The Chinese authorities arrest and deport hundreds of North Korean defectors to the North, sometimes in mass immigration sweeps, where they often face harsh interrogations and punishment.

In the last decade, it has been noted that approximately more than 70% of North Korean defectors to the South are females. More women leave the North because, as bread-winners of the family, they are more likely to suffer financial hardships. With rising social security issues including crime and violence involving North Koreans, the value of male labour decreased in China. Females were better able to find easier means of settlement by performing smaller labour tasks or by getting married to Chinese locals. As of today, 80-90% of North Korean defectors residing in China are females who settled there through de facto marriage. A large number of them are victims of forced marriage and human trafficking. Due to their vulnerability as illegal migrants, they had been sold for cheap prices. After violent abuse

that starts in apartments near the border with China, the women are moved to cities further away to work as sex slaves. Chinese authorities arrest and repatriate these victims to the North.

Resettlement of North Korean Defectors Entering South Korea

The Ministry of Unification is the main organization that manages North Korean defectors in the South through its admission processes and resettlement policies. It also has regional sub-organs called *Hanawon*, a government resettlement centre called ‘Center for Oneness’, which helps defectors in their day-to-day life for a smoother transition into South Korean society. In 2004, South Korea passed controversial measures intended to slow the flow of asylum seekers as it became worried that a growing number of North Koreans crossing the rivers into China will soon seek refuge in the South. The regulations now tighten defector screening processes and slash the amount of money given to each defector, to prevent ethnic Korean Chinese from entering the South as well as to stop North Korean defectors with criminal records from gaining entry.

North Korean defectors arriving in the South first face joint interrogation by authorities from the National Intelligence Service and the National Police Agency to ensure that they are not spies, and are then sent to *Hanawon*. There are also non-profit and non-governmental organizations that seek to make the socio-cultural transition easier and more efficient for North Korean defectors. For example, the *Saejowi* provides defectors with medical assistance as well as training in diverse topics ranging from leadership and counseling techniques to prevention and avoidance of sexual violence. The PSCORE, *People for Successful Corean Reunification*, runs educational programs for refugees, advocates human rights in the North and helps defectors adapt to life in the South. One of the critical considerations given to the Ministry is that most of these NGOs are aiming at an absorbing reunification by the South rather than a peaceful co-existence, by expecting a critical situation of mass defection of North Koreans to cause an internal collapse of the North.

Serious difficulties relating to psychological and cultural adjustment occur because of differing living conditions, rules, ways of thinking, and social environment in the South. Difficulties in adjustment often come in the form of PTSD; traumatic events and experiences such as disturbing memories or dreams of brutality of the regime, starvation, ideological pressure, propaganda, political punishments, along with

anxiety, depression, somatization, and alterations in the ways of thinking are common. PTSD often prevents them from adequately integrating into a new culture and from being able to hold jobs and accumulate material resources. Other adjustment difficulties occur due to such factors as the defector's suspiciousness, way of thinking, prejudice of the new society, its unfamiliar sets of values, and inability to adjust to the new way of living. According to the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, half of North Korean defectors recognized that they experienced discrimination because of their background. The other two major issues are poor working conditions and their inability to afford medical care.

Double Defectors in between

In some cases, North Korean defectors voluntarily return to the North, and their number seems to be increasing. A former South Korean MP estimated that in 2012 about 100 North Korean defectors returned to the North via China. In 2015, it was reported that about 700 unaccounted North Korean defectors living in the South may have fled to China or South-East Asia in the hope of returning to the North. The North Korean Kim Jong-un regime has started a campaign to attract defectors to return with promises of family safety, money, housing, employment, a public appearance on TV, and so on. North Korea has actually aired such appearances on TV where returning defectors complain about poor living conditions, ill-treatment as second-class citizens, pressure to fabricate stories against North Korea in the South, and then pledge allegiance to Kim Jong-un.

One of the most prominent defections to South Korea occurred in April 2016 when 13 North Korean female restaurant workers in Ningbo, Zhejiang province of China, legally crossed the border between North Korea and China with official passports and visas issued from the North. This group defection is significant while tackling issues of human rights and forced repatriation since the workers decided to defect in a group instead of monitoring each other as they are instructed to do. After being educated on security and South Korean socio-cultural issues, all 13 North Korean defectors were approved for social resettlement in August 2016. However, allegations of group 'abduction' made the Lawyers for Democratic Society in the South, called *Minbyun*, request an interview to learn whether the defection was voluntary or forced, but it was ignored and rejected. The National Council for Churches in Korea (NCCK) and the WCC, responding

to the request from the Korean Christian Federation in North Korea, also expressed suspicions of group ‘abduction’ requesting to return them to the North.

In spite of the collective effort of the defectors themselves, the government, NGOs, and humanitarian and religious organizations in helping the defectors make the adjustment process in a smoother and less painful manner, North Korean defectors seem to be situated in between as strangers, as the marginalized, and as alienated both from the North and South. Even today hundreds and thousands of unknown North Korean defectors are making their endless ‘arduous march’ shackled in the chain of division at the margin of one’s social context in foreign lands. We now hear North Korean defectors’ crying for breaking the chain of division.

Breaking the Chain of Division

As seen in the struggle of North Korean defectors in the light of people’s security for life, during the last 72 years, the Korean people have found themselves in the structurally subordinated situation devised and enforced by the Cold War-driven division system and its regimes. People’s security for life is the essential parameter for sustaining peace with justice, upholding human dignity and rights of all God’s people, and cultivating nature abundantly in the whole *Oikoumene*. In the division situation, however, both the North and South Korean nation state regimes not only fail to fulfill its security obligations to the people, but also become the principal perpetrator of various kinds of violence against their own people using the protection of their system as a pretext. Therefore, without reconstructing the Cold War-based division structure into the reunification-oriented peace system, there will be no fulfillment of the liberation of the Korean nation and no full enhancement of people’s security for life.

The division is a social and geopolitical ‘original sin’ of the Korean nation that has been the fundamental stumbling block in enhancing people’s security for life. The division is a paradigmatic reaction in violation of the divine covenant. The division is a structural sin against God, humanity and nature. The division is in contradiction to God’s will for the fullness of life for all. However, if we see the history of the Korean people from a perspective of the whole story of God’s salvific action and of what God

wants for the world, the division of the Korean Peninsula is not the end of history. Contrarily, the division is an omega point of springing up all the will of renewal and transformation in which God's people are called to engage in healing, reconciliation and peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

In such a faith setting, we dare to dream! One day, the people of North and South will transform the heavily militarized Demilitarized Zone from an invincible division wall to a balanceable cell membrane by cultivating it into a permanent eco-peace zone. We dare to dream further! One day, the children of North and South, growing up together in peace, will faithfully expand this permanently demilitarized eco-peace zone to the whole Korean Peninsula, to the whole North-East Asia, and to the whole world, envisioning a division-free, defection-free, nuclear-free *Oikoumene*. We dare to dream continuously! One day, the people of North and South will cultivate a people-centric, life-enhancing geo-economic environment of North-East Asia, establishing Special Economic Zones and connecting them by a Eurasian railroad transportation system running through the DMZ.

For the above dreams to become true, we have the mandatory dream! In the coming years, the people of God in North and South along with the peace-making churches in Asia and the world will lead a prophetic pilgrimage for transforming the Armistice Agreement into a Peace Treaty, pursuing another Six-Party Talks to convert the Armistice System into a Peace System and to normalize the relations between North and South, North and U.S., and North and Japan. This will promote a consensual process for denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and constructing a nuclear-free North-East Asian *Oikoumene* that includes the U.S., enhancing the Asian people's common security for life.

We, the life-affirming Asian Christian faith community, have to assure sustainable development for the North, advocating to international societies to lift up all existing sanctions against the North which victimize the poor and innocent people, women and children, and producing defectors. We, the peace-making Asian Christian faith community, have to advocate to both North and South Korean regimes and their allied superpowers to halt

all military exercises, nuclear missile tests, and any kind of brinkmanship on and around the Korean Peninsula, and to withdraw foreign troops according to the circumstance, mandating the U.N. Security Council to initiate a new peace-building process across the Korean Peninsula.

Dear participants of Asian Mission Conference 2017, we, the people of God, cannot compromise our faith in Jesus Christ with any attempt to make any kinds of war, particularly nuclear war, which totally destroy God's face as seen in the faces of people and nature. We, the people of God living in the Korean Peninsula, desperately implore your compassionate Eucharistic solidarity for accompanying us for the prophetic witness to the truth and light in Korea, which will break the chain of division. We, the healing and reconciling faith community, may mutually offer our Eucharistic solidarity based on the mutual trust, willingly taking the risk of believing in one another. Being filled with hope and new purpose for Ezekiel's vision of being associated as one nation, we pray, "Oh, Living God, by breaking the chain of division, renew and transform the people of North and South from being victims of division into the new creation of Jubilee in which the Truth reigns. Amen!"



‘Embracing the Strangers and Accompanying the Marginalised’

- Rev. Stephen Arulampalam

Embracing the Strangers and Accompanying the Marginalised from the perspective of a Person with Disabilities

Introduction

We are living in a world characterized by isolation, exclusion and excommunication due to ethnic, religious, political, cultural and gender issues. Sometime back, Professor R.S. Sugirtharajah (of the University of Birmingham, U.K.) had written a book *Jesus for? the marginalized people* where he mentions different marginalized people. The voice of the person with disability has remained unheard, unregistered and unrecorded throughout history. In this presentation, I would like to represent the voice of a person with disabilities in Asia. We are all here to participate in the historical Asian Mission Conference and Diamond Jubilee celebrations of CCA. I am grateful to the General Secretary of CCA, Dr. Mathew George Chunakkara, for giving persons with disabilities the opportunity to participate in this event. Their presence in the midst of other participants

speaks volumes of the theology of solidarity and accompaniment with one another. They will find their experiences of the event remarkable and unforgettable; very specially their wheelchairs, their sign language, their art and experience of walking together holding each other's hands will give a more powerful message than my paper to all.

Why I am interested in the theology of disability

I am Arulampalam Stephen attached to the Theological College of Lanka Pilimathalawa in the central part of Sri Lanka. When I was 9 months old, I contracted fever and a doctor gave me wrong medication for it, which affected my nerves and my eyesight started to deteriorate. Now I am enjoying a life of blindness.

After my secondary school studies, I applied for the ministry but the church did not give me a positive answer immediately, because it was a new issue for the church. In 1995, my house in Jaffna was bombed. My father lost his right leg and became a disabled person as well. My mother lives with some pieces of shell in her body. She remains disabled.

Immediately after my ordination, I was appointed Chaplain at the school for the Deaf and Blind where I was able to listen to the stories of many people. During this period because of the ongoing civil war in Sri Lanka a number of people became disabled. My personal experiences and the experiences of other people enabled me to create a theology of disability in my own context.

Who is disabled?

Generally people refer to this community as handicapped, disabled people, mentally retarded (mentally challenged), crippled (wheelchair users) and so on. There are also people who refer to them as the abled or the differently abled while yet another group of people call them persons with disabilities. One billion people, or 15% of the world's population, experience some form of disability. Of them, 80% live in developing countries. In Asia, there are 600 million people with disabilities. But Article 23(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and protection against unemployment." Despite this, the disabled peoples' community faces many stigmas in religious, social and employment arenas.

When we come to religion, we see an exclusive way of reading the Bible (Exodus 4:11, Leviticus 21:14-16, John 9:1-3); the Doctrine of Sin (Mark 2:1-12), and interpreting miracle in the light of faith (Mark 9; 14-29) play an important role in the exclusion of the disabled people. Giving opportunities, respecting human dignities, and inclusiveness are key aspects in removing social and economic stigmas.

Disabled People and Stigma

Disabled people are facing isolation or stigma from the socio-political, cultural and religious points of view in Asia.

What is Mission?

Long time ago, William Temple, theologian and former Archbishop of Canterbury, indicated that mission means to carry out the love of God through words and deeds. During the colonial period, the church used evangelical theology to convert people including disabled people. In 1952 at the Wellington Conference it identified that mission belongs to God. We all are partners in mission. In the light of this, it can be said that people of the disabled community are partners with God but they are not partners with other human beings. We moved from being church centered to God centered and then from being God centered to human centered. This shift helps us to understand the disabled community in a better way.

New Missiological understanding and the dignity of the disabled people

1. Theology of Disability

South African theologian David Bosch in his work *Transforming Mission* says that missiology is the mother of theology – because theology comes from mission. John Maqury lists out six main elements necessary to understand the nature and action of God. They are revelation of God, Bible, tradition, experience, history and other religious texts. From my experience, I feel that to create a theology of disability participation, experience and expression are necessary. Disability theology is a relatively new discipline, stemming from liberation theologies. Although the Sri Lankan churches are yet to examine this area, there is an ever-expanding

body of literature on the subject and practical guides on how to include people with disabilities in the activities of the church. There is far too much literature to review in depth here, so I have chosen a few of the key texts on which my theories are based.

Possibly the most ground-breaking book on disability theology is Nancy Eiesland's *The Disabled God*. From a disability rights perspective, Eiesland develops a powerful image of God in a "sip-puff wheelchair".¹ This image of a broken God is most visibly seen through Jesus' actions on the cross and his visible wounds after the resurrection.

The impaired Christ reveals a new humanity as the "revelation of true embodied personhood".² In her final chapter, Eiesland attempts to apply her theories to a practical element of worship that speaks of Christ's brokenness and embodiment through the Eucharist. She develops a liturgy that is inclusive for both disabled and non-disabled people.

The word mission comes from the Latin word "missio", which means sending out the church send out by Christ to proclaim the love of God towards humans and their deeds. Here I would like to introduce certain new missiological approaches and understanding towards persons with disabilities in order to promote their human dignity.

2. Image of God and Disability

There is a traditional teaching of the image of God among humans. Patrick Mcardle (of Australian Catholic University) describes the theological link between *Imago Dei* and humanity. This theological construct positions the human as a perfect individual who has self-reliance, rationality and autonomy. These dominant perspectives are missing among the disabled. And the image of God in Jesus – individual, male, whole, celibate, no defects in mind or body – communicates the theological inconsistency in the nature of God. Therefore he opines that theology should engage with the brokenness of humanity, which is a mirror to humanity, and this brokenness is not to be eliminated but to be celebrated. He introduces 'mutual vulnerability' and 'inter-subjectivity', which have the potential to confront the inconsistencies. Mcardle quotes the relational encounter of French philosopher Immanuel Levin as follows: The one who confronts the other is an essential 'other' who pleads not to be rejected and, ultimately, not be killed. He says in the face of the other, one is confronted

by his/her own vulnerabilities and frailties. American anthropologist John Swanton travels in a different path and says there is a shared experience of oppression and there are no individual impairments. All the experiences are melded together in the shared oppression. Therefore there is collective experience for all the disabled.

Indian theologian? Samuel George quotes Nancy Eiesland's view that disability is not to be seen as a distortion of the image of God but rather that human beings reflect the disabled image of God. The image of God is manifested in all humans with dignity and value. It is not dependent on what one accomplishes or contributes, but the dignity and value are permanent and essential attributes bestowed by God. Every human life is sacred and so every human is to be treated with honor. There is a distortion of value in understanding the image of God.

3. Blind Christ

This inherited set of attitudes and beliefs is ambivalent towards blindness. On the one hand, blind people are thought of as helpless, pathetic, useless, ignorant or even stupid, insensitive and incompetent. On the other hand, blind people are sometimes regarded as being strangely gifted. They have amazing memories and may have a weird kind of foresight. Blind people are regarded with a mixture of admiration, compassion and horror. A sighted person, sharing these attitudes towards blindness, who loses his or her sight transfers inwardly all of the previous images and presuppositions about blindness. The blinded person now has feelings of horror and compassion towards the self. All the helplessness and ignorance which were imputed to other blind people now recoil upon the self. Thus blindness is a shattering blow to one's self-esteem. This is reinforced by the attitudes of compassion and horror with which the blind person is now greeted by relatives, friends and above all, employers. In the light of this when I read the Bible I identified Jesus Christ also as a blind person. The Gospel according to Mark, Chapter 14: 65 (NRSV) says: "Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him 'Prophecy'. The guards also took him over and beat him." This passage, which mentions that they blindfolded Jesus and asked him to guess who hit him, indicates the blindness of Christ. To me, therefore, Jesus became blind in order to understand my community.

4. Inclusive way of interpreting the Miracles

Jesus' message in the gospels was one of inclusion. On a number of occasions, Jesus interacted with, healed and restored people with disabilities. The Gospel of Mark gives several accounts of the interaction between Jesus and people with impairments. As in ancient society, people with disabilities were stigmatized and excluded from society during Jesus' time. This was true in the case of the man with leprosy.³ According to Mosaic Law, anyone with a skin disease was deemed unclean and therefore disallowed from coming into contact with anyone else. On being relieved of the illness, the person with the skin disease had to present himself to the priest, who would prescribe appropriate rituals before pronouncing the person clean.⁴

Yet Jesus not only healed the man with leprosy, but also touched him thereby rendering himself unclean. This was unheard of then since it was forbidden in Jewish law to touch someone who was unclean. Jesus, in healing the man who could only be made clean by a priest, tackled the root of the problem thereby demonstrating his power and authority. In this act Jesus broke the stigma attached to skin disease and identified himself with the man, thus demonstrating true inclusion.

In the following chapter (Chapter 2), Mark recounts another healing story. In this narrative, a paralyzed man was presented to Jesus for healing. Due to large crowds around Jesus, the man had to be lowered through the roof of the building Jesus was in.⁵ The passage can be understood both positively and negatively. Firstly, in relating to the paralyzed man, Jesus saw beyond his physical disability and dealt with the man's spiritual condition before addressing his bodily one. This indicates that Jesus addressed the needs of the whole person and not just his/her physical condition. It was only when the Pharisees expressed shock that Jesus had taken it upon himself to forgive sins that Jesus demonstrated his power by healing the man. There was no expectation that the man needed to be healed of his physical condition other than as an illustration of Jesus' capabilities. It was commonly believed that disability was a consequence of sin in either the life of a person or his/her parent's lives. Mark links the concepts of healing and forgiveness in this story, thus reinforcing society's assumptions. The idea that disability is a result of sin has been passed down throughout Christian history and is still a commonly held belief amongst some sections of the church today. This has been particularly damaging for Christians with disabilities, who have felt guilt, shame and uncleanness because of their impairment.

Despite this, in John 9:3, Jesus makes it clear that disability and sin are not linked. The disciples, on encountering a man born blind, immediately linked the man's impairment to sin in either his or his parent's lives. Jesus then categorically stated that sin was not the cause of the man's disability. Jesus healed the man without offering him forgiveness as he did in many of his healings. This passage suggests that disability and sin are not linked, which was contrary to society's understanding at that time. These particular activities of Christ gave an identity to the disabled community.

5. The Nature of Spirituality

Human spirituality is that which transfigures and transcends the biology of the human. When we speak of transcending the biological, we refer to those potentials of the human being which enable him or her to make the biological organism instrumental for non-biological purposes. These potentials include abstract thought, imagination, empathy, the ability to represent biological experiences symbolically, and the capacity to integrate experience and knowledge around a significance or a meaning which goes beyond the pleasure and pain of the individual. Language and money are the two finest achievements of the human tendency towards the spiritual, because being relational in their character, they articulate and facilitate the experience of solidarity with other people. The capacity of the human will to become integrated with others, or to dominate others, as the case may be, is incarnate in money and in language.

When we speak of spirituality as transfiguring the biological, we refer to the fact that the biological is never left behind by transcendence. The body is not the antithesis of the spiritual but its organ. We should not contrast the spiritual with the material, nor should we regard the spiritual and the biological as being on altogether different levels. Rather, we should speak of transfiguration: the material infused with the spiritual, the body becoming the form of inter-subjectivity.

In Christian faith, the typical representation of spirituality is to be found in the story of the transfiguration of Jesus (Mk 9:2-8). The body was not left behind but shone with radiance. This could not occur to an isolated body, but only in the context of others, and of the speech which links person to person. This is why Jesus is seen on the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, and they are speaking with each other (v.4). Even in the resurrection he does not leave his body behind (Luke 24:39, John 20:6f), and with the ascension, the transfigured body is raised to universality (Acts

1:9). The ascension into heaven of the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), the figure of the resurrected Christ (Jn 20:27) and the bodily assumption of Mary all indicate that Christian faith confesses a biological spirituality, and believes in the resurrection of the body as the fulfilment of human potential (Romans 8:23, 1 Corinthians 15:42, Philipians 3:21).

Nevertheless, the body is transcended as well as transfigured. This takes place when the body of the other person is valued like my own body, felt like my own body, and even loved as my own body (Ephesians 5:28). The body which is not transcended remains encircled within the membrane of the skin. Egocentricity is the enclosed body. The senses, although they appear to open the body out upon the world, do not do so unless they are met by the answering sense of the other. In the reciprocity of eye contact, or skin contact, or conversational contact, we transcend the biological nature which is transfigured in the process.

6. Re-interpreting the hymns in the light of Liberation

Let us now turn to the more frequent occurrence of visual metaphorical language. When the 19th century Anglican priest J.M. Neale translated a hymn from the late evening service of the Eastern Orthodox Church among many others, there was no hint of a disparaging attitude toward blind people in it. Songs should encourage the congregation to come closer to God, but through a few songs we move away from the Lord. Words hurt particular people, they are oppressed and hurt through the words.

Lord, that in death I sleep not
 And lest my foe should say
 “I have prevailed against him”
 Lighten mine eyes I pray.
 O, Jesus, keep me in thy sight
 And guard me through the coming night

(Stanza 3 from “The day is past and over”, *Hymns of the Eastern Church*, 1853)

Another ambiguous example comes from the well-known hymn ‘Holy, Holy, and Holy’.

Line 3 reads like this...

Holy! Holy! Holy! Though the darkness hide thee

7. Disability and the church

Churches in Sri Lanka engage with the marginalized. The charitable projects and mission outreach projects were evolved from the vision to serve people with disabilities. But the church often ignores the struggles of the disabled. In Nancy Eiesland's opinion, the church is like a 'city on a hill' for the disabled – physically inaccessible and socially inhospitable. The church is beautiful and broken, impaired but powerful, complex and gifted. The church incarnates the disabled God through Jesus who embodied a commitment to justice, who challenged all structures. The integral mission becomes possible only when the voices of the disabled are heard, their experiences are honored and their gifts are allowed to flourish. The task of the ecumenical movements is to side with the disabled so that they have a right space within the church and not to passively support the structure of the society that alienates the disabled.

8. The Role of WCC in the promotion of an Inclusive Community

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has produced a theological document regarding disability. The statement, entitled "A Church of All and For All", is a foundational report, released in 2003, for all denominations exploring disability in their own contexts. It offers pointers and insights on major theological themes. Its aims are to enable churches to interact with the disability discourse and to equip the church to address issues of inclusion, active participation and full involvement of all people in the spiritual and social life of the church. The report addresses theological issues of *Imago Dei*, healing and the image of the disabled Christ. However, most importantly, the document attempts to address and apply the disability theology practically in the context of worship; offering some advice on how to be fully inclusive in worship. Finally, the statement offers a vision of the church as a fully inclusive, hospitable place that welcomes without discrimination.

The book, *Making a World of Difference*,⁶ by Roy McCloughry and Wayne Morris examines the main themes and issues of the disability theology. They dedicate their final three chapters to practical solutions for the inclusion of disabled people in the life of the church. This includes a charter for healing and intercession⁷ as well as "ten ways for churches to do something practical"⁸ for people with impairments in the church.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that hospitality towards and inclusion of all people is a gospel imperative. It is God's commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves. Christians must therefore work at both their practice and theology in order to become a fully inclusive community. This will require hard work, sacrifice, humility and graciousness from the congregation but will result in an environment that displays God's love and grace to all. Developing the theology of the church is a journey that the congregation must embark on together; it may take them into unexpected territories but will be of benefit to all in the long term as they will learn to love one another despite their differences.

End Notes

1. *Eiesland, The Disabled God, p. 89*
2. *ibid. p. 100*
3. *Mark 1:40-44*
4. *Leviticus 13 & 14*
5. *Mark 2:1-12*
6. *Roy McCloughry, Wayne Morris. Making a World of Difference, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002.*
7. *ibid., p. 111*
8. *ibid., p. 125*



Witness to the Truth and Light: Buddhist Religious Perspective

- Venerable A. Shin Pannajota

Today, it gives me great pleasure to attend the CCA's Asia Mission Conference and its 60th anniversary Thanksgiving Service. I would like to thank Myanmar Baptist Convention and Myanmar Council of Churches for hosting and coordinating this event, and all the delegates from different countries and faiths for taking part in this conference. At this conference, I have been given the great opportunity to exhort some parts of the Buddha's teachings to all gathered here. The name of my presentation is "Buddhist Perspective on Truth in life". As I am a Buddhist monk, I am going to explain Truth (Dhamma) from the Buddhist standpoint.

In this world, I think there is no one who does not wish to possess peace and happiness; similarly there is no human being who does not face family, political, social, economical, racial or religious problems. To be free of all these problems is very difficult but these days most people are trying to solve all these problems with the help of religion. Spiritual leaders of the world teach their doctrines to their followers saying that it will liberate them from all problems and sufferings. The Buddha and his disciples also teach the way that will lead to the cessation of all human sufferings and problems.

Today we see a particularly unfair competition based on racial and religious prejudices. As a result, people of different faiths and religions attack, fight, and quarrel with each other without looking for real reasons. People live in the darkness of ignorance and cannot differentiate between right and wrong. As a result they continue to create problems. This is a big problem in the world today

According to the Buddhist standpoint, to solve all these problems, first we must try to understand the sufferings or problems as facts, clearly and completely. It is called the first noble truth or *Dukkhasacca* in Buddhism. Then we must find the origin or cause of the problems we are facing and eliminate it.

What is the cause of sufferings or problems? From the Buddhist point of view, it is Thirst or Craving (*Tanha*). It is the only cause of suffering. It is very important to remove craving from our minds. It is the second noble truth, called *Samudayasacca* in Buddhism.

The Buddha pointed out that the situation in the world is that of '*Unolokoatittotanhadaso*' (life in any world is incomplete, insatiable, and is the slave of craving). It is people's cravings that create all problems. According to Buddhist view, every strife and conflict in the world, from little personal quarrels within families to great wars between nations, arise out of selfish thirst and hence, all problems of the world are rooted in this selfish thirst of people. People cannot see the truth because they are enveloped in ignorance and craving. A man engulfed in ignorance and craving can commit every known depravity such as killing and stealing.

In this world which is full of sufferings and problems, the Buddha instructed a path that will lead to the cessation of suffering. It is also one of the noble truths and is called *Magga sacca*. To have peace and happiness in life, we need the path and an instructor. The Buddha is an instructor, not savior, and the essence of his teachings is the path. It can be called the Middle Path (*majjima patipada*). The essence of his teachings can also be compared to a road map. Just as a traveller will need a map to lead him to his goal, one needs the middle path (*majjima patipada*) to show him how to achieve the ultimate goal of human life real happiness and ultimate peace. If one

wants to experience real happiness and ultimate peace, one needs to follow, practice and develop the essence of the teachings of the Buddha. They are moral discipline (*Sila*) mental discipline (*Samadhi*) and wisdom (*Panna*).

1. Moral discipline

Sila (morality) is bodily discipline and vocal discipline to prevent bodily commitment and vocal commitment. Right speech, right action and right livelihood are considered the elements of *sila* (morality).

Right speech (*sammavaca*)

Right speech means refraining from telling lies, backbiting and calumny; refraining from using abusive language and harsh words; refraining from frivolous talk (*vaciduccarita*). Speech must be true and beneficial, not foul and malicious. One should always speak good things. If one must talk, at least one should say something useful and helpful. This is called right speech (*sammavaca*).

Right action (*sammakammanta*)

The meaning of right action is abstaining from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct (*kayasucarita*). The fundamentals of morality are opposed to killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and drunkenness. Action must be prompt, yet well-considered and unselfish. Since we live in a society, whatever we do will have an effect on many people. This is called right action (*sammakammanta*).

Right livelihood (*sammaajiva*)

Refraining from wrong livelihood such as dealing in poisons, intoxicants, weapons, slaves and animals for slaughter is called right livelihood (*sammaajiva*). One must obtain right livelihood without causing harm to others.

The three factors (right speech, right action, and right livelihood) mentioned above constitute moral discipline. The recluse and everyone else should realise that moral conduct aims at promoting happiness both for the individual and the society. This moral discipline or ethical conduct is an indispensable foundation for spiritual development. Without this moral basis, it is impossible to have spiritual development.

2. Mental discipline

Samadhi (concentration) is mental discipline to control violations of the mind. Right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration are included in samadhi.

Right effort (*sammavajama*)

Preventing unwholesome states from arising, discarding unwholesome states that have already risen, producing the cause for the rise of wholesome states that have not yet risen and developing or maintaining wholesome states which have already presented themselves through energetic will are called 'right effort' (*sammavajama*). By applying right effort, one can reduce and eventually eliminate unwholesome states, and increase or decrease wholesome thoughts.

Right mindfulness (*samma sati*)

The practice of developing 'one pointedness' of the mind on one subject, either physical or mental, is called concentration. It leads to four stages of *jhana* (trance). In the first stage of *jhana*, after having secluded from sensual pleasures and unwholesome states, having been accompanied by initial application and sustained application, the mind is filled with rapture and happiness born of the seclusion. In the second stage of *jhana*, having been accompanied by internal confidence and unification of the mind, without initial application and sustained application, the mind is filled with rapture and happiness born of concentration. In the third stage of *jhana*, the mind is filled in equanimity, mindful and clearly comprehending with the fading away of rapture, and experiences happiness in the body. In the fourth stage of *jhana* the mind is fulfilled with only awareness, fully purified by equanimity which is neither pleasant nor painful and abandon of pleasure and pain, and with the previous passing away of joy and grief.

In brief, the right concentration leads to mental and physical well-being, calmness, a state of tranquility having seen things as they really are and it encourages the mind to achieve wisdom. These are called right concentration (*samma samadhi*). The three factors (right effort, right mindfulness and concentration) mentioned above are mental disciplines. The mind of a recluse or a meditator is trained, disciplined and cultivated by these three factors.

3. Wisdom or insight knowledge

Panna (wisdom) means understanding within oneself, rightly or in detail, what really exists, and how they are happening naturally. It is also called *Vipassanapanna* in Buddhism. Right thought and right understanding are included in *Panna*. The above mentioned things are very brief; we must study a lot more of the Buddha's teachings. By cultivating the three things, our mind will be free from defilements, impurities, cravings, etc.

Right thought

Thoughts of selfless detachment (*nekkhammasankappa*), thoughts of loving kindness or no ill-will (*avyapadasankappa*) and thoughts of non-violence (*avihiṃsasankappa*) are called right thoughts (*sammāsankappa*). Wisdom belongs to these noble qualities. If one lacks wisdom, it will result in thoughts of selfish desire, ill-will, hatred and violence appears in his mind. When a person develops his own spiritual path, his thoughts will become really benevolent, selfless and filled with love and compassion.

Right understanding

The understanding of the nature of the world as it really is, or the understanding of the four noble truths is called right understanding (*sammāvidhi*). When one has right understanding, he will understand the nature of things as they really are and their dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). The right understanding is the highest wisdom (insight knowledge) which sees *nibbāna* (nirvana).

The Buddha pointed out that all problems and miseries in the world arise out of the ignorance of Truth and hence, the realization of the Ultimate Truth can solve all problems. The cessation of sufferings and problems is also one of the noble truths, called *nirodha sacca*.

To sum up, I would like to say respectfully that everyone, whatever religion he accepts, should try to learn and understand the rightly intrinsic meaning of his religion and its practices, and follow it accordingly. People who fail to observe the noble teachings of their respective religions cannot experience peace and happiness in human society and its surroundings. Today human world is mentally poor because of people who lack knowledge about the essence of their respective religions and fail to observe the noble teachings of their respective religions. That is why all spiritual leaders must strive to lead people in the right direction to be mentally rich.

Oh, all my dear brothers and sisters in the sphere of religion, spiritual

leaders, and distinguished guests,

Human life is very short because we all must die within one hundred years. During such a short period, we should not spend much of our time in disputes, fighting, conflict, disappointment, discontentment, worries and anxieties. Should we live a meaningless life? We must think of ourselves. In this short period of life, instead of fighting, we must establish a peaceful and meaningful life. Finally, may I wish all of you peace and happiness in life knowing and analyzing the Truth expounded by your respective religions.

May the sublime teachings prevail in its pristine purity. May truth and peace prevail in every corner of the world.

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Witness to the Truth and Light: Hindu Religious Perspective

- Swami Navananma Jnana Thapaswi

Today, India is often in the news for the wrong reasons in the name of Hindutva or Hinduism. However, the very meaning of India or Bharat is the land which delights in Light (Bhas = Light, rat = delights). Indian culture represents a unique, all-embracing world-view and a vibrant way of life. The cultural stream of India is very extensive and has been around for eons. It has never been just a philosophical conception cut off from practicality. India's spiritual vision leads our awareness to eternity as revealed by the sages through the concept of Manu cycles or the Manvantara order, which spans billions and billions of years, measuring the age and rhythmic movement of the universe. In spiritual terms, the continuity of this cosmic vision functions through an all-inclusive spiritual concept known as Sanatana Dharma, which means an eternal system of dharma in relation to creation, life and existence. This spiritual culture was shared and perpetuated by a line of spiritual masters and their disciples and came to be known as Guru-Sishya Parampara or the Wisdom Tradition - the jnanamarga.

‘The Guru is the spirit of Indian Philosophy and culture which has as its basis and goal the consciousness that has directly realized the essence of the scriptures – the Guru Consciousness. The dynamic sacred centre of Hinduism is, in fact, the enlightened guru, whose charismatic leadership creates the institution for philosophical, religious, and social change. From ancient to modern times, the Guru has continued to be the Indian philosophical tradition’s source and insurance of its vital maintenance and growth’.

We can see that the source of everything related to Indian culture and heritage has been derived from this wisdom path handed down through the Guru-sishya tradition. It existed as a righteous and sublime way of life, inspiring and touching all aspects of life. It nourished ‘Dharma’, i.e. the right knowledge and right conduct that enriches and expands the horizon of life. This spiritual vision of India existed as a life-vision related to the inner transformation of life-force or *jeeva* (soul), which can be seen as the practical expression of spirituality.

‘Indian tradition postulates and maintains that all realms of existence are continuous – the physical, the vital, the mental and the spiritual – and it is perfectly possible for one order of being to be transformed into another. In such a tradition and world-view, where the pattern of life events is interdependent, Guru is seen as a unitary consciousness - variously called Brahma-Jnani, Brahma-saksatkari, Brahma-anubhavi, etc. What this tradition undergirds, therefore, is the experiential realization that the guru cetana (Guru Consciousness) is the Brahma cetana (God Consciousness). Guru, therefore, in this tradition is not merely a person from the western perspective, but a unitary consciousness whose identities have achieved self-expression....’

The wisdom path of India aims to lift man from his bare emotional existence to the highest pedestal of consciousness and human values through a process of transformation, which ends with mukthi, i.e. liberation from the cycles of births and deaths. This vision of Indian sages is constituted by the ancient Manu-centric Sanatana Dharma from which this spiritual culture originated. When we deliberate on this subject we have to highlight certain fundamental truths. We can understand it in depth only through a review of Indian culture, which flows in two distinct socio-spiritual streams, i.e. the Sanatana culture and Haindava culture (ritualistic Hinduism), both distinct from each other. We know that the most ancient- culture of India is known as Arsha Bharata Samskara or Sanatana Dharma, which is the rishi culture.

Creation According to Indian Tradition

The wheel of time- called as Kalpa, Manvantara, Chaturyuga, etc- is related to the parinaama or evolution of an atomic life-form into the absolute status of Brahman through the ebb and flow of srishti, sthithi, samhara and moksha i.e., creation, sustenance, dissolution and ultimate liberation. In the duration of a Kalpa, the creation completely merges with Brahman, the Supreme Light. This system of time is determined and ordered for the time-bound evolution of karma and dharma of all life-forms beginning from a microbe. The history of man's spiritual quest reveals two types of realities. One is his subjective individuality and the second is his cosmic identity linking him organically to the Cosmic Truth in a parental relationship with God being the Cosmic Father or Creator, as revealed in the Purusha Sukta of Rigveda.

The rishis measured every episode of creation in terms of Manvantara equivalent to the age of a Manu. Every solar system and life cycle originates from the sankalpam (conception) of Manus. In the endless march of time, uncountable Kalpas and Manu cycles have gone by, which would explain the reason behind a vast and expanding universe. For the same reason, the Indian rishis named God as Brahman, its meaning being 'That which Expands'.

Indian Cosmic Time Calculation

1 Kalpa = 14 Manvantaras

71 Age Quartets = 1 Manvantara

1 Age Quartet = Satya, Treta, Dwapara and Kali = 43,20,000 years











The cosmic phenomenon has got a nucleus, a functional centre from which everything manifests. That nucleus is the Manu, the Absolute in the form of the Archetypal Preceptor God, the instrumentality through whom the will of the Absolute is carried out, controlling the temporal dimension including karma and dharma.

Every yuga in a Manvantara fulfills the law of evolution in a structured way. The wisdom tradition envisions a gradual evolution through various time segments known as satya, treta, dwapara and kali yuga within the time

period of a Manu, consisting of seventy-one age quartets or chaturyugas. There are fourteen such Manu cycles in a single episode of creation known as kalpa. We can guess the depth of Indian spirituality when we know that the length of a chaturyuga itself has a duration of 43,20,000 years. We are in the seventh cycle of such an episode of creation, initiated by Vaivaswata Manu, the seventh Manu. In the present Manu cycle, this is the Kali yuga of the twenty eighth chaturyuga. There are forty-three chaturyugas ($28+43=71$) yet to pass to complete the present Manu cycle.

The History of Spiritual Deviation

In the Manu-centric Sanatana Dharma, Manu alias the Cosmic Purusha is the Creator, not the Trimurti gods - Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara. From the time the puranas began to explain creation in terms of trimurty gods- changing the time order of Manu as beginning from Brahma- the ancient Sanatana stream of spiritual culture took a diversion and began to flow through a diversified path, fragmenting Indian spirituality into three broad sects- Saiva, Vaishnava and Sakethya, with hundreds of sub-sects.

 Sanatana Dharma	 Trimurti Tradition/ Hinduism
 Creation begins from	 Creation begins from
 Manu alias Pursha	 Bhrama/Vishnu/Siva/Devi, so on
 Ashram Tradition	 Temple Tradition
 Guru Centric (wisdom Tradition)	 Priest Centric (Ritual Tradition)

Navajyoti Sree Karunakara Guru explains the history of this spiritual diversion in the following words:

What we are going through is the time-order of Manvantaras. That is our perspective or cognition of the world. In the Manu-tradition a great spiritual evolute fell from grace (in the third chaturyuga of the present seventh Manvantara). As a result, the Brahman initiated a corrective in the seventh chaturyuga (by evolving the Trimurty system) which was brought to a completion in the eleventh chaturyuga. Thereafter astral matters related to mukti were revealed which got codified as Vedas, Sastras and the Upanishads, without changing the old Manvantara order (to reaffirm that order). Since the sages could not transcend those who received these astral matters, they did not enquire into the reason why they had

received such knowledge. They used their intellect in understanding the path shown by the Almighty and charted their version of the Manvantara time-order- chaturyugas, manvantaras and kalpas as subservient to Brahma. Thus they could not invoke Manu, the First Guru nor grasp the Error and correct it. This is a peril that has befallen us.

‘The Error was repeated again and again as the evolutes, who were the spiritual authorities of revealed knowledge, could not discover the mystery and unravel it in full before us...The feeling of ‘I’ (Aham Brahmasmi) developed in the line of Manus. In the higher planes of knowing, it was seen that all the wisdom and knowledge attained so far had come through it (the Manu tradition). This ‘I-ness’ can be seen in any of the books of Vedanta. You talk to any common person - this bloated notion of a free ‘I’ (ego) can be seen. When this comes up in the circle of ascetics (brahmacharis), such notions come forth through the master-disciple lineage. In the tradition of deity-worship (devaparampara), the ‘deva’ (god) or the ‘devi’ (goddess) I am devoted to would be the greatest and most glorious. Due to such possessiveness in individuals, all kinds of deities, chamundi, yakshi, pey, maruta, matan, mantramurthi (dark, evil spirits such as succubi, ghosts, ghouls etc.) became the ‘Lords’. This happened because of people’s selfishness and egotism.

‘Due to the emergence of Varnasrama, castes upon castes, those who worshiped according to the Trimurti tradition could not function in accordance with the goodness of the Age. Prior to this, tales were created using the medium of Srutis and Smritis and they were presented as authentic. Before that, as there appeared the creed of ‘materializations’ (siddhi), some sanyasis themselves handled the traditions of siddhi. As it came up to this, the tradition of Manu faded away even from memory. This degradation of the times is due to the refusal to modify the customs that required a change according to the age and the falsification of the ideology that the abode of Brahman should be with the celestials (devas) and Brahmins’ at all times.

Sanatana Dharma Vs Hinduism

The Manvantara time-reckoning was thus re-charted, bringing it under the trimurti tradition and giving it a new definition. It distorted the Sanatana spiritual culture that followed the Guru-centric jnana path respecting the age-specific dharma and karma. Moreover, the status of Guruhood was substituted by the temple tradition involving priest-craft and worship of

devi-devas. Guru-hood in the Sanatana culture transcended the statuses of all spiritual entities including the trimurti gods.

This deviation fragmented the Indian society spiritually and socially. As already mentioned, this mistake gave India two contradictory spiritual characteristics. We can identify these two spiritual characteristics in terms of the Arsha Bharata Samskara guided by the guru tradition, and the Haindava culture, which has grown through the popular temple tradition with all sorts of superstitions, caste restrictions, untouchability and so on. The Haindava culture was strongly established here by which different spiritual entities with different identities, naama-rupa – names and forms and rituals- were installed in temples and worshipped in order to appease them through tantric and mantric rituals with the intermediacy of priests. Along with this, the practices of blessings, performance of siddhi, miracles and exorcism also emerged.

The jnana path tried to nourish the qualities of truth, love, compassion and humility through right thoughts and deeds and strived to earn punya (virtue) through the ways of karma, dharma and bhakti for attaining spiritual sublimity. The Guru Tradition in India was based on a sound heritage, stemming from its ancient civilization. It was the ancient and unbroken teaching system by which Self Knowledge was transmitted from the enlightened to the one aspiring to it. The sages in every age received the revealed 'word' from Brahman, which became the Vedas. The wisdom tradition worked through the Guru-sishya order. Guru was the highest symbol of perfection, the connecting link to the Absolute Truth. Such a Guru would be the spiritual authority of the age, of karma, dharma, jnana and mukthi. The wisdom tradition was a knowledge related to life and its fulfillment.

With the advent of Vedic ritualism, this pure life-culture became defunct. The graceful Guru fathomed the threefold time and the cause-effect background of life-experiences. This inner fathoming or mental absorption of an omniscient Guru was known as Smriti. The word Smriti meant Guru's perception of those karmic entanglements which were behind the emotional swings in life, in the form of sorrows and happiness, and the advice Guru gave to the disciple for overcoming such hurdles was considered as the Veda or Sruti.

When one approached a Guru in order to liberate the soul from its emotional and karmic entanglements, the process of learning by sitting beside the Guru was ‘Upanishad’. Such a culture of learning from the Master and living by his guiding words was the essence of the Wisdom Tradition of Indian spirituality. When the spiritual guidance of such a Guru embodiment was unavailable, people began to lead life unaware about the evolving course of dharma, accepting the Vedas and Upanishads - the pre-historic catalogues of dharma - as the inviolable source of wisdom.

The Wisdom Tradition of India

The saying that ‘Guru Sakala Dharmata’ is based on this exalted vision of the absolute truth of God. The absolute truth of God self-manifests and gets activated through Guru and his Word, which is to be followed by the family - the mother, father, children and others. The divine Word revealed through the Guru becomes the guiding force behind the institution of family - the Grihasthashram and Grihasthashrama Dharma, orienting life and culture to a pedestal of absolute purity and sublime truth.

The individual and family lives, are affected by the good and bad deeds of ancestral souls. There are also negative influences because of the distorted worship of malignant spiritual entities, followed by the families as mentioned earlier. The Guru parampara of Navajyoti Sree Karunakara Guru strives to unburden the individuals, families and gotras from the negative karmagati and spiritual influences, through a way of life that follows the word of Guru vigilantly by mind, word and deed, keeping only the Atmajnani Guru in the heart. Only the realized and divinely authoritative Guru can perceive the karmagati of a person and guide one to the Absolute.

Truth is found through ultimate bhakti, the surrender in devotion and realizing that ‘Guru Saakshaat Parabrahm’, i.e. Guru is the embodiment of Brahman. The Guru has been the vital force of the Indian Philosophic and cultural traditions. He ensures a fresh and ongoing contribution to it; he disseminates its ideas; and he is himself the living embodiment of the philosophical ideas that he teaches.

We can thus see that this guru-sishya tradition is the essence of the spiritual soul of India which strives to evolve the human spirit from the status of a human to the many dimensions of the divine such as deva, rishi, sanyasi, jnani, bhakta and muktha leading to ultimate liberation. These spiritual

embodiments are related to expanding levels of human consciousness related to spiritual evolution. Guru Margam or the wisdom path combines jnana, karma, yoga and bhakti in order to nourish dharma. One's success in life is nourished by way of enhanced punya and through that, fortune and wealth. Navajyoti Sree Karunakara Guru reminds us that we have lost this tradition of wisdom. The history of the degeneration of this wisdom path is very old as it began twenty-five chaturyugas ago in the present Manu cycle.

The spiritual view of India is a path that strives to fulfill dharma (the duties and purpose of life), artha (the earning of wealth etc. required for attaining material and spiritual well being), kama (exhausting or fulfilling all desires) and finally, earning mukthi (getting release from the cycles of births and deaths). The backbone of the Sanatana culture was to realize the path of evolution in a natural and rational way, and in accordance with the will of God. It was intended to actualize this knowledge in life and evolve oneself to the path of jnana.

We should be able to understand the prayer 'Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavantu' as the essence of this spiritual culture. The Indian spiritual concept is that of fulfilling the purpose of life through karma, according to dharma and the concept of parinama or evolution through the wheel of time. It is a complete life-vision in which everything - from an atom to the Absolute- attains perfection by undergoing transformation. It is in this manner that the Indian spiritual concept existed as the richest spiritual path in the world. We have to realize that our present spiritual, cultural and social situations are pathetic. The spiritual guidance of Navajyoti Sree Karunakara Guru sheds light on the cause-effects of this spiritual degradation, which is both ironic and distressing.

The Guru's is a path of spiritual renaissance to redeem the society from this spiritual degradation and value erosion. Guru brings to our focus the deviation that occurred in the transformational path of spirituality relevant to the age and to dharma and karma. It is an indisputable fact that the Guru's movement of spiritual renaissance, as a correction to this situation, is able to impart to the modern world a new light and inspiration, brilliance and strength. Guru presents before us a new path of karma and dharma respecting the yuga dharma in order to rectify the situation, taking into consideration the spiritual as well as material aspects. In Santhigiri, Guru has begun to develop it as a liberating culture without the restrictions of caste, religion, class, gender, etc. to fulfill the dictum 'One Caste, One Religion and One God for Humanity'.

Yuga Dharma and Guru Dharma in Indian Spiritual Tradition

‘We have only one religion – the Religion of Liberation’, said Navajyothi Sree Karunakara Guru about the path of dharma he founded. Guru Dharma deals with cosmic principles related to time cycles (yuga dharma), wisdom transmission (guru dharma) and the laws concerning the soul’s transmigratory journeys for the experience of non-dual primordial consciousness. It is also about the method to gain the pure vision of the non-dual truth through the reality of dual phenomenal existence. Time cycles such as yugas, manvantaras and kalpa have certain vagueness about it. Just like time in the form of day and night, year and season are bound to human destiny, yugas and manvantaras are the measurements of infinite time. It is related to the origin and evolution of life in our solar system, which has come into being by the Will of the Divine Light (Brahma Prakasham) with such matchless perfection.

How the Absolute non-dual Truth can create a world of plurality is a question that continues to perplex man. Can existence come into being from non-existence? Although the Divine Light is a non-dual primordial consciousness and also the basis for phenomenal existence, it creates the world of plurality with names, forms, qualities and different potencies by launching itself through the primordial kinetic urge (Adi Sankalpam). This primordial urge, a spontaneous self-expression of the non-dual Truth, creates the boundaries of time and space and the whole phenomena of existence like the waves in a silent ocean. Some religions are against anthropomorphizing God, as they argue that the Absolute Truth is formless. However, the argument is only partially true. Navajyothi Sree Karunakara Guru said:

‘Although God is *arupi* (formless), there is *swarupam* (form). When we say love of God, we should imagine a *swarupam* for God in mind, because God indeed is a *swarupam*. Saying that God is omnipresent and interpreted in some other way, we would never be able to understand God’ (Navajyothi Sree Karunakara Guru).

The pure absolute consciousness has to first transform into an entity for the purpose of creation, the scriptures reveal. The Brihadaranya Upanishad mentions: ‘In the beginning, this was but the Self in a form similar to that of a Man’. Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus Christ said that

‘the Logos is the container or place of all ideas, the power of all powers, the highest of the angels, the First Born son of God, the image of God, the second God, the God Man’.

According to Manu Smriti, the treatise on dharma, the First Born of God has been described thus:

‘This universe was enveloped in darkness - unperceived, undistinguishable, undiscoverable, unknowable, as it were, entirely sunk in sleep. The irresistible self-existent Lord, undiscerned, creating this universe with the five elements and all other things, was manifested dispelling the gloom. He who is beyond the cognizance of the senses, subtle, un-discernible, eternal, who is the essence of all things and inconceivable, himself shone forth. He, desiring, seeking to produce various creatures from his own body, first created the waters, and deposited in them a seed. This (seed) became a golden egg, resplendent as the sun, in which he himself was born as the progenitor of all worlds.’

This progenitor is known as Manu in Indian cosmology. He is the first born of God, the Purusha of the Vedas and Upanishads, and the Logos in western theology. The Biblical Adam could be this human progenitor, although unclear to the compilers of Bible. Blavatsky, the Russian mystic and founder of Theosophical Society mentions in her book ‘The Secret Doctrine’ that the word Adam has been derived from Adi, meaning the ‘first or beginning’ in Sanskrit:

‘Even the name of the first man (Adam) in the Mosaic Bible had its origin in India... the words Ad and Adi mean in Sanskrit “the first”; in Armenian, “One” (Ad-ad, “the only one”); in Assyrian, “father” whence Ak-Ad or “father-creator.” And once the statement is found correct it becomes rather difficult to confine Adam to the Mosaic Bible alone and to see therein simply a Jewish name...’

The Indian rishis calculated the age of the universe in terms of Manvantara after the name of Manu, the archetypal Guru, the primordial Purusha, through whose conception (sankalpa) every solar system comes into existence. Man has lost the awareness about this archetypal heavenly father. Navajyothi Sree Karunakara Guru said: ‘Manu Parampara is to provide God’s dharma to the world. It is a long time now since we have reached this helpless state of not knowing about Manvantara, Chaturyuga, how many chaturyugas constitute a Manvantara...’

Nine heavenly bodies revolve around the sun creating the conditions for the origin, sustenance and evolution of human life. The Indian rishis revealed that a Manvantara has seventy one age-quartets or chaturyugas (306,720,000 human years) consisting of satya, treta, dwapara and kali, which cyclically evolve to a pre-determined goal of perfection concluding with a Manvantara. Then another solar system begins with the next Manu. Fourteen such archetypal Manus appear in an episode of creation called kalpa.

‘Evolving through each age, developing through centuries, we are crossing stages. When we say ‘avasthabhedam’, the stage from an evil entity to a deva is a unique stage of ours’, said Navajyothi Sree Karunakara Guru. When Darwin’s theory of evolution reaches ethereal planes (mandalas), the soul of man further evolves to the status of greater luminous bodies such as that of a deva, rishi, sanyasi, etc. The transformation of the soul goes through ten such spiritual stages, according to the Guru. The lokas mentioned in the Bhagavata Purana and other texts relate to these spiritual stages. After the age of Kali, the chaturyuga cycle starts again with Satya, Treta, Dwapara and Kali. According to the rishis, satyayuga is the age of perfection, when God’s realization is direct. While the perfected souls in satyayuga adorn the heavens as radiant entities and merge with Brahman at the end of a kalpa, the souls are in the process of evolution through the states of plants, animals, man, deva, rishi etc., as they too have to attain perfection. Man might go down in the hierarchy of evolution when dharma and karma are violated.

The present age is the kali yuga of the 28th chaturyuga, with 43 chaturyugas yet to go to complete this Manu cycle. Kali yuga is a period of spiritual perfection. The spiritual order of Kali yuga requires that man attains necessary soul luminance to qualify for the all perfect satyayuga, rectifying the mistakes that might have happened in the karma and dharma of previous yuga cycles. Sanatana Dharma is a changeless spiritual order. However, the medium of revelation as well as the modes of application change because of socio-environmental changes and human errors that trigger periodical civilizational changes. This change is therefore continuous; the spiritual incumbency of revelatory mediums too is bound to end in the scale of time.

‘When the Tretayuga is completely traversed in the order of yuga dharma, an ideology cannot remain more than 5000 or 10000 years. With the passage of time, many failings come in those ideologies’ (Navajyothi Sree Karunakara Guru).

In the above context, yuga dharma, the age-specific renewal of the dharmic order and revelatory medium become imperative. Yuga Dharma as Guru said ‘is not only for any specific caste, religion or person. Yuga dharma is for the whole world’.

Kali Yuga – the Age of the Supramental

While the Vedic tradition portrayed Kali Yuga as an age of ruin, Navajyothi Sree Karunakara Guru said that Kali is the best age after satyayuga, since it is an age of spiritual evolvement.

Even the Sudras, the subaltern population, evolve their faculties to attain higher goals in life including the right to rule and realization of God that were denied to them. The revelations of Navajyothi Sree Karunakara Guru regarding the dharmic order of kali yuga deserve serious attention:

1. We should make changes according to the time. Time will not step aside for us. Since this is the age of kali, what is required is the propagation of dharma suitable to kali yuga.
2. If the time of deva in the treta and dwapara had been fulfilled through mantra and tantra, it has to be fulfilled through austerities and knowledge (tapas and jnana) in the age of Kali’. Without perfecting the kali dharma, it would never be able to enter satyayuga.
3. Most jnanis have not been able to understand what the dharmic order of kali yuga is.
4. In order to implement kali yuga dharma, a correction and a new path are required. The new path is to develop a good character among the people (Navajyothi Sree Karunakara Guru).

The efforts for the transition to kali yuga dharma had begun from Sri Krishna. After Sri Krishna, the Upanishad Rishis, Sri Buddha, Mahavir and other mahatmas tried to rejuvenate the jnana tradition of India.

Guru said that there would be a change only when we travel through the path opened by the mahatamas.

‘What is required first is the removal of ignorance. Only that will lead to victory. What is required for that? We should understand the vision of life of Mahatmas; should think about it and then try to actualize it. Thus, if we strive step by step, we can reach the desired shore... Our destined karma is to knock at the door and find out the self-sacrifice of every great soul done for our sake... Mahatmas are the means to love truth and to know the karma with discrimination.’ (Navajyothi Sree Karunakara Guru)

Therefore, the mistake that has gripped the world is that kali yuga dharma of the fourth epoch could not be implemented here. Guru said that worship of One Almighty God has to be perfected in kali yuga. The doctrine of One Absolute God was put forward by India first. However, for the last few millenniums, the Vedic tradition functioned without giving respect to the doctrine of One God worship and Guru sankalpa. Therefore, the Yuga dharma could not be established in India. The idea of ‘one god worship’ was propagated by prophets like Moses, Jesus Mohammad Nabi in West Asia, and has spread throughout the world. Religions should have a logical worldview. In the prophetic religions there is, however, no clear concept of yugas and manvantaras, about the evolution of souls, reincarnation, the possibility of spiritual renewal by other world teachers, etc. which has led to a narrow world-view of cosmic processes.

The religious leaders interpreted religion according to their will and national interests; they bound the people with strict religious laws. About 60% of people in developed countries like America do not go to church nor participate in religious rituals. In the Islamic countries, thousands of people are dying because of religious violence. Today, religion promotes hatred and violence instead of peace and love. The human race is going ahead without the awareness of yuga dharma, engaged in adharmic activities and mutual hatred. The adharmic activities taking place throughout the world have affected nature and exploitation of natural resources, which are producing newer diseases and atmospheric pollution. It is making human life miserable. Navajyothi Sree Karunakara Guru was born in the end of twentieth century (1927-1999) in India, giving yuga dharma a new definition.

Guru Dharma

The soul in its infinitesimal form should evolve to its Absolute nature, which necessitates an evolutionary scheme. Nature has an inherent

character to evolve the jeeva to its Absolute status through a series of evolutionary incarnations. There is the process of moulding the physical setting according to the nature and quality of evolution presupposing an inter-relationship between spirit's evolutionary status and physical attributes. There also exists a divine intervention that creates or directs this rhythmic evolution. The uniqueness of Indian spirituality is this idea of a divine intervention in the form of a spiritual embodiment that exists as the 'witnessing authority of all actions and knowledge, i.e. Guru Incarnation, in the evolutionary process of soul and body. In the practical plane, this concept existed in India in the form of Guru-Disciple spirituality in the scheme of Sanatana Dharma.

Since the evolutionary process is successive, the manifestation of Guru Incarnation is also successive in terms of humanity's spiritual progression. This process has been ordained in a manner of 'karma and dharma' according to the age, which is referred as Yuga Dharma. Yuga Dharma is the dharmic orientation of life in accordance with the evolving cycles of time for the soul and body to evolve from its imperfect state to its Absolute status or from the state of nescience to absolute enlightenment. Indian spirituality considers the relationship between an enlightened Guru - who is the embodiment of absolute realization- and the souls who are struggling to attain freedom from the chains of imperfection as the fundamental dharma for the evolvment and fulfillment of all living beings.

There is a revelatory knowledge which gives the information about such Guru Incarnations, who help the imperfect souls to reach the path of perfection. We were not able to comprehend the history of revelations about such great souls and about the prophecies made by them about the incarnations that are to come in succession. We should realize that beyond the wondrous feats and occult performances, there is this path of spiritual evolvment for the soul and body in accordance with a perennial law in nature. There should be a correction to our ignorance on this subject, as it is not good to wait yet.

The life and teachings of Navajyothi Sree Karunakara Guru can be seen in the light of a series of prophecies regarding a divine incarnation purporting to our age. The indications of the times and characteristics of that divine incarnation had been mentioned right through the ages since the dawn of Kaliyuga by many sages and prophets, from Sri Buddha, Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed to futurists and saintly personalities like Nostradamus, Maharshi Aravind Ghosh and others. The prophecy about the 'End of Times'

or ‘Era Change’ and the advent of a great Messenger of God is found in the scriptures of all major religions -in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Taoism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Islam. There is a surprising uniformity in these prophecies about the ideological and physical attributes as well as the signs of the times of this prophetic Incarnation, which is referred as Maitreya Buddha in Buddhism, ‘the Son of Man’ in Christianity, Messiah in Judaism, and Mahdi Imam in Islam.

The devotees, through their self-experience, comprehend the similarities in the life and teachings of Navajyothisree Karunakara Guru with that of the prophesied Maitreya or Mahdi Imam. There are, however, several other people who have already attributed this prophecy to themselves. The truth of an Incarnation is judged by the impact it makes in humanity’s spiritual psyche in line with cosmic laws of evolution. There is a spiritual order in the universe, which is uniform and binding to all people in the world. The seers had discovered this truth but the institutions built up in their names have been spiritually incapable to perceive this universal truth, dogma and superstitions blocking their real progress.

Guru Dharma according to Navajyothi Sree Karunakara Guru:

- ❖ It is through Guru that the concept of God is realized.
- ❖ Guru is that special state of attainment working from the perception of kalantara karma (spiritual work pertaining to the transition of ages) and the karmic traditions of specific ages. Guru is not someone who acquires knowledge after coming into this world. Guru is a born seer who perceives the evolution of soul through ages and sets its course right.
- ❖ If the term Guru stands for a being of special power ordained from nature yet transcending nature, it cannot be known through written scripture or poetry.
- ❖ Guru evolves into godhead, passing (evolutionary) stages. Guru is the giver of visions at the level of anu (atom), the indivisible totality (akhandata) and in the object of one’s worship (aaradhanaamurti). Guru is the one who has perceived time in its triple aspects (past, present and future); enlightened himself, he enlightens others, and perfects (evolutionary cycles) repeatedly.

- ❖ The difference between a Guru and deva is immense. A life without realizing this is fruitless.
- ❖ The avastha (spiritual stage) of Guru equals the state of God.
- ❖ Guru is a deerghadarshi (sage of great far-sightedness) who can see and ordain whatever is needed or not needed for a Yuga (Age).
- ❖ Our basic mistake is that we do not understand what the greatness of Guru is.
- ❖ Guru, who is the knower of threefold time, is fully perfect.
- ❖ Gurus have been sent (by the Almighty) to different places (from time to time) with the intent that at least some dharmas (spiritual laws) will be carried out.
- ❖ Finding a Guru is the opening of a door to discern the dharma and adharma (rights and wrongs) you do.
- ❖ All those who are following a religious doctrine are part of guru dharma (the Spiritual Law of the Guru) in some way. This dharma (Spiritual Law) of Guru capable of enlightening all doctrines is called sakaladharmaatma (the soul of all dharmas).
- ❖ Someone who works siddhi (miracles) is not to be taken as Guru.
- ❖ Gurumargam (the path of the Guru/Master) is the best. This path would make it possible to build a cultural tradition lasting millions of years.
- ❖ Forge ahead on the strength of your good actions. Find solutions for sins. Seek the guidance of Gurus (masters) for that.
- ❖ Even after believing in the truth that is Guru, one might go wrong, if one does not discern what to pursue and what knowledge to seek.
- ❖ There are two paths for worshipping the Almighty- one being that of devis and devas (deities) and the other of the rishiparampara (lineage of sages). Deities' power is dominant in the Ages of Treta

and Dwapara. There is also Gurumarga (the path of the masters), for working out all the mistakes made by man through Ages through experience.

- ❖ Do not be under the impression that you can know Gurus from what is written down on paper.
- ❖ Learn from those who have learned from life, or follow them. This is the way of Guru-Sishya relationship, is it not? If you carefully grasp this much, you have the means to guard yourselves; the world also has the means to guard itself.

This positive notion of the Guru has always had an identical or unchanging meaning in both the Indian Philosophical tradition as well as culture. The notion has managed to incorporate the great achievements of human self-discovery for which, in turn, it has been both the stimulus and the goal.



Witness to the Truth and Light: Islamic Religious Perspective

- Dr. Musdah Mulia

As a Moslem, I truly believe that Christianity is the closest to Islam in terms of faith. If Christianity and Islam were of one family, Christianity would be the older sibling of Islam. The Qur'an mandates Moslems to believe in the Christian Prophet and Holy Bible just as they believe in the Prophet Muhammad and the Holy Qur'an that was revealed to him.

Likewise, we are also obligated to believe in the Prophets and Apostles as well as all the holy books revealed to them. The central figures in Christianity, particularly Mother Mary and her son Jesus Christ the Messiah, are placed in noble positions in the Qur'an. They are holy persons who must be revered by all human beings.

I have witnessed the great contribution of Christianity in Indonesia through enlightenment and transformation of the nation towards a more civilized state. The Christian teaching of loving one another has become a strong foundation for the nation in maintaining peace and establishing a solid civilization.

Prominent Christian leaders also contributed towards Indonesia's independence from the colonialists. They fought hard alongside other Moslem, Buddhist, Hindu combatants and others to secure an independent Indonesia with *Pancasila* as its state ideology. Our religious leaders agreed to make Indonesia a democratic state as a homeland for all who would work hand in hand for the betterment of Indonesia.

Christians, through their various religious organizations as well as women's organizations, actively participate in nation development all over Indonesia. The Christian teaching that emphasizes on universal humanitarian values is one of the foundations for the development of an Indonesian culture upholding the principle of 'unity in diversity'. This means that, although comprising people from various religions, faiths, races, traditions and languages, Indonesia is one undivided nation.

ICRP (Indonesian Conference on Religions for Peace) is an inter-faith organization that has been in existence since the 1990s. Representatives from various religions and faiths have sat on the main committee of this organization, including Christians of various denominations. Since 2007, I have been entrusted as head of the organization. We actively establish and promote peace through the cooperation of all religious congregations. This is because we have the conviction that all religions have one common enemy, and that is injustice.

Islam and Christianity are the religions of humanity

Islam and Christianity are actually not native religions of the Indonesian people. Islam came to Indonesia in the 13th century through traders and preachers who disseminated Islamic teachings throughout the Indonesian archipelago. The key to the success of Islamic propagation in the archipelago was not conquest but rather, it was the ability of Islamic preachers to adopt a cultural approach to the prevalent local traditions, beliefs and wisdom dominated by Hinduism and Buddhism.

Instead of forcing *sharia* (Islamic law) on the community, the preachers of Islam (who were well known as nine saints, especially in Java) developed a cultural Islamic approach by accommodating certain aspects of local traditions, beliefs and wisdom. As a result, there was a process of indigenization of Islam in Indonesia. Throughout the history of Indonesia, Muslims were able to develop mutual respect, understanding and tolerance of others. It is obvious that the development of Islam in Indonesia was very different compared to that of Islam in the Middle East.

The population of Christians in Indonesia presently is approximately 24 million people; it equals the total population of Malaysia, and equals 6 times the population of Singapore. Christianity came to Indonesia in the 16th century with colonialism, especially Dutch and Portuguese colonialism. The close association of Christianity with Western imperialism and colonialism made many Muslims consider Christianity as synonymous to colonialism despite both religions originating from outside Indonesia. Islam is always understood as an Arabic or Eastern religion, meanwhile Christianity is considered as a European or Western religion. This misguided understanding leads to prejudice.

It is very interesting to note that despite the association of Christianity with colonialism, Indonesian Christians tend to be very nationalistic. Most Indonesian Christians enthusiastically joined in the struggle for independence. It is important to note that during every general election, The Catholic Council of Bishops and The Indonesian National Communion (?) of Churches issue a political statement.

The statement or declaration praises God for the Indonesian nation-state and thanks God for accompanying the Indonesian people in their struggle to realize the ideals of the Constitution of Indonesia, namely national sovereignty, justice, prosperity and peace. The Declaration states that all Indonesian Christians are called by God to participate in the national elections to choose leaders who are committed to Pancasila, the constitution and the national ideals.

Our task as peace lovers is to campaign and make people realize that Islam and Christianity are two religions which carry the universal message of peace, freedom and salvation. Both are present in the realm of conveying a new morality for social transformation in mankind. Islam and Christianity are moral forces because of their metaphysic and humanistic character. Islam and Christianity not only carry teachings in vertical aspects (between human and God) but also carry teachings which contain horizontal aspects (among human beings). Therefore, both religions respect humanity.

Religious commitment of the founding fathers

Indonesia epitomizes exceptional uniqueness. It is the largest Muslim country in the world and is home to almost two hundred million Muslims, which is approximately 85 % of the total population of Indonesia. Despite the fact that the majority of Indonesians are Muslims, Indonesia is not an Islamic state.

Indonesia's state ideology is not Islam, but is based on *Pancasila* (Five principles, namely Belief in God; Just and civilized humanism; Unity of Indonesia; People's power; and Social justice). These five principles are compatible with the universal values of human rights also conducive for building peace among the community.

Indonesia protects people of all religions and beliefs as stated in its Constitution. Such conditions came up because the founding fathers of this republic—who were prominent Muslims and Christians - did not choose religion as the foundation of the state. Rather, they chose *Pancasila* as the state's philosophical foundation and also as the guidelines for establishing the state's political power. Certainly, such a choice was not made without reason nor was it an easy thing to do.

Historical record has expressly displayed and borne clear witness to the fact that the debate of our founding fathers had torn the group into two severely opposing poles: the nationalists and the Islamists. The former advocated Pancasila, and the latter wanted Indonesia to be based on the Islamic Ideology. Such heated debate occurred in meetings prior to or in the wake of the Independence Proclamation, especially in the sessions held in the Parliament in 1945.

The choice of Pancasila as the foundation on which the state is based, witnesses the victory of nationalist Muslims and Christians or rather, the victory of moderate Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. This also proves that since the beginning, key Muslim and Christian figures understood the importance of maintaining pluralistic and democratic values in Indonesia.

This pluralism shall always be manifested and not be negated in the life of the Indonesian state. The active roles played by both Christian and Muslim leading figures, especially by the founding fathers in embodying peaceful, tranquil, inclusive and pluralism-respecting Indonesia, shall always be borne in mind and disseminated. These ideas are of considerable use and can serve as an inspiration for efforts to foster peace, justice, and humanity in Indonesia.

Pancasila as the common ground to overcome prejudice

Our founding fathers prepared the Indonesian constitution based on *Pancasila*. This constitution has been amended four times, yet the regulation

concerning religion as stipulated in Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution has remained the same. The articles read: The state is based on the Belief in One Supreme God. The State guarantees the freedom of each of its citizens to embrace their respective religion and to perform religious duties in accordance with their respective religion and belief. The provision of the article expressly indicates that Indonesia state comprehensively guarantees the religious freedom to its citizens.

The thing worth noting here is that Indonesian Christian and Muslim eminent religious leaders hold an inclusive, moderate and tolerant disposition. They are aware of the importance of maintaining harmonious togetherness as a nation, as well as the significance of upholding human dignity and esteem regardless of religious differences and also the importance of enforcing basic human rights, especially the right of religious freedom for all civilians including the minorities and vulnerable groups.

The endeavors made by both the Christian and Muslim communities to establish a strong and stable civil society by upholding democracy, reinforcing human rights and promoting justice (including gender justice) have become more apparent. The strong indication towards this tendency was made clear by the advent of a number of legislations and public policies, such as Act Number 39 of 1999 on Human Rights. As far as religious life is concerned, this Act lays down (in Article 22): (1) Every individual is given a free choice for embracing his or her own religion and belief and for performing his or her duties in compliance with the religion or belief adhered to. (2) The state guarantees followers of any religion or belief with freedom to observe and perform religious duties in accordance with his or her religion or belief.

In addition, the commitment upheld by Indonesia has become stronger by the birth of Act Number 12 of 2005 on the Ratification of International Covenants concerning civil-political rights stipulated therein the assertion of freedom of advocating any belief.

Recommendation and solution

Indonesian Christian and Muslim communities are intensely influenced by the local culture which is tolerant, open, inclusive as well as respectful to humanity. The Indonesian Muslim community is very different from those of other areas, especially Middle East. Indonesian Muslim community has long experience of living together with people of different religions

and faiths. The founding fathers of this country were very respectful of humanity and actively involved in efforts to overcome prejudice and campaign for justice and peace.

Now, what should Muslims and Christians do to contribute for peace? I propose three concrete actions:

Firstly, Muslims and Christians must work together to continue the efforts of cultural reconstruction through education in its wide sense, particularly education on family life. These efforts need to be implemented because the culture of peace, respect, tolerance and inclusivity cannot emerge naturally and spontaneously in society; instead it must be arranged through the education system. Why is it important? To reduce prejudice in society, children must be taught to embrace multiculturalism. A few researches state that prejudice and bias are very often learned in childhood. Therefore, education is a means to a harmonious intercultural society. Multicultural education can shield people from the negative effects of globalization. It promotes universal religious values of peace, justice, and human dignity. I believe that the implementation of multicultural education will be very useful for a diverse country like Indonesia.

Secondly, Muslims and Christians must work together to continue the efforts of law reform. We have to reform the laws and public policies which are not conducive to the establishment of peace and justice as well as the upholding of democracy and human rights.

Thirdly, Muslims and Christians must work together to continue the efforts of religious interpretations. We have to propose a new religious interpretation which is more conducive for promoting peace, justice, and upholding human rights. Unfortunately, the widespread interpretation practiced in the Muslim community is not at all compatible with the principles of human rights, particularly women's rights and gender equality.

Finally, I would like to recommend that Muslims and Christians should work together to continue to campaign for religious interpretation that will lead us to an in-depth understanding and appreciation of universal values of morality that is compatible with human rights. It is this type of interpretation which will lead us to eliminate all forms of prejudice, hatred and violence.

Asia Mission Statement

Introduction

The decision to adopt a Mission Statement, after discussion and deliberation at the Asia Mission Conference 2017 is a great act of faith. It boldly and loudly proclaims that the Asia Mission Conference held in Yangon, Myanmar, from 12 to 16 October 2017, should prophetically and challengingly continue to speak to the churches and to all concerned people all over Asia and beyond. And that from that conference, the AMC should grow into a path-breaking Mission Movement that opens new annals in the history of Mission in Asia.

Having gathered for both the Asian Mission Conference in Yangon-Myanmar, and for the celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Christian Conference of Asia, we, having heard the social, political, economic, religious and ecological contexts of the Churches in Asia, commit ourselves, and call upon all people of God, to

‘Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light, in Asia’.

The theme of the Asia Mission Conference - 2017 ‘Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light, in Asia’ is inspired by the Biblical verses illuminated in the Gospel of John,

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me, will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

“I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

“I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37).

The theme is rooted in the Asian context. We are called to be on a journey. A journey together, following our Lord Jesus and witnessing to God's truth and light, in Asia. We begin our journey in Asia, where we experience the risen Lord, and are related to one another in Jesus Christ. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Asia is home to all major world religions. The majority of the people of Asia are poor, often struggling just to get by, due to injustice and exploitation. And yet, we live out a message that speaks of the hope that is within us, though articulated imperfectly, and in different ways, and in different languages.

We journey together; ours is not an exclusive path. We walk together towards a common goal, with people of different faiths and with people of no faiths. As Christians, we journey with our sisters and brothers in churches who join together in communion with one another. We journey with our families and with people of many different nations and cultures who walk on the roads, sail in the seas and fly in the skies, embracing one another and struggling for justice and peace. We journey with the migrants and the excluded as we embrace the stranger (Hebrews 13:2). As religious believers, we journey together with women and men from other religious communities, drawing inspiration from all people who seek the common good amidst the groaning of creation. And as we journey on, we know that God will never be far from us, and we will not be overwhelmed nor consumed (Isaiah 43:2).

We seek to bear witness to the truth and light that has been given to us which illuminates our way forward. We proclaim our message in a listening way (Matthew 16:13), as we accompany others bringing good news to the oppressed (Isaiah 61:1-2). We bear witness not as masters but as servants (Luke 17:7-10); we journey not to be served but to serve others (Mark 10:45). We announce the reign of God in a spirit of repentance (Matthew 4:17), embodying the spirituality of the cross and emptying ourselves (Philippians 2:5-8). We bear prophetic witness to the truth and light drawing on our Asian heritage and our rich cultural and religious traditions that bore witness to God in Christ long before the missionary movement of the modern era (Colossians 1:15-20), and we draw on the modern traditions, which continues to bear prophetic witness today.

For sixty years, the Christian Conference of Asia, together with its member churches, councils, other ecumenical organisations and related communities, has been on a journey bearing prophetic witness to the truth and light, in Asia. We are now called to re-envision that witness, as we

respond today to the challenges of God's mission, in Jesus Christ, who made a paradigm shift in the mission here on earth, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Our calling springs from the Asian context, but our message is to the entire world.

Prophetic Accompaniment

We journey together with all humanity, with all creation, as co-sojourners, and as co-pilgrims on our journey with a sense of oneness, humility and service. We follow the manner of accompaniment of Jesus, because He has sent us: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). He was sent by the Father. He comes among us in our humanity and accompanies us as one of us. He pitches his tent among us (John 1:14). He also comes with a prophetic mission: The Lord God has anointed him with the Spirit and has sent him to bring good news to the poor and to proclaim the year acceptable to the Lord (Luke 4:18-19). He gives His life for us. Knowing we are sent, we go to others. We do not wait for them to come to us but we, first, go to them. We journey with them. We live among them. We respectfully listen to them. We learn from them. We are at home with them. We appreciate and understand the value of their languages, customs, and culture, in order to journey with them and to accompany them in a way that they can join with us. But we do not simply follow them wherever they go, merely conforming with their journey. As co-pilgrims, we share, in some way, the light and the truth that they already have, because the Holy Spirit is active and present in the heart of each and every person, and because the true light of the world has enlightened everyone (John 1:9). We do not seek our own status, position or wealth and we do not hesitate to confront unjust powers. But we courageously challenge the unjust structures and powers in our prophetic accompaniment. We give of ourselves for the good of the others, the least, the needy, the poor, the marginalised and the outcast (Matthew 25:40).

Affirming the Servanthood

We understand, from the life and ministry of Jesus, that mission unquestionably affirms servanthood. Biblical teachings depict various forms of servanthood. For example, servanthood is suffering (Isaiah 52:13-53:1-32), it is practicing humility, it is being in service to others (Matthew 20:28) and it is sacrificing oneself (Luke 17:7-10). Affirmation of servanthood requires a new understanding of its complex manifestations.

Servanthood must challenge the hierarchical structure of the society and it must challenge the church that marginalises people based on their nationality, religion, class, gender, age, ethnicity and different abilities. Our affirmation must lead us to a new understanding of servanthood: as friendship. We are called to be servants to one another, to minister to one another and to befriend one another. St. Paul reminds us to, “Serve one another in love” and “the entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbour as yourself” (Galatians 5:13-14).

Without losing sight of the example of servanthood in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our affirmation disclaims any call to servanthood that denigrates the lives and struggles of victims of violence. It disclaims the model of servanthood that denies the lives and liberation of the downtrodden and that which ignores the vulnerability and the fragility of life in the midst of war, violence, discrimination and victimisation. Instead, our affirmation echoes the voices and histories of Asian people who have resisted the powers of injustice and have found, in their living testimonies, a form of servanthood that is a powerful example and ethic of resistance. Our affirmation brings out the stories of Asian people who have sacrificed their lives for the dignity and liberation of the marginalised, and finds a form of servanthood that is a life-giving praxis in their living testimonies. Our affirmation takes us into the everyday Asian realities, where servanthood is a central dimension of peoples’ practice of solidarity across boundaries.

We affirm servanthood, because it provides a model of leadership that is embedded in humility, perseverance service and sacrifice. A leadership that is based on sharing of power with, instead of power over, a leadership that gives life in the midst of dehumanising powers that create injustice and thrive on unjust human structure. Jesus taught us that in His kingdom, servanthood is deemed a virtue and not a punishment. We are reminded of what Jesus said, “Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-27). We affirm servanthood because it extols the living together as a human community that respects human dignity and the sustainability of all creation.

In our journey together with humanity and all creation, we affirm servanthood as a way of life that disrupts every form of power that causes injustice and violence against the rights and dignity of human beings and all

creation. Jesus exemplified servanthood by redefining power and ministry as the power to share and to minister to one another (John 13:1-17), by resisting the violence that dehumanises the lives of the marginalised (John 8:2-11), and by empowering the powerless to voice their rights (John 5:1-18). He sacrificed his life as a testimony to the risk of living the life of a servant. In our journey together with all the peoples of Asia, we affirm servanthood as a web of power and imagination that is centred in the life and dignity and liberation and fullness of all life. We affirm servanthood in our witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in Asia today.

Participating in the Reign of God

Journeying together with all humanity and with all creation, we understand mission as participating in the reign of God. The reign of God was well manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. He began his public ministry announcing: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15). The reign of God is here; it is in our midst (Luke 17:21). Yet, the fullness of the reign of God will be revealed in the End Times, “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels” (2 Thessalonians 1:7). The reign will be revealed clearly only when, “he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marvelled at on that day among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed” (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

We participate in the reign of God by living a life of prophetic witness here and now on the earth. Paul tells us that it is necessary to do God’s will to enter the reign of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:21). Jesus reminds us that detaching oneself from the things of this world, doing the will of the Father and bearing good fruit (Matthew 19:24; 21:31; 21:43) are necessary to enter into the reign of God. We learn from Luke that the poor are blessed because the reign of God is theirs (Luke 6:20), and that we must be prompt and wholehearted in our response to the invitation to the reign of God (Luke 9:60-62). We are reminded of the essentials to enter into the reign of God: The Holy Spirit is the key to enter into God’s reign. Bearing prophetic witness is the key to participating in the reign of God. Living in the Holy Spirit is the key to remaining and participating in His reign. This truth tells us, again, that there needs to be a fundamental transformation of the whole person. By the power of the Spirit, we can and must learn to see in the way that God sees, to judge in the way that God judges and to love in the way that God loves. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what the will of God is — what good and acceptable and perfect is” (Romans 12:2).

Embodying the Spirituality of the Cross

Journeying together with all peoples in Asia, we understand our mission as embodying the spirituality of the cross. The cross is one of the most complex inadequately understood symbols in the history of Christianity. It had been used as a symbol to maintain power over the marginalised. It carried with it a historical burden of violence perpetrated against different religions, too. However, it remains as a symbol of the people's struggle and liberation. It continues to remain as the most powerful symbol of faith that sustains the life and hope of Christian communities in the midst of suffering, violence and injustice.

The gospel narratives testify to various realizations of the spirituality of the cross. Witnessing the last breath of Jesus on the cross, the women disciples modelled a spirituality of perseverance and faithfulness (Mark 15:40-41). They manifested the amazing spirituality of remaining by, standing, watching, listening and receiving Jesus's message spoken from the site of wounds, the site of death (John 19: 25-27). Their exceptional courage and unbelievable tenacity in witnessing the death of Jesus from within the site of violence, is interwoven with their testimony of life — "I have seen the Lord!" said Mary Magdalene (John 20:18). In the testimony of the women disciples, through their audacity to imagine life and the possibility of eternal life in the aftermath of violence and death, we see the embodiment of the spirituality of the cross. It is the spirituality that inspires and strengthens the women and the peoples of Asia to go forward, facing the life in the midst of injustice, violence and death.

Embodying the spirituality of the cross in Asia today is also similar to the journey of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). Marked by the trauma of witnessing the death of Jesus, the disciples failed to witness the presence of life in their midst. Jesus' act of breaking bread, however, re-familiarised them with the sharing of a meal and the warmth of fellowship. That great act reminded them of the possibility of life in the aftermath of violence. Participating in the act of sharing a meal is a form of embodying the spirituality of the cross in Asia. Practicing hospitality towards strangers as an embodiment of the spirituality of the cross is a form of everyday spirituality. It has also become a risky practice because it is embodied in the lives of those who persist against injustice and violence, while embracing, and offering love to, strangers, who have often turned out to be enemies.

The spirituality of the cross is embodied in Asia today in the lives of Christians and all people who struggle for healing, justice, and transformation, and for courageously challenging structural injustices. In the aftermath of the cross, the disciples received the breath of resurrection (John 20:19-22). The giving of that breath took place at the site of fear and uncertainty. The giving of breath signifies three elements of Jesus' life: The sharing of peace, the sending out of the disciples into the world (John 20:21) and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. These remind us of our mission as an embodiment of the spirituality of the cross; as the practice of bringing peace to a community that has been overcome by fear and violence; as the sending out of people to serve as witnesses to the breath of life, amidst the power of death; and as the pouring out of healing through the embracing love of the Holy Spirit.

Mission Concerns

1. Groaning of Creation: Our Stewardship and Kinship

The Biblical reference to the groaning of creation (Romans 8:22) is becoming all the more relevant to our age, which practices massive destruction to the environment and brings about the fatal endangerment of all life on earth. We have now come to recognise the deep interconnections and interdependence between human life and all other forms of life on earth. We also realise that human activity can change the delicate natural balance of our small planet for the worse. Global warming and climate change – obviously related to the excessive emission of carbon from human industrial activity – the burning of fossil fuels and the pervasive consumerist life-style are now visibly affecting all parts of the world. Inexorable human greed continues to destroy forests, pollute rivers and deplete ground water along with many other non-renewable resources. The United Nations, in spite of its huge efforts to convoke summits of world political leaders and its appeal to voluntary organisations and religions on these crucial issues, does not seem to be effective in checking the mad rush of the world to a fatal end.

While we recognise and appreciate the positive role of the many Christians and several churches in Asia who make their congregations aware of the gravity of our environmental situation, we urge all churches in Asia to take bold steps in order to seek collaboration with adherents of other religions. We also urge all people of goodwill to implement sane environmental

policies, for the future of humanity. The use of alternative forms of energy, reduction of carbon emissions, greening of the earth, and above all, the constant effort to follow a simple lifestyle, are to be promoted in Asia, as essential Christian values for our age.

2. People on the Move: Embracing the Stranger

People on the move have been a phenomenon in human history. The nature of, and the reasons for, people on the move were varied in biblical history: Abraham, Jacob, the Israelites out of Egypt, the Israelites sent into Babylonian captivity, the dispersion of the Jewish Diaspora in the Roman Empire, and the missionary journeys of the early Church. Biblical narratives portray the reasons for various forms of migration – due to economic reasons, drought, starvation (Genesis 26: 1; Ruth 1: 1), war (Jeremiah 14: 12). The experience of being wanderers and then being liberated from oppression manifested the very identity of the people of Israel. Similar situations continue to threaten the lives of millions of people in the world today. An increasing number of people are forced to leave their ancestral homes or countries in search of a better and safer life. Asia is not an exception to this growing trend.

People on the move are increasing in large numbers today in Asia with different causes and they belong to various categories: war refugees, climate refugees, migrant workers, internally displaced persons due to conflicts and violence, victims of religious and ethnic persecutions and preys of human trafficking. Welcomed or not, these less fortunate people end up in other countries and communities as migrants. They are often strangers in unfamiliar circumstances, facing discrimination, social exclusion, and even rejection. The victims of forced movements and their numbers are increasing in Asia too. Despite the progress of modern transportation and information technologies, in the era of globalisation the doors of the world are tightened or altogether closed for migrants. Migration inevitably poses a challenge to any society, as norms of justice and hospitality are not followed. We live in societies where the status of strangers has been changed from being a recipient of hospitality to that of a victim of hostility.

The Church, as the body of Christ, is the embodiment of the presence of Jesus, who was incarnated as a stranger to the world (John 1:14), He suffered and died under discrimination and exclusion (John 1:5, 3:19-20, 8:23). God as the Migrant God is clearly evident in the incarnation of

Jesus, who had a refugee status in Herod's killing fields, who experienced a marginal status due to his identity of a native of the less reputed province of Galilee and due to his wandering style of ministry in Palestine.

Realising the fact that Asia has been experiencing disturbing situations of displacement of people and communities in manifold forms, the mission of the Church is to accept strangers as subjects, as they are people with the same 'likeness and image of God'. We have to host them as messengers from God. The Church needs to be a Church of hospitality and proclaim the good news of the reign of God that is actualised by the compassion of God through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, who demonstrated the inclusive and friendly character of the nature of God's kingdom. As a community of the pilgrims of faith, we are called to be concerned about the people on the move and to cross borders to embrace the strangers in our midst.

3. The Excluded and the Marginalised: Accompanying People and Communities

The kingdom, the rule of God, is based on the logic of 'total inclusion'. It cannot, in any way, be on the logic of exclusion. In simple language, God's mission cannot be anything but universal and all inclusive. St. Paul writes, "With all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:9-10). Again, clearly referring to the situation of his time, St. Paul states, "There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male nor female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Most importantly, the Risen Lord reveals the ultimate reconciliation of 'heaven' and 'earth'. So God's Mission (*Missio-Dei*) revealed through Jesus Christ cannot be anything but all-inclusive and we are all called to participate in God's all-inclusive mission, totally rejecting exclusion on any basis; whether it be, caste, colour, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientations.

Asian societies, in reality, are divided. Vast sections of people are marginalised and excluded. Sociological forces are not the only reasons for such exclusions, but economic impoverisation as well, as people become victims of the present dominant model of development. In the present context of extreme marginalisation and exclusion, we are called

to be part of a mission of accompaniment and inclusion. Our Lord Jesus loved and related to the excluded and the marginalised — the lepers, the outcasts, the Samaritans, the tax-collectors, non-Jewish people, women, sinners, publicans, etc. Jesus, through his life and mission, manifested an incomparable model of love, concern, solidarity and accompaniment. Through his statement, “...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40), Jesus is declaring his total oneness with the least — the hungry, the naked, the imprisoned, the marginalised and the excluded. So, our participation in God’s mission requires us to accompany and journey with all those who are marginalised and excluded. We, the churches and the faith communities, have to ask ourselves whether we are currently searching for, identifying ourselves with, and giving accompaniment to the marginalised and the excluded among us. This is the unavoidable mission task of the churches and the followers of Jesus, today.

4. Economic Injustice: Prophetic Witnessing

One of the starkest realities of the present world, where we are called to be in mission, is the alarming intensification of inequality. The very design and principles of our economies have taken us to an extremely unsustainable and unjust point. As inequality is shockingly intensifying in Asia, an inescapable mission imperative for churches and the faith community is to become deeply and systematically aware of the intensification of poverty and inequality. The Church and the followers of Jesus must stand up against and confront the powers and practices of injustices. The context in which Amos was called to prophesy was when the rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer. It should be remembered, “When the poor and the needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I, the Lord, will answer them” (Isaiah 41:17). So, in obedience to the will of God in the context of increasing impoverisation, the church and the followers of Jesus must work for the establishment of fair and just ‘provisioning’ for all people, and for a just and sustainable society. The Church and faith communities locally regionally, nationally and transnationally have to take up this mission task unhesitatingly and with unquestionable commitment.

As the present economic trend of the world witnesses the ascent of money, the world is fast coming under the reign of money. People are falling into the trap of worshipping money and prosperity. The worship of wealth and power deeply impacts values, thinking, ethics, and religion. In such situations we

are reminded of Jesus, who undeniably said, “You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matthew 6:24). The faith community in Asia has to wake up and respond to the current realities, become deeply aware of the massive and grave economic and social changes, and guard itself against the worship of ‘mammon’. It is our task in such situations to undauntedly prophesy and stand up against the reign of money that subverts the kingdom values.

The true mission is inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes, “he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). True to the mission commitment and inspired by the Holy Spirit, in this time of intensifying inequality, impoverisation and injustice, the faith community has to dedicate itself to prophetic ministry. The commitment to mission demands the rejection of the worship of prosperity and power. It demands a courageous stand, against all dehumanising forces and unimpeachable solidarity with the poor and the oppressed.

At this critical time, the Church and the followers of Jesus are called to be unhesitant prophets, courageous upholders of the kingdom values, and undaunted bearers of the spirituality of the cross, as part of their inalienable mission.

5. Religious Intolerance: Nurturing Interfaith Harmony

Although well-meaning people everywhere had hoped that the 21st century would usher in an age of peace and justice, our world is suffering from surmounting violence and conflicts under the banners of religion and culture. The spectre of fundamentalism, with its characteristic exclusivism and aggressiveness, is on the rise in several world religions that were once considered pacifist. War and conflicts are generating massive migrations of populations that challenge the traditional openness and hospitality of human communities. Xenophobia, with a religious tinge, can be the most dangerous sign for the future of our world. We may find some solace in the fact that the member churches of the Christian Conference of Asia and other recognised ecumenical bodies would largely stand by the great biblical virtues of hospitality to the stranger, and love of the enemy. In this context, we call upon all Christians to demonstrate the forgiveness and reconciling power of the cross of Christ, in their relationship with other religions and other faith bodies.

Witnessing to the truth in love and forgiveness is a prophetic and holy task laid upon all those who follow Christ. Resolving old conflicts and healing wounded memories, with attention to the principles of justice and the promotion of life in communities, are of crucial importance in the ministry of the Church. Local congregations and Christian institutions are called to engage in dialogues of life with neighbouring communities, with mutual respect and openness to learn from the other. The practice of true hospitality by accepting the other, irrespective of religion or faith as God has accepted us in Christ, can help Christians to contribute to the making of a new humanity leading to peaceful co-existence here on earth.

6. Geo-Political Turmoil: Building Peace

We recognise that the Asian continent is diverse, and the core Asian values cover a wide range of factors: vast geographical terrain, rich religious and cultural heritages, ethnic identities, philosophical traditions, diverse customs and social values, economic gamut, and political ideologies. As the world has been witnessing the crumbling of the sacred edifice of the much-acclaimed economic development models, Asia has been considered a region uniquely equipped for a major leap forward in a troubled global situation. Asia has been recognised as a potential force, capable of shifting the centre of gravity of global economic and political systems to this continent in the 21st century. However, we view the emerging trends in Asia's geo-political, geo-economic and geo-strategic situation with a sense of deep concern.

Unfortunately, Asia is a region where most nations deeply distrust their neighbours and where old-style nationalism, or religio-nationalism still reigns at its zenith. Nuclear and missile programmes are advancing fast in Asia, due to competition among nations. A growing military-technological alliance between Asian countries and non-Asian nations, and the amassing of sophisticated weapons and advanced military technologies by an increased number of countries in Asia are disturbing situations. External interventions and militarism promoted by foreign powers in Asia have trampling effects on the sovereignty of Asian nations. Asia still holds promises and hopes, but for the promises to be realised and the turmoil to be quashed, strong and sustained efforts for peace building, confidence building, and dialogue within and across borders of nation states in Asia are imperative. Asian nations should embrace the long nurtured Asian values of tolerance, harmony, reconciliation and peaceful co-existence.

Our faith leads us to reflect upon the fundamental Christian values and the theological convictions which affirm that there is no peace without justice. The absence of peace and situations of conflicts in Asia are due to the denial of justice. Justice is not only about rectitude; it is also about giving what is right and just. Our faith reminds us that peace is a condition where God leads nations to settle their conflicts and beat their swords into ploughshares (Micah 4:3). We believe, that ultimately, peace is a condition where, “the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6). Building peace is an act of engaging in God’s mission and to have peace, means to enjoy God’s gift of the fullness of life, security, and liberty (Ezekiel 34:25-31).

Affirmation of Our Commitment

With indestructible hope, we commit ourselves ‘to journey together, and to partake in the mission of prophetic witness to the truth and light, in Asia.’ Our faith and commitment inspire and strengthen us to be sojourners in God’s mission and to follow the way revealed to us by Jesus Christ.

Our Redeemer Jesus Christ ‘did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of servant’ (Phil. 2:6-7). We sincerely repent, because we have not sufficiently humbled and emptied ourselves and have refused to be servants. We have not been fully faithful to the redemptive acts of our Lord Jesus Christ and have not fully submitted ourselves to carry out God’s mission in the present world and to embody its spirit. So with hearts full of repentance we commit ourselves to be genuinely humble and to be truly servants. And to be undaunted prophetic witnesses to the truth and light, in Asia.

God is at work to redeem all that the Parent God has created. God’s ultimate purpose, the divine mystery, that is revealed to us in Jesus Christ is that God is at work ‘to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth’ (Eph. 1: 10). The Triune God invites the entire cosmos to the Feast of Life and to the fullness of life (John 10: 10). We have to be the stewards of the whole creation. And we whole-heartedly commit ourselves to participate in God’s redemptive mission for the whole creation. In particular, God unites all humanity in Christ. Jesus Christ prayed, “They all may be one” (John 17: 21). So, we are called to pray and work for the unity of the whole humanity and uncompromisingly fight against all divisive and disuniting

forces. In Mission, we have to embrace the stranger and give hospitality to them.

God's mission in Christ calls us to envision a new humanity based on freedom, justice and love. He urges us to be in solidarity with those who are denied these three things, which include 'the blind, the poor, the oppressed and the captives', and He urges us to bring the 'good news' to them (Luke 4:18 &19). We commit ourselves to stand up against all exploitative, oppressive and dehumanizing forces, at this time of intensifying impoverisation, inequality and exclusion, and to be harbingers of a new humanity and 'a new heaven and a new earth.'

In Mission, God empowers us to be forgiving and to be healing. We commit ourselves to nurture harmony with the brothers and sisters of different faiths, and to build peace in the midst of the conflicts, tensions and turmoils.

We believe that the Holy Spirit guides and empowers us to participate in God's Mission with unquestionable dedication and unchallengeable commitment. We embrace the spirituality of the Cross. And we believe in and look forward to the ushering in of the 'reign of God', the creation of 'new heavens and a new earth' (Isaiah 65: 17). And "The people who walk in darkness will see a great light, those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them" (Isaiah 9: 2).

We sincerely pray and ardently hope that there would be genuine repentance, with a profound re-envisioning of the unquestionable commitment to the Mission that is entrusted with us by our Lord Jesus.

Sixty years ago in Prapat, we committed ourselves to 'Live Together'. Here in Yangon, we move forward and commit ourselves to 'Journey Together.' We hope that Yangon will become an unforgettable name in the history of Mission.

We believe that 'our journey together and prophetic witnessing' will inaugurate a new era in Mission.



AMC Closing Service

“The Truth Implies Ultimate Freedom and Liberation for all God’s People”

- Archbishop Steven Than Myint Oo

I thank God for this opportunity to participate in this timely and historic event, this closing worship service of CCA’s AMC 2017.

I am very sorry I could not participate in all the sessions of this conference from the beginning because the Church of the Province of Myanmar, which is the Anglican Church in Myanmar, had to serve as host for the East Asia Anglican Bishops’ meeting in Yangon, which we had committed to hold in Myanmar two years ago.

I really wanted to listen to the Bible studies, presentations etc. I wish I could have participated in the group discussions and learnt from you all. Sadly, I missed all these chances including the opportunity to make fellowship with my brothers and sisters who attended this conference.

Nevertheless, I received some materials of study of this conference and had a quick glance at them. I believe that because the resource persons and speakers, who are authorities in their respective areas of Bible studies, thematic and panel presentations, and because of the capacity of those who attend this conference, the conference will meet its objectives and goals particularly its theme: “Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia”.

Therefore, I do not want to add my theological or philosophical insights and make those who attend this conference go back to their countries with heavy mental loads. I just want to share with you a story that changed my insight theologically, philosophically and spiritually.

Before that, let me quote from a paper presented at this conference, which gives an understanding of Truth. It reads:

“The truth to be proclaimed is on the basis of the vision of the kingdom of God Jesus proclaimed which implies that ultimate freedom and liberation for all God’s people and the entire cosmos is the essence of the message of the Gospel.”

Here the truth implies ultimate freedom and liberation for all God’s people. ‘God’s people’ means all people, particularly the sinners, the poor, the lowly and the marginalized. This ultimate freedom and liberation include the entire cosmos.

To me, that is to say, there is ultimate freedom and liberation for all human beings and the entire world regardless of class, race, colour, nationalities and even the faiths we confess. It is the truth to proclaim as prophetic witness to the truth and light in Asia and all over the world particularly by those who attend this conference.

I believe that when Jesus told the Roman governor, Pilate that “...the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth”, this truth implied the ultimate freedom and liberation of all human beings and the cosmos. What a wonderful message and good news for the world!

Even though the world has been increasingly facing injustice, discrimination, killing, fighting, poverty, many kinds of disasters, sufferings and death, there exists total freedom and liberation for the world – no more pain, no

more tears, no more suffering and no more death, which is the zenith of suffering or the window of unending suffering.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us join our hands together and proclaim or witness that truth to the world. This truth is indeed the light and hope of the world.

The paper which I read goes on to say that “This truth reminds us that mission of the church is not limited in the comfort zones, but it is an invitation to live like the disciples and witness to the truth in order to be the light and salt of the earth.” It is in line with the theme of our East Asia Anglican Bishops’ meeting, namely “Living and Sharing Jesus-Shaped Life”.

That is to say to proclaim and witness to the Truth and the Light will be the painful and sacrificial process which Jesus Christ and his disciples and many others had already crossed. Without it there will be no ultimate freedom and liberation of the world. Nevertheless, if we really love the people and the world, we need to join hands together and journey together as witness to the Truth and Light, in Asia and in this world.

However, to be the real light and salt of the world to witness to the Truth and the Light, I think we need to pay serious attention to what Jesus reminds us when He answered the question of Pilate which reads:

“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders.” (John 18: 36)

When Jesus says “my kingdom is not of this world” it doesn’t mean his kingdom is not in this world but it means His Kingdom is not shaped by or based on the ways and principles of the world. His kingdom is shaped or founded by the ways and principles of heaven which is the Truth and the Light. Jesus reminds us not to follow the ways and means and principles of the world when we are journeying together to be prophetic witness to the Truth and Light.

This kingdom, which is a state of ultimate freedom and liberation and which is the Truth and Light of all, is not only for a group of people who

profess a particular faith but also for people of all generations including the whole world.

Here I would like to share with you a story as I conclude my sermon.

Danibote story :

When Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in 2008, about 300,000 people died.

Some Anglicans and some Baptists who were Karen, some Indian Muslims and some Bamah Buddhists climbed up a tree to escape the storm, the tidal waves and floods.

- They did not ask each other what their race or religion was.
- At that time these thoughts were completely out of their minds; what was really in their minds and their focus was the storm.
- The feeling in all was fear.
- The sense in all was that of death.
- The wish in their minds was to liberate themselves from death.

The storm with heavy tidal waves that could cause their death was their common threat.

With only these thoughts in mind and not of their identities - being Karen, Bamah, Indian, Christian, Muslim or Buddhist- they held onto one another firmly to resist the storm. Some who could not hold on to the others anymore died while only the few who could hold on survived.

Dear brothers and sisters, the world is like the tree on which many people are taking shelter. It has been surrounded by many dangerous things which can cause suffering and death for all people regardless of their race, class and religion.

These dangerous things are injustice, oppression, discrimination, poverty, disasters and so on, and can cause death. These are common threats regardless of who we are. Therefore, we all need to join hands to face and overcome these, like the people on the tree who joined hands to face the deadly storm.

Where do injustice, oppression, discrimination, poverty and disasters come from? They do not come from outside. In fact, they come from inside man.

Deep inside man is *lawba* (greed), *dawtha* (anger), *mawha* (anxiety) or *akutho*, which we Christians call “sin”, and these can cause death or unending suffering for us. This combination of sin and death is very real and a common threat to all human beings. This sin is the root of all sufferings and problems that lead us to death.

In fact, the world has put much effort to solve problems like injustice, poverty, discrimination, fighting, and killing so as to have reconciliation, peace and development in the world. However, the sufferings of the world do not decrease but increase more and more.

I think we the people of the world have not yet touched the root of all problems, the real challenge of the world, which is Sin.

Others may call it Akutho or something else; whatever it may be, it is the root of suffering and death. I feel that all the efforts of the world have touched only the outer layer and ramifications of Sin, not the root of suffering and death called SIN.

It is my hope and prayer that when we are journeying together for prophetic witness to the truth and light in Asia and in the world, we will not only be able to remove the outer layer and ramifications of suffering and death, but also erase sin which is the root of all suffering and death.

The people on the same tree proved that when they were existentially and deeply aware of their common threat, which was death and unending suffering, they lost their sense of race, class, faith and they could join hands together and hold together to overcome the deadly storm.

Likewise, if we all are really existentially and deeply aware of the danger of sin and its wage death,, I believe that we will be able to join hands together regardless of our race, denomination and the faiths we confess and with truth and light, we will be able to resist sin and overcome all sufferings.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us join hands and journey together for Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light, in Asia and in the world.

Let me conclude my sermon with a chant from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*:

“Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage; hold fast that which is good; render to no man evil to evil; strengthen the faint-hearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honour all men; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.”



Reflective Responses from Representatives of Pre- AMC Events

Asia Regional Consultation on People with Disabilities: Strength in Weakness and Quests for Dignity

(A Pre-Event to the 2017 Asia Mission Conference)

10-11 October 2017

Consultation Communique

We, 63 participants including person with disabilities, met in Yangon from 9-11 October 2017, on the auspicious occasion of the Christian Conference of Asia's (CCA) 60th Anniversary and conference on the theme "Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia." We are grateful to CCA for thoughtfully holding CCA's "Regional Consultation on People with Disabilities: Strength in Weakness and Quests for Dignity". We consist of representatives, including People with Disabilities (PWDs) from the CCA member churches, National Councils, their related care-giving institutions and organisations, church leaders, theologians, academicians, professionals and the families of the PWDs. There were the conversations based on the United Nations and Ecumenical Frameworks with academic

and practical knowledge through sharing sessions and story-telling sessions by the PWDs, caregivers and care-giving institutions. We have scanned the religious and societal status of the PWDs by listening to the country reports from 13 Asian countries. We realised that the context and status of the PWDs remain the same everywhere. Stigmatization and discrimination are in practice, and the PWDs and their families are pushed to a state of social isolation and live in shame.

We appreciate churches across the globe for actively engaging and caring for the PWDs through different diaconal interventions, however we solicit the churches to be much more proactive in terms of being inclusive, by affirming and practising the interdependency ‘with’ and ‘among’ PWDs. We were challenged by the statement ‘Gospel is Gospel’ ‘for all’ and that has to be communicated with wholeness, without any dichotomy, avoiding any labeling of our faiths by a generalizing theology. We are motivated to brand them preferably as disabled people rather than as ‘people with disabilities’. Their presence, participation, expressions and experiences are the sources to develop theologies of the disabilities and theologies of inclusion.

We were inspired by the prayers, songs sung in sign language, and art (by legs) by the participants in this consultation. Hence, we expect the churches to express their inclusion by adapting similar methodologies that are inclusive.

We were cautioned by the PWD participants NOT TO USE PWDs for projects and as objects for fund raising. At the same time, there was a call to move from ‘charity’ model to inclusive model of diaconal and ministerial interventions.

We do realise that the churches are mostly influenced by ideologies like ‘ableism’ and ‘patriarchy’ as they observe Levitical and such laws as imperative. This tends to make the church have a minimal focus on the ministerial obligation towards the PWDs and marginalize them.

We were challenged to believe, affirm and practise inclusivity in all socio-religious spectrums of our lives. In this context we are made to recognize:

- That the PWDs are ‘also’ created in the image of God by the same Creator with equal qualities of lives.

- Some biblical passages seem to be ‘exclusive’ and ‘discriminative’ toward PWDs, but by adapting disability hermeneutics one could experience the inclusive nature of the same passages.
- Right to worship and to participate in the mission and ministries of the churches is the fundamental Right of every Christian, including PWDs. Therefore, the church as a body of Christ is yet to learn to practise a ‘transparent inclusion,’ by creating a physical space for the PWDs, by becoming an accessible and inclusive church both physically and spiritually.
- The aroma of Asian spirituality is nothing but inclusive, which upholds its unity and diversity. Therefore, it is an ecumenical call for the Asian churches to promote inclusive spirituality that affirms dignity and respect ‘of’ all, ‘for’ all, ‘with’ all, including PWDs.



- All governments are bound to uphold the UN Convention of People with Disabilities and therefore, it would be an opportunity for CCA and the Asian Churches to ecumenically involve in affirming, promoting and defending the Rights of the PWDs with the “kin-dom” values of Justice, Peace and Hope.

Therefore we commit ourselves to:

- Read the Bible through inclusive lenses by adapting disability hermeneutics.
- Affirm, defend and promote the rights of the PWDs spiritually,

theologically, ministerially and diaconially.

- Articulate the theologies and missiologies of inclusion.
- Promote disabled-friendly congregations by inculcating the culture of inclusion, and practise fuller accessibility for all.
- Encourage PWDs to actively participate in the ministries of the church and pursue theological education.
- Develop disabled-friendly worship resources by tie-up with Christian liturgy publishing houses.

We appeal to:

- The CCA and its member churches and councils to practice and promote ‘transparent-inclusion’ by becoming inclusive and practising accessibility.
- The CCA to initiate a network of disability ministries of the member churches and councils to inspire and encourage, to open a dedicated disability programme and deliberately have a PWD as a facilitator of the programme team.
- The **Asian Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network** to incessantly work on bringing the unheard conversations and stories of emancipation of the PWDs, in Asia to enlighten member churches and councils, as we march towards a society and ecclesia ‘for’ all, ‘by’ all, and ‘with’ all.
- The CCA to act as a RAMP to emancipate the theological and ministerial knowledge on disability concerns in Asia by WHEEL-CHAIRING disability conversations for cross-learning with HEARING AIDS and cross-fertilization with the help of CRUTCHES.

Yangon, October 11, 2017

Statement of the Asia Consultation on
**“Human Trafficking and Forced Migration:
A Call For Decent Labour and A Living Wage”**

a pre-event to the 2017 Asia Mission Conference

We, the participants of the Asia Consultation on Human Trafficking and Forced Migration, gathered around the shared concern of the increased occurrences of forced migration, including trafficking in persons, and their labour and services.

Our region is economically diverse, with migrant-sending, migrant-transit or migrant-destination countries, and has witnessed historic and contemporary injustices such as violations of human rights including the freedom of movement.



We lamented the disregard for the human dignity of migrants and the violation of their human rights, and listened to stories of people victimized by forced migration, especially human trafficking. We were moved by Celia Veloso's testimony about her daughter, Mary Jane Veloso, a victim of trafficking who is imprisoned with a death sentence. The campaign for her demonstrated how in the Philippines, Indonesia and around the world, united action can offer a reprieve from execution from the Indonesian government.

Forced labour migration, including trafficking and smuggling of persons, is aided and abetted by labour export programs of migrant-sending governments and the demand for cheap labour by migrant-receiving governments. This leads to the exploitation and commodification of the poor.

Migration is gendered and sexualized. The high number of women, youth and children trapped in modern-day slavery calls us to address oppressive systems.

Migration is globalized and xenophobically nationalistic, racialized and ethnicized, heightening racial discrimination and hatred among peoples. Migrants are criminalized, reduced to the documents that they possess and do not possess.

Migration cannot be isolated from concerns for decent labour and the struggle for a living wage. Decent work requires a living wage, as global public goods, with a safe and secure working environment.

Migrants are people, not documents or the financial contributions that they make.

Looking ahead, we commit to common lines of action, cooperation and solidarity to help our migrant brothers and sisters. Through service provision, pastoral care, advocacy and public awareness, we can build on each other's strengths as migrants, migrant-serving institutions, member councils, member churches and ecumenical bodies.

Our concerns arise out of our faith conviction that all persons are bearers of the divine image and are of sacred worth.

Forced migration redefines our Christian and ecumenical mission. In the light of the Gospel, our faith communities and ecumenical bodies must revisit and re-examine the mission of the church and the way we organize our churches to deliver its ministries and make visible its mission. This

requires an ecclesiology that recognizes the diversity of God's people, in both their gathered and dispersed nature, resulting, not least, through migration. It requires a Christology that recognizes the multi-faith and multi-religious character of Asia and its diaspora, and makes for an evangelistic task with dignity and integrity in such situations. Missiology must help us understand how to do mission in a plural and diverse diaspora, and in obedience to God's will for the entire oikoumene.

We arrived in Yangon as strangers to each other but are now friends and co-workers, connected by our common desire to address forced migration and human trafficking. The shalom we seek for all is none other than the peace the prophets have proclaimed: "They shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken" (Micah 4:4). The life we dream for all is none other than what our Lord Jesus has willed: "I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). We disperse as a faith community impelled by the call to "Keep loving each other like family. Don't neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:1-2).

CCA Diamond Jubilee Celebration

and

Thanksgiving Service

In commemoration of the 60 years' historic journey of Christian Conference of Asia, the thanksgiving service and Diamond Jubilee celebrative public meeting of the CCA was held on Sunday 15 October 2017, at the Franc Auditorium of the Baptist Church in Myanmar and was attended by more than 6,000 people including 600 delegates of the AMC. A homily based on the Biblical Text Acts 1:8 was delivered by Bishop Dr. Soritua Nababan, the only living participant of the 1957 Prapat Conference and a former president of the CCA.

The welcoming addresses, greetings and felicitation were from CCA Moderator, Bishop Willem T.P Simarmata, CCA Vice Moderator, Rev. Diana Tana, CCA General Secretary, Dr. Mathews George Chunakara, Rev.Dr. Olav Fyske Tveit, General Secretary of World Council of Churches and Archbishop Felix Anthony Machado of Vasai, Chairman of the Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the FABC, and Dr. Jabu of Myanmar Council of Churches were delivered accompanying the cultural presentation from diverse local ethnic groups in celebration of CCA Diamond Jubilee.

Thanksgiving Service

Homily

‘You Will Be My Witness to the Ends of the Earth’

- Bishop Dr. Soritua A. E. Nababan

Dear sisters and brothers!

I greet you in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

At the outset, I thank God Almighty for enabling us to come together and commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Christian Conference of Asia. I am also particularly thankful to God Almighty for enabling me to participate in this celebration as a person who was present at the CCA's (then East Asia Christian Conference or EACC) conference in Parapat, Indonesia 60 years ago. As a young pastor of my church, Huria Kristen Batak Protestan(HKBP) which hosted the Parapat meeting, I was assigned certain tasks to assist the organization of the Parapat Conference, and thus witnessed the efforts of the Asian church leaders who were keen to initiate and found the EACC/CCA.



As we meet in Yangon today with members of the churches in Myanmar, with the participation of representatives and leaders of all CCA

member churches and councils as well as representatives of various churches and ecumenical organizations from several parts of the world, we are all united in thanking God for CCA, to pray for CCA and its members, its leadership and its ongoing journey.



As we have gathered here now for the thanksgiving, I have chosen two familiar passages for our reflection and meditation.

The risen Lord says **BUT YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT COME UPON YOU; AND YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM, IN ALL JUDEA AND SAMARIA, AND TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.** (Acts 1: 8)

AND REMEMBER, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE END OF THE AGE. (Matthew 28: 20 b)

1. *Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.* Psalm 106: 1. This will be our hymn as we celebrate today the Diamond Jubilee of the CCA in this Thanksgiving Service. There are at least three things for which we thank God since He brought the church leaders together 60 years ago in Parapat: a) the growing awareness of being neighbours, drawn closer together in a fellowship,



called to realize their common mission as Asian churches (that is reflected in the theme: *The Common Evangelistic Task of the Churches in East Asia*) as well as the awareness of living together with people of other faiths with

all its challenges and consequences; b) the increasing mutual trust and cooperation in dealing with challenges in the lives of the churches in the societies, particularly the prophetic ministry of social judgement in the light of the gospel, and c) the growing self-consciousness of doing theology in the various contexts of Asia. Parapat was a landmark event that continues to develop because until then almost none of our churches knew each other outside their own countries.



2. One of the decisive developments in the course of the last 60 years, for which we are grateful, is the progressing, widening and deepening understanding of the gospel, transforming beyond the exclusive inherited pietistic understanding of “winning souls”. We come to have, slowly but certainly, a holistic understanding of the gospel, that it is indeed the good news about conversion



and renewal available for humankind (Mark 1: 15) and also about freedom, justice, righteousness and welfare willed by the Lord for the world (Luke 4: 18-21). The churches have realized the

need to be jointly responsible – sharing the responsibility with people of different faiths – in all the efforts to free humankind from its sufferings caused by backwardness, poverty, diseases, fear and the uncertainty

of law. They are called to be fully involved in striving for justice in all walks of life; called to cooperate with people of all faiths to abolish hypocrisy, falseness, corruption, and dishonesty; and called also to strive for the welfare of all humankind, physically and spiritually. The CCA has



been performing its mission and witness during the past 60 years in various ways. In this journeying together, we received the abundant mercies and blessings of God Almighty for which we need to be thankful continuously.



3. One of the ways to widen the understanding of *the evangelistic task* is to read Mark 16: 15 anew: “*Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation!*” So, the address is not only to people and nations but to the whole creation. This awakens the awareness of the reality and the threat of climate change that is happening now and at rates much faster than previously thought: extreme weather events, higher recorded temperature, rising sea levels and disappearing islands,





melting glaciers, giant floods and increasing heavy storms, and unimaginable landslides. The economy of greed has led to free competition in exploiting the natural resources and in destroying forests – all disrespecting

nature as a creation of God just as humankind is, and unmindful of the damages caused in the life of people around us.

4. During the past 60 years, especially since the advent of globalisation followed by the new digital era, churches in Asia became more aware of the wider and deeper missional involvement in the concerns of the world: the challenge of economic injustice deeply embedded in the economic structure of society, locally, nationally and internationally; religious intolerance and the many proxy wars that threaten peace in the world. We thank God that even if sometimes our churches took different stances on certain issues, which created tensions among our churches, in the end our churches reached a common understanding of the basic task. The expulsion of CCA from Singapore was a living witness to the world that our churches prefer to side with victims of injustice and to care for the needy rather than enjoy living in a comfort zone accommodated by an autocratic regime. The expulsion also strengthened the fellowship and enhanced the solidarity of the churches in Asia.

5. In facing the challenges of our times, there are always temptations to avoid responsibility, make excuses, be hesitant because of lack or uncertainty of information, be anxious and fearful because of the concrete threat of the powerful and the oppressor. Often, our smaller numbers among the many different faiths become an excuse not to carry out our task in hand. In many cases, there is the temptation to live happily and enjoy the comfort zone provided by the political structure.

6. One expression of gratitude at this Diamond Jubilee could be that we, all of us, members and leaders of the churches, here in Myanmar and in other Asian countries realize anew that we are witnesses sent by the living Lord now. He also equips each of us and all community of believers with a

power given by the Holy Spirit. This is the first and foremost fact that we are reminded today. It is the power – *dynamis* – which is more powerful than all powers we know in the world, political and economic. However, it is also more powerful than the sufferings caused by poverty, violent oppression, and all natural and manmade disasters. We should always remember that it is a power meant to enable and protect us as witnesses. If we do not witness, the power will not be given to us because we cannot own, keep or direct the Holy Spirit.

7. Keeping this always in mind and mutually reminding ourselves that we are witnesses will enable us to move in our journey together. For there is another temptation—while we are ready to journey together, we may unconsciously walk on the same spot or keep walking around without moving ahead. Here we need to remember that we are sent to continuously move centrifugally – *in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria* – and forward, *to the ends of the earth*. And see, how many billions of people here in Asia, which is also in “the ends of the earth”, have not yet heard the Good News or seen the Light. Being entangled in church traditions and internal activities is one form of walking on the same spot or walking around without moving ahead. Let us today beseech the Lord to pour His Holy Spirit on us and on all the churches in Asia and in the world so that we can move forward, that we may be enabled to make God’s love present and effective in all these contexts.

8. The other message is to hold the promise of the risen Lord that He will *be with us, to the end of the age*. This is the assurance which we should never doubt. Because He is faithful – we can trust Him – though we are often unfaithful. He is with us not only during good times when we enjoy freedom and success, but also when we are persecuted, discriminated, pushed to the peripheries, alienated or oppressed. That is the good news.

9. When He mentions that those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, strangers, or prisoners are “*the least of those who are members of His family*” (Matt 25: 35-40), He wants to also mention that He is with them in their situation, in their very dire need and suffering. That is why He said: “*Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.*”

10. Being with Him and empowered by the Holy Spirit means not to let

the status quo stand but reform it, change the situation, so that people are freed from their sufferings and structures are changed for the benefit of all people's welfare.

11. It is not the only absolute certainty, but the duration of His being with all His witnesses "*to the end of the age*" is an absolute certainty. Nobody can change this assurance. Even when it seems that a situation is God-forsaken, in reality the Lord is always present – because He says that, because He promises that, and because He keeps that promise.

12. As in the beginning in 1957, now we are called in this globalisation and digital era to journey together, demonstrating God's love for all people in Jesus Christ, present and effective in all contexts, here in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and all other Asian countries.

13. Let us therefore renew our commitment to hold to this promise, so that our celebration today becomes a new step to joyfully journey together to witness prophetically the Truth and the Light, which is Christ Himself, in Asia. Amen.

Ephorus Dr. Soritua A.E. Nababan, LLD has the distinction of being the only living participant of the 1957 Prapat Conference who attended the AMC and the CCA Diamond Jubilee celebrations in Yangon, Myanmar. He belongs to the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP). He served as the first Youth Secretary of CCA, President of CCA, Vice Moderator and later as President of the World Council of Churches. He chaired two World Mission Conferences (in Bangkok and in Melbourne) initiated by CWME/WCC.

Diamond Jubilee Celebration

Welcome Address

*- Dr. Mathews George Chunakara
General Secretary, CCA*

Esteemed ecumenical friends and colleagues,

Greetings and welcome on behalf of CCA



I take this opportunity to welcome you all to this event. Six decades ago, in 1957, our forefathers met in Prapat, Indonesia to form the first regional ecumenical organization in the world. They discussed there on the theme,

“Our common evangelistic tasks in Asia’ in 1957, with participants of 23 countries. For the first time in protestant churches, delegates from different churches and NCCs came together for the Asian Countries’ Conference. It was the first Asian consultative event organized and sponsored by Asian churches and International Missionary Council and WCC respectively.

We have been meeting in Yangon to discuss on the theme for the Asia Mission Conference: ‘Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the truth and light, in Asia’. We also commemorate the 60th anniversary of CCA. Ecumenical organizations from around the world have come. There are ecclesiastical leaders such as heads of churches, archbishops, bishops, general secretaries of churches and general secretaries of NCC, and heads

of evangelistic desks of churches and organizations – from within Asia and beyond Asia. They are all part of this historic meeting.

When CCA completes its 60 years, we are reminded that 60 years is very significant. The 60th anniversary Diamond Jubilee is remarkable for an organization. When a person reaches the age of 60, he/she has completed one life cycle. The number 60 means ending one cycle and starting a new cycle. In Indian culture and most South Asian cultures, it is a celebration of completion of half of one's lifetime.

We are reminded of our task and the continuation of our journey here.

It was recorded in 1957 that Prapat would be remembered with places like Edinburgh, Amsterdam, etc. for ecumenical significance. It was initiated by the Asian church leaders – Asian leaders themselves took the initiative to gather together. When the CCA celebrates the Diamond Jubilee with the Asia Mission Conference along with 600 participants, this is of great significance. As the hosting city for the AMC-2017 and CCA Diamond Jubilee, Yangon will also be recorded as an important ecumenical location. This is all due to active participation and support of its member churches, starting from Iran in West, Japan in the East, Nepal in the North and New Zealand in the South.

We have with us today the WCC general secretary. In 1957, WCC was also at Prapat. He will be extending the Diamond Jubilee message. An invitation was extended for them to be part of this event, especially because CCA and the WCC have many of the same member churches in Asia. Rev. Olav Fyske Tveit is an ordained minister of the Church of Norway.

We have with us Archbishop Felix Machado of Vasai, chairman of the Ecumenical and Interreligious affairs of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

Representing the Myanmar Christian Council and Myanmar Churches is Dr. Ja Bu.

Rev. Diana Tana, Vice Moderator of CCA, and Bishop Willem Simarmata, Moderator of CCA, are also here at this event.

We remember, welcome and acknowledge several ecumenical luminaries who have been directly linked with CCA and its leadership in the past. Bishop Dr. Nababan, who delivered the homily, is the only living member who had attended the 1957 meeting of Prapat.

There have been nine general secretaries who have served before me.

John Victor Samuel is very sick and unfortunately could not be present, but we have heard from his wife and she mentioned how he is still talking about CCA. They extended their good wishes.

Three of my predecessors are present, it is a great source of encouragement: Rev. Ahn Jae Woong, Rev. Prawate Khidarn and Rev. Henriette Lebang.

It is also happy to note that all three of them and myself, four of us were staff members at CCA at the same time. Who knows if it was coincidence or providence, or a part of God's grand design.

Dr. Theresa Carino who was very much a part of us when CCA was in Hong Kong is also in our midst.

Several former officers are attending this event. There are former officers, either former general secretaries, presidiums or treasurers, and younger members as well. Former presidents, former executive staff members, etc. I would like to welcome to all delegates of member churches and member councils, ecumenical councils, organizations, partners etc. A large number of people participated with us during our thanksgiving service. There are several hopeful signs and indicators coming from this country of expanding ecumenism.

Hearty welcome to all .

Presidential Address

- *Bishop Willem T.P Simarmata*
Moderator, CCA

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Mr. Saw Patrick Loo Nee and Rev. Yam Kho Pau, let me express our sincere gratitude for your hospitality, being the hosting churches during this Asia Mission Conference and also



for this Diamond Jubilee. Distinguished guests from ecumenical partners, WCC General Secretary, and also all of you that I cannot mention right now, distinguished speakers and all participants of the AMC, Vice Moderator Diana Tana, and respected general secretary of CCA, Mathews George. I have to thank also Bishop Dr. Nababan for his homily today and we have to thank God because he is still with us today. I am so grateful and I have the privilege to convey the presidential address for the 60th Diamond Jubilee commemoration for CCA today. Let me share my thoughts that I would like to correlate with the 500th Jubilee for Reformation this year.

Firstly, the journey of Reformation for 500 years, and CCA for 60, is the history of journeying together. If we look at the theme seriously, journeying together contains an endless recognition of our ecumenical movement. A constant process of repentance. The Christian truth is always focusing on repentance and renewal. What does this mean to struggle for the truth nowadays in Asian churches? In order to be able to live in truth, churches in Asia should be putting their emphasis in holistic processes of social and religious processes of transformation rather than a hierarchical institution.

The diamond jubilee of CCA and Reformation jubilee in 2017 should be articulating the ecumenical topic that is urgent for the survival of human kind. How can the social system repent? How can we be transformed by the wisdom of God? How can our greedy capitalistic societies change their lifestyles radically? How can we strive for an ethical society, which is at the core of ecological and social responsible civilization? Some of these questions have been responded by our speakers. Sr. Sudha Varghese – a social activist working over 2 decades with the most downtrodden Musahar community that are rat eaters. Her life has been meaningful for others. How can our church in Asia reform for caring for the many? Our church in Asia caring for others; a church should be for others. A church that is not capable of reforming has no future here on Earth. The CCA should work together as a team towards supporting members in our communities for moving forward. CCA should journey together with other religious elements – Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Confucian – together to voice loudly, to plan strategically, and act wisely. To reform and transform our lifestyle.

Second, to be the truth and light means bearing the cross as we did everyday with bringing the cross. Reformation defines the significance to the truth and light by remembering the theology of the cross. This will inspire us and encourage us in Asia to act bravely for the better life of people. Wisely, in God's way. I have to admit, our cross in Asia is even harder and heavier nowadays than before. We are worried about worsening political tensions in the Korean peninsula, we are besought to learn about terrorism in Philippines, the killing of 10,000 people mysteriously due to the war against drugs. We still see in Asia violence, discrimination, trafficking, religious intolerance, and extremisms. Therefore, 60 years for CCA should be commemorated in a form of mutual solidarity; each one should take part to support the programs of CCA. Commemoration today should be the starting point of a commitment for CCA to experience the lives of the marginalized.

Third, let us see that mission and unity are inseparably. Our regional and social structure has been changed for 500 years, and 60 years in Asia. I present two examples. First, the significant increase in Pentecostal, evangelistic and individual churches in Asia, which has emerged in opposition and separation with traditional mainline reformation churches. Second, a significant increase in Muslim population, radically and extremely regionally and globally. We are impressed by the statement of the Interfaith speakers at the Asia Mission Conference. Faith and spirituality of truth and light, human society can be a better society for one

and for all. From their texts, I find out a divine longing of the interfaith community in Asia. We should bring the principle of reformation in our present contexts, and therefore, brothers and sisters, may I urge to all of you in Asia, interreligious dialogue must be strengthened in Asia. Asia in the future will be the center of Christianity, and our youth and children should be ready for that change.

I am humbly thanking God for the hope that is given to CCA up until now. My sincere gratitude to all our leaders, members, who have contributed their life, time and energy to form and reform the CCA until now.

Thank you very much.

Diamond Jubilee Message

Journeying Together means that We are not Alone!

*- Rev. Dr. Olav Fyske Tveit
General Secretary, World Council of Churches*

Distinguished Moderator of the Conference of Churches in Asia, Archbishop William Simmermata; General Secretary of the CCA, Mathews George Chunakara; Cardinal Charles Bo, Archbishop of Yangon; representatives of the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar; church leaders from all member churches of CCA; leaders from the churches here in Myanmar; representatives of ecumenical organizations and churches from the rest of the world; delegates of the Asia Mission Conference, dear sisters and brothers in Christ: I bring greetings and blessings from the fellowship of World Council of Churches, from our moderator Dr Agnes Aboum,



and the vice-moderators, at this significant Diamond jubilee, the 60th anniversary of the Conference of Churches in Asia. You are “Journeying together” to strengthen the “Prophetic witness to the truth and light in Asia.” You mark the anniversary by focusing on your tasks. Celebrating an ecumenical body by reflecting on mission is a very good idea. Unity and mission belongs together.

1. An anniversary is a benchmark on the road, a place to pause and to reflect, but not to stop. It is significant that your theme starts with a description of the past that also points to the way forwards. You have been journeying together, and you are ready to move forward together. This is also the literary meaning of mission: To be sent, to move forward, out

there, with the people, where God is present as creator, savior, and life giver. That is where we shall reflect the light of God.

2. In the mission of God we are called to move together. The first disciples were sent (at least) in pairs, two and two. The Christian Conference of Asia was established to find new ways to pursue the mission and the unity of the Church here in Asia. There is no Christian mission that is done as a private and personal enterprise, neither a business for a few specialists or somebody who have great visions for their own sake or for the ambitions of their own church only. It is not an effort to establish our own kingdoms, or our own privileges, but efforts to share more of the coming Kingdom of God. Mission is our common work, our joint witness, it is God's mission. It is a response to the call to preach and show that the Kingdom of God is near (Luke 10:9). It is a journey together to live in reconciliation between God and us, between us, and to share the call to reconciliation. The qualities of these relationships are the expressions of the Kingdom of God; the relationships developed among us should carry the values of justice and peace.

3. Therefore, in mission there must be a prophetic witness to the truth and the light. There must be something and somebody who helps us – all of us, including the Church – to see more clearly and to see the truth. That is also why we need mission together, mission in unity: we need the mutual accountability of sharing the light and truth with one another, reminding one another of what is the way forward. There is a truth we owe each other, so that we can witness to the truth together - in Asia, in the world. For our life together as churches and for our common witness for the truth, therefore, we need both the call to mission and to unity. Therefore, we need to renew our willingness to journey together.

4. Any ecumenical organization and institution must share this to fulfill its purpose. Therefore, it is quite proper that the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) is commemorated in a mission conference of Asia. The World Council of Churches and the global ecumenical family mark this occasion by expressing our deep appreciation for the witness of the CCA over the past 60 years. It is a celebration that reminds us of the historic formation of this vital heart of ecumenism in Asia, an organization which was constituted by a decision of churches, national councils of churches in Asia and Christian councils, whose representatives gathered at Prapat, in Sumatra,

Indonesia, in 1957. A gathering that was jointly supported by WCC and the International Missionary Council (IMC) and for which the first General Secretary of WCC, Rev Dr Willem A. Visser 't Hooft personally attended. WCC's accompaniment and support to the formation of the erstwhile East Asia Conference of Asia (EACC), which later became the CCA in 1957 opened a new chapter in WCC's history, as it was the first time that the WCC would play a significant role in the formation of a regional ecumenical organization. Later on the International Council of Mission became an advisory commission within the World Council of Churches. Here in Asia you made this natural merge between unity and mission some years before the WCC. The WCC will celebrate our 70th anniversary next year, and one of the significant events next year is a World Mission Conference in Arusha, Tanzania.

5. The 60th anniversary celebration is an occasion for both the CCA and the global ecumenical movement to celebrate our common ecumenical commitment in Asia. CCA is a vibrant and living forum continuing cooperation among the churches and national Christian bodies in Asia, within the framework of the wider ecumenical movement. You are participating in the mission of God in Asia – and you are working for the benefit for the wider world.

The modern ecumenical movement was a continuation of a long journey of Christian life in Asia. The Christian presence in Asia has been witnessing from the very beginning of Christianity, with the St. Thomas Christians in India, Nestorian Christians in China in the seventh century, with Franciscan missionaries active in parts of the Asia in the 13th Century, and extensive Protestant and Catholic missions from the 16th to the 20th Century.

Even being a minority (with a few exceptions), and often linked to the colonial history, Christianity in Asia is truly integrated as a great tradition in Asia, witnessing Christ in contexts that are both diverse in religion and culture. Asian Christians have been showing that mission means working together and serving together in diakonia: transforming society with their dynamism, willingness to integrate, contributing to the building up of society – particularly in schools and in hospitals, but also helping in challenging systemic injustices and breaking down barriers and building bridges. Christians in Asia in their unique journey in following Jesus Christ, with their agency, have taught and enriched the world greatly in

many domains - to name a few : Witnessing and demonstrating a costly discipleship; promoting inter-religious dialogue and in living in harmony with other faiths; challenging oppressive social systems and in solidarity, placing themselves in the margins of society; contributing beauty and spirituality to liturgy and worship; Asian Theology is opening up new insights and horizons for global Christian theological thinking; and the presence of Christian missionaries from Asian countries, serving people all over the world.

6. Sixty years from now, how will they judge us when they will reflect back to this day? The question raised at this anniversary event is: Why must the call to mission be responded to as a call to journey together? The obvious answer is that unity is urgently needed. We know that from a Biblical perspective and our own experiences. We read that Christ prayed - and I believe he almost cried - that the disciples should be one so that there could be credibility in the witness to Jesus Christ. So that the world may believe that this is really about the truth, the truth about God, about ourselves, about our lives. So that the world may have real light in darkness, not only an illusion. Why did Jesus pray for this? Because he knew that it is not so easy to journey together. Because we know that it is not so easy to walk together, even when the intentions are the best, and the vision and commitment is strong. Because we know that we are different, we do not always understand one another, we might be frustrated and provoked by the others. Sometimes for very good reasons, sometimes for reasons we should be able to handle.

7. The project of Christian mission, particularly in the 19th and early 20th century, was also in many ways to tirelessly share the Gospel, the truth and the light of God, with the whole world – but the implications was that this also led to the sharing of the confessional and historical divisions of the Church to the whole world. The wisdom of bringing the mission movement and the ecumenical call together was realistic, constructive – and strategic, clearly expressed already in Edinburgh in 1910. Later, there have been and are many challenges to bring the mission movements and the ecumenical movements together in a common witness by the churches. We are not called to be one so that the world may see that the churches are perfect or uniformed, or that they pretend to be so. But we are called to be one so that the world may believe that we are called to love one another embracing our differences and living in repentance for our short-comings. We are called to be one so that the love of God can transform us and the

world as we reflect the truth and the light of God who calls all people to live in justice and peace. We share a truth that we are given by the Holy Spirit. This is also why we owe this truth to one another. Truth is not our private property, or the privilege of our church, confession, group, tribe, party, cast or nation. Truth is a gift of God. And therefore must be shared, with all, also with the Church.

8. Dear sisters and brothers, it is possible to make further progress in bringing the quest for unity and the mission closer together. Your conference here is one excellent example of that. I believe that we have a momentum for this journeying together in our time. This means that we search for expressions of our unity by doing together what we can do together in mission through evangelism and diakonia. This is the common service for justice and peace, and this can be the way forward towards more visible unity. We celebrate the many expressions of unity we have achieved, knowing there are many more issues to deal with that are dividing the churches. If we are able to have a stronger focus on our common tasks in the Kingdom of God and less on ourselves and our interests, the Holy Spirit can move us together towards more signs of unity – so the world may believe.

9. This is even more urgent in a time when there are so many forces dividing us as human beings, but also as Christians. We are living in an era of profound contradictions, tensions, divisions, even conflicts and wars. There are so many powers and interests that are driving us apart that are breaking down the bonds of fellowship, the qualities of relations that is given to us in the Kingdom of God and its justice and peace. The world, also here in Asia, is in great need of another vision for the future than pursuing only their own interests or building closed units based in political, economical or traditional privileges. We do not need unity that is exclusive, that make the diversity among us to walls of separation, of conflict, even a motivation for violence. Ethnic, national, political and religious identities are used to define who are included and who are excluded. We have to remember that we all have a mixture of roles, relations and identities. Our identity as disciples of Christ should be a light to others that encourage them to accept themselves as they are, and to see themselves as part of the wider human fellowship God has created us to be. Therefore we also need the truth, and the truth to be told, the truth about the human dignity and the human rights, for all, all.

10. The peoples of Asia have been and are experiencing violence and war and fear of war, often also due to the involvement of powers outside Asia. This has been part of your history, but it is also part of your journey together today. The war is holding its breath for what might happen at the Korean peninsula. Together we are praying and working for peace, every day. Some of the conflicts today are related to scandalous economic disparity and injustice. We live in a world where eight men own the same wealth as the 3.6 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity. The poor are becoming increasingly impoverished and rich become wealthier. Use and abuse of political and economic powers results often in flagrant abuse of human rights and the extensive infringement of civil and political rights. We live in a world that produces enough food to feed everyone, yet 815 million people – one in nine – still going to sleep on an empty stomach each night. We live in a world with 65.6 million people forcibly displaced from their homes due to conflicts, famines and financial hardships - the highest number in human history. We live in world which continues to invest \$1.57 trillion each year in weapons of war, including nuclear weapons that can destroy all of us. We live in a world contributing to climate change and destroying 7 million hectares of forest annually and destroying the planet's natural ecosystems and compromising the ability of the planet to sustain life.

11. Dear sisters and brothers, there is an urgent need for another vision of the unity with all our diversity God has given us, but also with a vision for the justice and the peace God has given us. There is an urgent need for the truth and the light of the unity that can protect all of us in our vulnerability as human beings and as one planet.

12. We are meeting here in this beautiful county Myanmar, whose government and churches have welcomed us to have these celebrations as well as have the ensuing Asian Mission Conference. This country has gone through significant changes towards democracy and shared power, and the churches have a strong ecumenical commitment. There are many challenges for this nation as it is for many tribal and religious groups here, particularly when it comes to the need for open inclusive and just communities for all.

13. Overall in the world we see that religion, ethnicity, history and the nation states are making us related to one another in our human family. That does not mean that we have the right to promote exclusion and conflict based on these dimensions of our lives. To the contrary, we should share a vision of fellowship that are giving light to those who experience

darkness, those who live in the shadows of death, those who are persecuted or discriminated. The character of our Christian faith is that we believe in, worship and preach the triune God, the creator, the liberator, saviour, and the life giver. The mission of this God is to care for all, and the wellbeing, the justice and the peace of all.

14. Journeying together means that we are not alone! We believe that we are journeying together with the Triune God who works in a world that is groaning, along with humanity, for its redemption and final fulfillment in Christ (Rom 8:22). CCA is expressing a hope, a prayer, in your commitment to journeying together. The World Council of Churches names this a “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace”. We are journeying together praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is also expressed in the theme for the upcoming World Conference on Mission and Evangelism, which is meeting in Arusha, Tanzania in March 2018. That theme is: ‘Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship’. We are on a pilgrimage that is not only a journey identifying the problems of the world. It is characterized by giving light and hope for a transformed world of justice and peace. This happens through our constructive involvement in the life of our people, our communities, our nations, our region, our world. This is what it means to bring a prophetic message amidst the complexities of today’s world.

15. This we have to do together. That is why we pause together, to see, to give thanks together to God, to renew our call and finding the direction forward. Together, with a shared but not yet accomplished mission.

May God grant you the grace that 60 years from now, our future generations can remark about our generation: They journeyed together. They brought truth and light to Asia, to the world. Together.

May God bless you and all churches in Asia!

Felicitation Addresses

(1). Archbishop Felix Machado

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC)

As Chairman of the Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious affairs of the FABC, I stand before you also in the name of the president of the FABC.



The Lord has been generous to us, we also have tried our best to respond faithfully to our Lord's prayer that they may be one, as you and I are one. Our meeting on such a joyful occasion is also a moment of encouragement for us to do anything possible to journey together towards full and visible unity of all missions. It is a joint occasion of the 60th year anniversary on contributing the nurturing and strengthening of the ecumenical vision in Asia. The presence of the Trinitarian God ensures us – yes, it is why we are doing the *missio deo*. I am referring to the historic mission conference in 1910, Edinburgh in which the ecumenical movement was born and the mission conference in 1957, Prapat in which the CCA was born, and the mission conference that has been taking place today. To take part in this mission conference and in the Diamond Jubilee of CCA.

The theme which has been chosen for the AMC is linked to the hope and relevance of CCA in the Asian context. We hope that the current situation faces grave realities, in the face of adverse realities. It emphasizes the hope and trust we need in God's promises. We must continue to be transformed

by the encounter of the other and mutual witness of our faith. We must continue the great adventures ahead of us. Our two bodies, CCA and FABC, have distinct characteristics. FABC is the Federation of the Asian Bishop Conferences, but does not include Australia nor New Zealand. The CCA does. Our two bodies, since 1995, we have worked together officially, but unofficially for many years before that. Our joint efforts include AMCU – this endeavor is for the fulfilment of ecumenical mission in Asia. We still have far to go to reach the goal that the Lord has set for us. I appreciate the missions made by the Myanmar Council of Churches and the Myanmar Baptist Convention for the successful unfolding of this occasion, and I conclude with a humble prayer. Lord God, with your great mercy, enrich all of us, members of different churches, with your grace and strengthen us with your mercy so that we may serve you with our bodies.

(2). Dr. Ja Bu

Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC)

On behalf of the Myanmar Council of Churches, it is a great privilege and honour for me to stand before you to read this letter of felicitation from MCC to the CCA, particularly at this occasion of the Asia Mission Conference and Diamond Jubilee. The MCC and its member churches would like to give thanks to God for his bountiful blessings in spite of weaknesses and failures. We give thanks to God for the CCA for its life and mission since its conception 60 years ago at Prapat in Indonesia. We pay tribute to the CCA for its grateful service to God and his Kingdom.

We learn that the word Prapat means come together. 60 years ago, representatives of our Asian churches came together at Prapat for life together, accepting that they belong together as sisters and brothers. We give thanks to God that Myanmar churches came together with other Asian churches together at Prapat. We give thanks to God that our respected leader, Prof. U Kyaw Than was an organizer at the conference. At this conference, we remember him, knowing that he would have been here with us, if he had not passed away five months ago. We give thanks to God that U Kyaw Than was the associate general secretary of the East Asian Christian Conference at 1957 and succeeded again as general secretary in 1967, serving until 1973. Due to the changes of the political situations of Myanmar since 1962, we have been in a moratorium for 60 years. No church leaders were allowed to go abroad to attend ecumenical meetings, and were

totally isolated from the ecumenical fellowships. During those moratorium years, visits from CCA leadership gave witness to our ecumenical solidarity in the midst of total isolation. Even though Myanmar churches did not have much opportunities to share our experience for the past several years, we have benefited so much from CCA and other sister churches. Several women and youth leaders participated in workshops, trainings, training of trainers, capability building, etc. We are indeed most grateful to CCA for the opportunities to participate in the Asian ecumenical movement, especially in the governing bodies of CCA. By way of information, the MCC has developed a new initiate for ecumenical leadership since 1990. It is a one-month intensive training, and we anticipate the possibility of inviting other church participants in the near future.

We give sincere thanks to God and CCA for the opportunity given to us to host the Asian Ecumenical Institute, Asia Mission Conference and Diamond Jubilee here in our beloved golden land of Myanmar. In our part as your host, we have tried our best to make your time and stay here fruitful, joyful and meaningful. However, we are sure there have been mistakes, inconveniences, and unexpected problems during these events. For all those, we sincerely apologize and ask for your understanding.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, 60 years ago in Prapat, our representatives came together for life together. Today, after 60 years, we come together here in Yangon to journey together in the household of God, a family of God in prophetic witness to truth and light in Asia and throughout the world.

May the Lord continue to protect, guide the CCA to become faithful instrument for extension of God's kingdom, fulfillment of his purpose.

Following the statement from Dr. Ja Bu, Bishop Willem TP Simarmata, Moderator of the Christian Conference of Asia, invited Mr. Steven Kardow, who accepted the responsibility of hosting the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly and Easter Celebration next year on behalf of the people of North Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Our Profound Thanks

- *Rev. Diana Tana*
Vice Moderator, CCA

Greetings and salutations. It is indeed a pleasure and honour to be given this opportunity to express a vote of thanks to a number of people. As you have already heard, participants have gathered around Asia and the world to attend the Asia Mission Conference, the first since 1994, and to celebrate this Diamond Jubilee of CCA. I have heard people say, “Isn’t this a wonderful occasion”. And it’s not over yet. We have been privy to an inspiring homily during our service this afternoon, and to wonderful addresses. Thank you for recording our history and keeping us focused on the present, and allowing us to dream a new future for CCA, and calling upon God to centre us all in this endeavor together. We say thank you, and thank you for the invitation extended in North Sulawesi. To all member churches and councils, ecumenical partners, funding partners, sponsorship partners, women’s groups and fellowships, seminaries and theological institutes, and the World Council of Churches: thank you for your representatives here for their presence and participation and ongoing support. In January of this year, as part of my sabbatical, I accompanied Grace to Myanmar to workshop the worship services for the Asia Mission Conference and Diamond Jubilee. To meet the representatives of the hosting churches to get a feel for their thinking in terms of the preparation, and to see firsthand



the locations and building that might be utilized. The representatives of the hosting churches warmly welcomed us. They have done an amazing job, and we say to them – MCC, MBC and other churches and religious communities in Yangon and Myanmar who have played a role big and small towards the success of these events, and to the work done here in this special event today. We say thank you.

With any major event to be organized, there are always local arrangement committees, this time they have done an outstanding job at meeting our needs and making sure that we want for nothing. You have gone over and above what you needed to do. Thank you so much. To all the exhibition booths, thank you for being here and showing us your efforts. To the presenters and panelists, you have challenged our theological perspectives and paved the way for new understandings of our lives and faith. You have taught us to explore new ways of readings and understanding scripture. Thank you for spending the time to share them with us. Thank you.

Central to the work and prep for these two events have been involved the efforts of the Executive Committee, especially the dynamic leadership of CCA General Secretary Dr. Mathews George Chunakara, all the staff of CCA, the stewards and interns, to ensure the success of these events. Thank you.

At the beginning of our conference, throughout the day and at the end of each day, including our commemorative and thanksgiving service, we give and continue to give thanks to God. We sang, we danced, we learned hymns, and we listened to the choir to the beat of the drums and crash of cymbals and tinkle of the piano. Thank you very much.

To the participants. Many of you have travelled halfway around the world to be here. You have left your churches, families, and faith communities in the hands of God. Soon, you will return to them and be reunited. Thank you for coming and being part of this historic occasion.

To the government of Myanmar, to the representatives present. On behalf of the CCA, we thank you for allowing us to come here, and allowing us to hold the AMC here in Yangon, and to celebrate with you and your people our DJ. Greetings and salutations and thank you very much.

Last but not least, to the people of Myanmar, greetings and salutations. On behalf of the CCA, we say thank you for your warmth and hospitality. Thank you for your strength and courage and for your kindness and warmth of spirit. We will continue to pray for your wellbeing and miss you always.

Finally, we give praise and glory to almighty God, may He/She continue to bless us and keep us always. Thanks be to God. Thank you.

List of Participants
Asia Mission Conference - 2017

List of Participants

1. A Ko Lay, Judson Church Yangon in Myanmar
2. Absalom Daniel Takayeitouw, Evangelical Christian Church in Tanah Papua
3. Adil William, Assemblies of God in Pakistan
4. Agrawal Jayant, Church of North India
5. Agostinho De Fatima, Protestant Church in Timor
6. Agustinus Pengarapen Purba, Karo Batak Protestant Church in Indonesia
7. Ah Sah, Methodist Church, Lower Myanmar
8. Ai Pau Rung, Lashio Council of Churches in Myanmar
9. Akane Shinoda, Nippon Sei Ko Kai (Anglican Church in Japan)
10. Akiko Aria, United Church of Christ in Japan
11. Alan Falconer Miller, Church of Scotland
12. Albert Sundaraj D. R. Walters, The Anglican Diocese of West Malaysia
13. Alexander Moffat Sneddon, Church of Scotland
14. Aleyamma Thomas, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
15. Alida Nababan, Batak Protestant Christian Church
16. Allen Christy Dayal Vijjeswarapu, Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church
17. Alphinus Kambodji, The East Java Christian Church
18. Alvaro O. Senturias Jr, Cosmopolitan Church in Manila in the Philippines
19. Amanda Jane Tibbey, Uniting Church in Australia
20. Andrea Mary Mann, Anglican Church of Canada

21. Andrew Chan, Bishop, The Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui
22. Andrew, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
23. Ann Elaine Bourquist, International Ministries, American Baptist Church USA
24. Anna Julian, MCFB
25. Annie Daniel Daw, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
26. Archimandrite Oleg (Cherepanin), Russian Orthodox Church
27. Arisdo Marbun, Jakarta Theological Seminary
28. Arul Dhas Thanka Nadar, Christian Medical College in India
29. Ashim Kumar Baroi, Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha
30. Asir Ebenezer, Church of South India
31. Asiri Priyalal Perera, Methodist Church in Sri Lanka
32. Augustine Dipak Karmakar, Church of Bangladesh
33. Aung Myat Tun, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
34. Aung Myint Htwe, Kyon Pyaw Regional Council of Church in Myanmar
35. Aung Myint Khing, Pathein Council of Churches
36. Aung Pe Than, Methodist Church, Lower Myanmar
37. Aung Thura Kyaw, Methodist Church, Lower Myanmar
38. Aye Kywe, Daw, National YWCA in Myanmar
39. Aye Mu Mu Aung, Myanmar Council of Churches
40. Ayub Masih, Presbyterian Church of Pakistan
41. Ba Kyin Hla, Pyay Council of Churches
42. Baekki Heo, Korean Christian Church in Japan
43. Bang Joo Chin, Presbyterian Church of Korea
44. Bardia Matiu, Te Runanga Whakawhanunga I Nga Hahi O Aotearoa New Zealand

45. Barry Paul Dawson, Presbyterian Church USA
46. Benjamin, Vision Trust in Myanmar
47. Beulah Rajamanickam, Madurai Lady Doak College in India
48. Bian Rongaliang, China Christian Council
49. Bishop Daniel, Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Church, Diocese of Sydney
50. Bishop Kuriakose Mar Theophilose, Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in India
51. Bishop San Si Htay, Church of the Province of Myanmar
52. Bohyun Hwang, Korean Methodist Church
53. Bokyoung Park, Presbyterian University & Theological Seminary, Presbyterian Church of Korea
54. Boo Won Nam, Asia & Pacific Alliance of YMCAs in Hong Kong
55. Budi Cahyono Hartono, Gereja Isa Almasih in Indonesia
56. Byoung Woo Lee, Presbyterian Church of Korea
57. C.Thauung Lin, Lorrain Theological College in Myanmar
58. Camillus Fernando, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
59. Carlos Ocampo, Uniting Church of Christ in Australia
60. Carmencita Karagdag, Philippines Independent Church
61. Carolyn Rubavathy, Madurai Lady Doak College in India
62. Catherine Sujean Chang, United Church of Christ in the Philippines
63. Cecilia Chikako Shimojo, Nippon Sei Ko Kai (Anglican Church in Japan)
64. Chak Tong Wong, Methodist Church in Hong Kong
65. Chang Bae Byun, Presbyterian Church of Korea
66. Cheh Liang Mok, Council for World Mission
67. Chen Ching-Yuan, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

68. Chhakchhuak Zohmingliani, Presbyterian Church of India
69. Chi Yu Chen, Taiwan Christian Church Music Ministry Association
70. Chin Hsing Lee, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
71. Chinda Soukpaseuth, Lao Evangelical Church
72. Choon Jung Huh, Presbyterian Church of Korea
73. Choon Pin Kang, Council for World Mission
74. Christian Tamala, Ambon Christian University in Indonesia
75. Christopher Rajkumar, National Council of Churches in India
76. Christopher Sonawane, Christian Conference of Asia
77. Christopher Vijayan Selvamony, The National Missionary Society in India
78. Chul Ho Lee, Korea Evangelical Church
79. Chun Ho Samson Jeremiah Fan, Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui, Anglican Church
80. Chung Chih Chang (Hong), Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
81. Claus Grue, World Council of Churches
82. Corrie Margaretha Van Der Ven, Protestant Church of the Netherlands
83. Cynthia Shinde, National Council of Churches in India
84. Dale Ruby Peach, Methodist Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
85. Daniel S. Thiagarajah, Bishop, Jaffna Diocese of Church of South India
86. Danilo Azuela Borlado, Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches
87. Darwin Samuel Prajanna Balan, Church of Ceylon
88. David Aniruda Das, National Council of Churches in Bangladesh
89. David Colin Poultney, Methodist Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
90. David Paul Jeffrey, The United Methodist Church in the USA

91. David Suresh, Church of South India
92. Daw Aye Aye New, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
93. Daw Beaulah Aye, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
94. Daw Debora, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
95. Daw Esther Lay
96. Daw Khin Khin, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
97. Daw Li Mi San
98. Daw Lily, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
99. Daw Maw Ni
100. Daw May Aye Shwe
101. Daw Mya Thida Lwin, Precious Grace Baptist Church in Myanmar
102. Daw Nyunt Nyunt Thein
103. Daw Nyunt Nyunt Thein
104. Daw Phyu Phyu Zaw, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
105. Daw Rugh Daniel, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
106. Daw Tin Swe Yin, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
107. Daw Yu Ya Myo Myint, Precious Grace Baptist Church in Myanmar
108. Deanna Combong, Sr., Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
109. Dewi Lestari, Indonesian Catholic Church
110. Dharma Lingam Stella Darshan, National Christian Council of Sri Lanka
111. Dhiloraj Canagasabey, Bishop, Church of Ceylon
112. Diana Tana, Te Runanga Whakawhanunga I Nga Hahi O Aotearoa
113. Dieter Paul Hecker, Gossner Mission in Germany
114. Dietrich Werner, Bread for the World in Germany

115. Duhlian Robert Thanga, Presbyterian Church in India
116. Eang Chhun, Praek Talong Church in Cambodia
117. Eh Htoo, Leprosy Mission of Myanmar
118. Eh Tar Gay, Myanmar Institute of Theology
119. Elben Villao Rodriguez, Evangelical Methodist Church in the Philippines
120. Elin Welmiria Otu, Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor
121. Eliza Gracia, Jakarta Theological Seminary
122. Elizabeth Dhinagar, Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church in India
123. Elizabeth May Delaney, Sr, National Council of Churches in Australia
124. Elmer Ellezo Aringa, Episcopal Church in the Philippines
125. Emma Alamin Cantor, United Methodist Church in the Philippines
126. Errawalla Yesurathnam, Bishop, Methodist Church in India
127. Ester Byu, Myanmar Baptist Convention
128. Esther Kathirolu, Tamil Nadu Christian Council in India
129. Fang Ye, China Christian Council
130. Farhana Anthony Nazir, Presbyterian Church of Pakistan
131. Felix Machado, Archbishop, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
132. Fredrick Robert Kereopa, Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia
133. Garbin Marchilla Rufino, United Methodist Church in the Philippines
134. Gard Khankaew, Glory Hut Foundation in Thailand
135. Gawn Aung, Moe Nhyin Regional Council of Churches
136. Gemma Cruz, Australian Catholic University

137. George Jacob, Church of South India
138. George Shey, Precious Grace Baptist Church in Myanmar
139. Gerard Frank Willemsen, Uniting Church in Sweden
140. German Sailuk, Evangelical Christian Church in Bangladesh
141. Gideon, Myanmar Council of Churches
142. Gigi Mathews, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India
143. Gin Khan Mang, Tedim Christian Collage
144. Gladston Robert Nelson Baianpu, Church of South India
145. Gloria Ayu Kristin Malonta, Central Sulawesi Christian Church in Indonesia
146. Gomar Gultom, Communion of Churches in Indonesia
147. Gritje Rosalinne Monim, Evangelical Christian Church in Tanah Papua
148. Gye Hwa Jho, Presbyterian Church of Korea
149. Hans Torgny Öberg, Church of Sweden
150. Hao Kho Pao, Homalin Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
151. Henny William Booth Sumakul, The Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa
152. Henriette T. Hutabarat Lebang, Former General Secretary of CCA, Communion of Churches in Indonesia
153. Heon Wook Park, United Church of Christ in Japan
154. Hermanus Laelu, Rev, Sinode Gereja Kristen Oikoumene di Indonesia
155. Heung Ying Tsui, The Salvation Army, Hong Kong and Macau Command
156. Hevukhu Achumi, Western Sumi Baptist Church in India
157. Hlaing Yadanar, Myanmar Council of Churches

158. Hluk Naing, Methodist Church in Upper Myanmar
159. Hnin Pwint Phyu
160. Hong Cheol Ahn, Korean Society for Service in Asia
161. Hong Jung Lee, Presbyterian Church of Korea
162. Hrangkaptluanga, Methodist Church in Upper Myanmar
163. Hsin Cheng Chen, Methodist Church in the Republic of China
164. Hte Lont Hgyi
165. Humphrey Sarfaraz Peters, Bishop, Church of Pakistan
166. Hyun Bum Jung, Korean Methodist Church
167. I Nengah Suama, Bishop, The Protestant Christian Church in Bali
168. Inamdar Anil Wilson, Church of North India
169. Indira Vasantha Jeti, Sam Higginbottom University in India
170. Indrawati Raman, Indonesian Catholic Church
171. Irma Mepico Balaba, National Council of Churches in the Philippines
172. Irwanto, Indonesian Catholic Church
173. Isabella Novsima, Jakarta Theological Seminary
174. Israel Paulraj, Church of Ceylon
175. Ithrana Lawrence, Council of Churches of Malaysia
176. Ito Loh, Tainan Theological College & Seminary, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
177. Ja Nan Sayama, Mawlamyine Regional Council of Churches
178. Jacoba Marlene Joseph, The Protestant Church in Western Part of Indonesia
179. Jacynthia Murphy, Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand And Polynesia
180. Jae Cheon Lee, Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea

181. Jae Moo Yoo, PCK-Goodnews, Presbyterian Church of Korea
182. Jae Shik Shin, Honam Theological University & Seminary, Presbyterian Church of Korea
183. Jae Woong Ahn, Former General Secretary of CCA, Presbyterian Church of Korea
184. Jairus Hasugian, Gereja Isa Almasih in Indonesia
185. James Boliget, Episcopal Church in the Philippines
186. James Rehmat, Ecumenical Commission for Human Right Development in Pakistan
187. Jane David Daw, St. Gabriel Church in Myanmar
188. Janejinda Pawadee, Church of Christ in Thailand
189. Jayanesan Paul Chinnaswamy, Church of South India
190. Jeaneth Faller, Silliman University in the Philippines
191. Jeong Hwa Jang, Presbyterian Church of Korea
192. Jeong Nam Park, Presbyterian Church of Korea
193. Jerson Benia Narciso, Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches
194. Jetti Oliver Alfred, Sam Higgin bottom University
195. Jeyakumar V. Peter Daniel, Samiti for Education, Environment, Social and Health Action in India
196. Jimmy Marcos Immanuel, Protestant Church in Western Part of Indonesia
197. Jobi Thomas Joshua, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in the United Arab Emirates
198. Jochen Kirsch, Mission 21 in Switzerland
199. John Charles Gilmore, Churches of Christ in Australia
200. John Geevarghese Mathews, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in Singapore
201. John Julian Andrews

202. John Karmakar, Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha
203. John Suresh Robert Thangaiah, PLANT Trust in India
204. Jonatan Emmanuel Sverker, Uniting Church in Sweden
205. Jonathan Gianan, Evangelical Methodist Church in the Philippines
206. Jong Guk Lee, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea
207. Joo Yee Sim Julie, Council for World Mission
208. Joram Calimutan, Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants in Hong Kong
209. Jose Sleebe Kattumangattu, Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in India
210. Joseph Deva Komar, Methodist Church in Malaysia
211. Joseph Justin Devadhas, Church of South India
212. Joseph Ludlow Patterson, World Association for Christian Communication
213. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
214. Joshua Rathnam Chinthala, Church of North India
215. Joyanta Adhikari, National Council of Churches in Bangladesh
216. Ju Young Lee, Anglican Church of Korea
217. Jucy Merina Adhikari, National Council of Churches in Bangladesh
218. Kam Cheong Po, Hong Kong Christian Council
219. Kam Do Thang, Myanmar Council of Churches
220. Kamphone Khontapanya, Laos Evangelical Church
221. Kaptluanga, Methodist Church in Upper Myanmar
222. Karin Maria Lövestam Öberg, Church of Sweden
223. Kathy Min Din, Myanmar Council of Churches
224. Kauk Sein, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar

225. Kaw Thaw, Bago Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
226. Kensaku Matsuyama, Nippon Sei Ko Kai (Anglican Church in Japan)
227. Kensuke Koito, United Church of Christ in Japan
228. Khamdeng Kounthapanya, Lao Evangelical Church
229. Khamphone Kounthapanya, Lao Evangelical Church
230. Khine Nwe Oo, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
231. Ki Hak Choi, The Most Reverend, Presbyterian Church of Korea
232. Ki Ho Chun, Presbyterian Church of Korea
233. Kok Thang, Methodist Church in Upper Myanmar
234. Kristiani Magdalena Pangau, Jakarta Theological Seminary in Indonesia
235. Kumar Sajay, Mar Thoma Metropolitan Church
236. Kyaw Kyaw, Independent Presbyterian Church of Myanmar
237. Kyaw Myo Naing, Church of the Province of Myanmar
238. Kyaw Nyunt, Myanmar Ecumenical Institute
239. Kyaw Soe Latt Mahn, Pathein Council of Churches in Myanmar
240. Kyi Kyi Ngwe Daw, Southern Shan State Christian Fellowship in Myanmar
241. Kyoung Gyun Han, Presbyterian Church of Korea
242. Kyrie Kim, Anglican Church of Korea
243. La Ja Nwaw, Myanmar Institute of Theology
244. Lal Ram Zau, Presbyterian Church of India
245. Lal Tin Hre, Association for Theological Education in Myanmar
246. Lal Zar Laum Bawn, National Council of Churches in Bangladesh
247. Laldini, Sayama, Churches of Province of Myanmar

248. Lalrinmuana, Madalay Theological College in Myanmar
249. Le Ngoc Bich Ly, Evangelical Church in Vietnam
250. Li Suk Han, Hong Kong Counseling and Mediation Service
251. Lian Peng, Methodist Church in Upper Myanmar
252. Limuel Equina, Association for Theological Education in South East Asia
253. Ling Zaw, Presbyterian Church of Myanmar
254. Lorence Castillo, Migrante International in the Philippines
255. Luan Khan Tung, Ted Christian College in Myanmar
256. Ma Htu Seng, Myanmar Deaf School in Myanmar
257. Ma. Concepcion Buscabus, United Church of Christ in the Philippines
258. Maaike Antje Van der Meer Wigboldus, Protestant Church of the Netherlands
259. Mahn Myo Khaing, Myanmar Council of Churches
260. Mahn Palmerston, Myanmar Council of Churches
261. Mai Kyi Kyi Win, Myanmar Council of Churches
262. Mai Ni Bu, Myanmar Council of Churches
263. Majid Abel, Presbyterian Church of Pakistan
264. Makoto Kato, United Church of Christ in Japan
265. Mama, Methodist Church in Upper Myanmar
266. Mammen Varkey People's Reporter in India
267. Mamota Baraigee, National Council of Churches in Bangladesh
268. Manhong Lin, China Christian Council
269. Maran Hkun Zai Dan, World of Hope in Myanmar
270. Marianne Ejdersten, World Council of Churches

271. Marie Sol Villalon, United Methodist Church
272. Martha Mary Marwein, Presbyterian Church of India
273. Martin Krieg, Association for Protestant Missions and Churches in Germany
274. Maruati, Sayama, Methodist Church in Upper Myanmar
275. Mary Daniel Daw, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
276. Mathew K. Punnoose, Council of Churches of Malaysia
277. Maureen S. Rumeser, The Protestant Church in Western Part of Indonesia
278. Maxcin John, Church of South India
279. May Aye Lwin, Ecumenical Church Loan Fund in Myanmar
280. Melkisedek Puimera, The Protestant Church in Western Part of Indonesia
281. Melkisedek Sniut, Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor
282. Menchu Millamena, Philippines Independent Church
283. Mervin Sol H. Toquero, National Council of Churches in Philippines
284. Mey Navy, Kampuchea Christian Council
285. Mg Mg Gyi, St. Gabriel Church in Myanmar
286. Mhan Aung Myint Htwe, Kyone Pyaw Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
287. Mhan San Chain, Kyone Pyaw Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
288. Michael Lendo, The Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa in Indonesia
289. Mikyung Cha, Asia Education and Research in South Korea
290. Milton Biswas, Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh
291. Moe Moe Ei, Pyin-OO-Lwin Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar

292. Molina Karmaker, Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha in Myanmar
293. Mung Kham Cin, Myanmar Deaf School
294. Musdah Mulia, Council of Indonesian Ulema in Indonesia
295. My Thida Lwin, Precious Grace Baptist Church in Myanmar
296. Mya Min Lwin Saw, World of Hope in Myanmar
297. Mya Mya Win, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
298. Mya Sanda, Pyin-OO-Lwin Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
299. Myat Noe Swe Ma, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
300. Myat San, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
301. Mykhailo Shapkin, Russian Orthodox Church
302. Myo Myint, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
303. Myo Nwe Si, Taunggyi Council of Churches
304. Myo Tun
305. Myung Sook Lee, Presbyterian Church of Korea
306. Nai Hluk, Methodist Church in Upper Myanmar
307. Nang Htoi, Pyin-OO-Lwin Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
308. Nang Ruby Lin, World of Hope in Myanmar
309. Naoya Kawakami, United Church of Christ in Japan
310. Naung Latt Saya
311. Naw Lily Htoo
312. Naw Paw Khree Moo, Myanmar Council of Churches
313. Naw Tha Khu, Self Supporting Kayin Baptist Mission Society in Myanmar
314. Naw Thwe Sah, Myanmar Council of Churches

315. Neill Harrold Ballantyne, Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand
316. Nelun Gunasekera, Church of Ceylon
317. Newton Manilal Parmar, Methodist Church in India and Polynesia
318. Ngo Bei Chhua, Mara Evangelical Church in Myanmar
319. Ngwa Tar
320. Nhin Nhin Aye, Self Supporting Kayin Baptist Mission Society in Myanmar
321. Ni Ni Yin, Pyin-OO-Lwin Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
322. Nikolas Biswas, Kallyanpur Baptist Church in Bangladesh
323. Nin Ram P., Traunggyi Council of Churches in Myanmar
324. Novia Hana Tampubolon, Jakarta Theological Seminary in Indonesia
325. Nyi Bo, Pyay Council of Churches in Myanmar
326. Ohmar Swe, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
327. Olav Fykse Tveit, World Council of Churches
328. Oliver Joseph, Myanmar Council of Churches
329. Pan Shwe Khaing, Mara Church in Myanmar
330. Pann Mo Mo Chit, Myanmar Council of Churches
331. Pao Tsan Hsieh, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
332. Patihan Khankaew, Glory Hut Foundation in Thailand
333. Patricia Kathryn Talbot, The United Church of Canada
334. Patrick Laing Tone, Myanmar Council of Churches
335. Paul Kwong, Archbishop, The Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui
336. Paul Shishir Sarker, Bishop, Church of Bangladesh
337. Paul Youngun Kong, Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church

338. Paulinus Dawson, Fr., Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
339. Paulo Ieli, Methodist Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
340. Paulraj Yoges Vathsala, Church of Ceylon
341. Philip Huggins, Bishop, Anglican Church of Australia
342. Philip Kuruvilla, National Council of Churches in India
343. Phyo Maung Maung Mya Saw, Myanmar Council of Churches
344. Pichet Jantararat, McGilvary College of Divinity of Payap University in Thailand
345. Po Ho Huang, Chang Jung Christian University in Taiwan
346. Poe Taeh Naeh, Self Supporting Kayin Baptist Mission Society in Myanmar
347. Pornsawan Christpirak, Glory Hut Foundation in Thailand
348. Pradit Takerngrangsarit, Christian Conference of Asia Foundation in Thailand
349. Prakash P. Thomas, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India
350. Prapakorn Sukkho, Church of Christ in Thailand
351. Prawate Khid-arn, Former General Secretary of CCA, Church of Christ in Thailand
352. Prem Chand Singh, Bishop, National Council of Churches in India
353. Prince Devanandan, Methodist Church of New Zealand
354. Prinstone Ben, Church of South India
355. Puia, Myanmar Council of Churches
356. R. C. Acharya, National Council of Churches in Nepal
357. R. Joshua U, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
358. R. Norman Abraham Simson, Yayasan Elsafan (Foundation for the Blind) in Indonesia
359. Rahel Daulay, Jakarta Theological Seminary

- 360. Rangsima Khamsan, Church of Christ in Thailand
- 361. Ranjana Laksri Karunaratne, Church of Ceylon
- 362. Raw Zan, Semi Council of Churches
- 363. Rebecca Cunningham Asedillo, Global Ministries, United Methodist Church
- 364. Rebecca Tapa, National YWCA in Myanmar
- 365. Redeemer A. Yanez Jr, Bishop, Philippines Independent Church
- 366. Reuben Qamar, National Council of Churches in Pakistan
- 367. Reuel Marigza, Bishop, United Church of Christ in the Philippines
- 368. Rex Beta Reyes Jr, National Council of Churches in the Philippines
- 369. Rex Nathan, Te Runanga Whakawhanunga I Nga Hahi O Aotearoa
- 370. Rey Asis, Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants in Hong Kong
- 371. Rhee Timbang (Obispo Maximo III), Philippines Independent Church
- 372. Richard Dawson, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
- 373. Risto Jukko, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
- 374. Ritson Manyonyo, Yayasan Elsafan (Foundation for the Blind), Indonesian Christian Church
- 375. Roberto Isip Bacani, Evangelical Methodist Church in the Philippines
- 376. Roderick Salazar, Fr., Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
- 377. Roger Gaikwad, National Council of Churches in India
- 378. Rohail Nasir, Universal Gospel Assembly in Pakistan
- 379. Rokhum Zohmangaihi, Presbyterian Church in India
- 380. Rudelmar Bueno De Faria, ACT Alliance
- 381. Sahat Lumban Tobing, Methodist Church of Indonesia
- 382. Sai Aung Tun, Mary Chapman School for the Deaf in Myanmar

383. Saji Chacko, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India
384. Saji Thomas Palathinkal, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India
385. Salai Nay Lynn Htun, Chin Baptist Church in Myanmar
386. Samadhanam John, Church of South India
387. Samuel Ngun, Myanmar Institute of Theology
388. Samuel Srinivasan Nelson Dhanaraj, Church of South India
389. Samuel Vara Prasad Rao Mokana, Christ Church of India
390. Samuel W. Meshack, Hindustan Bible Institute in India
391. San Lone, Matupi Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
392. Sang Chang, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea
393. Sang Jung Park, Former General Secretary of CCA, Korea Evangelical Holiness Church
394. Satu Ve U, Mara Evangelical Church in Myanmar
395. Savy Hillary Min Min, Church of the Province of Myanmar
396. Saw Crainer, Chairperson of Finance and Property
397. Saw George Shey, Myanmar Christian Fellowship of the Blind
398. Saw Lukar, Myanmar Council of Churches
399. Saw Patrick Loo Nee, Self Supporting Kayin Baptist Mission Society in Myanmar
400. Saw Say Thaw, Pathein Council of Church in Myanmar
401. Saw Sheemo, Vision Trust in Myanmar
402. Saw Thaung Kyi, Myanmar Christian Fellowship of the Blind
403. Saw Wallace Mya, Myanmar Council of Churches
404. Sawako Fujiwara, Thohoku Gakuin University, National Christian Council in Japan
405. Saya Naung Latt, Saing Taung Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar

406. Se U, Palaatwa Regional Council of Church in Myanmar
407. Sein Win, Semi Council of Churches in Myanmar
408. Seng Aung Saya, Moe Nhyin Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
409. Seng Ro Sang, Falam Council of Churches in Myanmar
410. Septemmy Lakawa, Jakarta Theological Seminary in Indonesia
411. Serey Vuthy Keo, Kampuchea Christian Council
412. Seung Min Shin, National Council of Churches in Korea
413. Shannon Lynn Mccarthy, The United Church of Canada
414. Sharaz Sharif Alam, Presbyterian Church of Pakistan
415. Shay Myar, Mary Chapman Deaf School in Myanmar
416. Shein Thet Nyunt, Myanmar Council of Churches
417. Shelly Dawson, Presbyterian Church USA
418. Shijoy Abraham Zachariah, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India
419. Shin Yi Huang Cindy, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
420. Shin Young Yun, Presbyterian Church of Korea
421. Shoko Aminaka, National Christian Council in Japan
422. Sibu Pallichira, Mar Thoma Metropolitan Church in India
423. Sikyung Yoo, Anglican Church of Korea
424. Simon Sarbunan, Christian University of Duta- Wacana Yogyakarta in Indonesia
425. Sirivanh Yeur Thao, Lao Evangelical Church
426. Smith N. Za Thawng, Judson Baptist Church in Myanmar
427. So Young Choe, Korean Methodist Church
428. Soe Naing, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar

429. Sok Nev, Kampuchea Christian Council
430. Solomon Rongpi, Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India
431. Song Hee Chai, Presbyterian Church of Korea
432. Sonia Carolina Parera Hummel, United Evangelical Mission
433. Soon Jong Youg, Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea
434. Soritua Nababan, Ephorus, Batak Protestant Christian Church
435. Soung Yein, Mary Chapman Deaf School in Myanmar
436. Sovy Dymeas, Kampuchea Christian Council
437. Stefan Rune David Emilsson, Uniting Church in Sweden
438. Stephen Arulampalam, Theological College of Lanka
439. Su Su Kyaw Sayama, Pathein Council of Churches in Myanmar
440. Sudha Varghese, Sr., Nari Gunjan in India
441. Sudhanshu Kanda, Christian World Imprints in India
442. Sudu Tada, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
443. Sui Ling, Myanmar Council of Churches
444. Suk Hoon Kang, National Council of Churches in Korea
445. Suleman Haroon Shfqat, Presbyterian Church of Pakistan
446. Sung Jin Kim, Kidokkongbo, Presbyterian Church of Korea
447. Sung Kook Park, Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea
448. Supaporn Yarnasarn, Church of Christ in Thailand
449. Suphachai Sovatee, Glory Hut Foundation in Thailand
450. Supunnee Langka, Glory Hut Foundation in Thailand
451. Susan Chang, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
452. Suwanto Suwanto, Indonesian Catholic Church
453. Swami Navananma Jnana Thapaswi, Santhigiri Ashram in India

454. Sylvana Maria Apituley, The Protestant Church in Western Part of Indonesia
455. Tae Min No, Presbyterian Church of Korea
456. Tarun Biswas, National Council of Churches in Bangladesh
457. Tay Za WinU, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
458. Terence Ian Corkin, Uniting Church in Australia
459. Tertius Yunias Lantigimo, Central Sulawesi Christian Church in Indonesia
460. Tesu Yim, Institute of Second Reformation in Korea
461. Than Than Aye Daw, Myanmar Institute of Theology
462. Than Than Win, Sayama
463. Than Win Saya, Mawlamyine Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
464. Thang Tin Sum, Myanmar Council of Churches
465. Thawng Hlei Vum, IPCM
466. Thein Lwin, Precious Grace in Myanmar
467. Thein Pe U, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
468. Theodore Joel Karmakar, National Council of Churches in Bangladesh
469. Theresa Carino, United Church of Christ in the Philippines
470. Thet Paing Myat Saya U, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
471. Thin Thin Han Sayama, Self Supporting Kayin Baptist Mission Society in Myanmar
472. Thomas B. Baroi, Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh
473. Thomas Kyaing Mahn, Myanmar Council of Churches
474. Thomas Liddle, Protestant Church in East Timor/ Global Ministries in the USA

475. Thuami, Methodist Church Upper Myanmar
476. Tigga Lawrence, Church of North India
477. Tijo Markose, Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in India
478. Tin Aung Shwe U, Leprosy Mission in Myanmar
479. Tin Maung Shwe, Myanmar Baptist Convention
480. Tipakorn Prakot, Bangkok Institute of Theology in Thailand
481. Tjeerd De Boer, Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong
482. Togar Satria Simatupang, Christian Protestant Angkola Church in Indonesia
483. Tohfán Chalernwong, Glory Hut Foundation in Thailand
484. Tong Meufo, Protestant Church in East Timor
485. Toni-Lyn Hidalgo Gutierrez, Evangelical Methodist Church in the Philippines
486. Tonny Daud Kaunang, The Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa in Indonesia
487. Toshimasa Yamamoto, Kwansei Gakuin University in Japan
488. Troitje Patricia Aprilia, Protestant Church in Western Part of Indonesia
489. Tso Manking, Hong Kong Counseling and Mediation Service
490. Tu Lum, Ho Pin Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
491. Tun Shwe Saw, Methodist Church in Upper Myanmar
492. Tye Yau Siew Philip, Malaysia Theological Seminary
493. U Ah Sah, Saing Taung Reional Council of Churches in Myanmar
494. U Hoke Sein, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
495. U Lu Aye, Bishop, Myanmar Council of Churches
496. U Ngao Mit Khun, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
497. U Saw Shwe, Emeritus Bishop, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar

498. U Tun Tun Oo, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
499. U Win Tin, Myanmar Council of Churches
500. Va Hnei Mc., Lorrain Theological College in Myanmar
501. Van Ding Lian, Lorrian Theological College
502. Van Kung, Mara Evangelical Church in Myanmar
503. Vanitha Joyce Daniel, Samiti for Education, Environment, Social and Health Action in India
504. Vanlal Chhuanga, Myanmar Council of Churches
505. Vanmawia, Presbyterian Church in India
506. Varsha Hemnath Shetty, Methodist Church in India
507. Vaughn Geuseppe Alviar, Philippines Independent Church
508. Victos Azariah, National Council of Churches in Pakistan
509. Vidanalage Rajitha Ishara Demel, Church of Ceylon
510. Vikato Shikhu, Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India
511. Vincent Rajkumar Rajendran, Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in India
512. Vinili Hevukhu, Western Sumi Baptist Church in India
513. Vinod Victor, Anglican Church of Australia
514. Virginia Reyes, National Council of Churches in the Philippines
515. Wah Naw Bway Say
516. Wapangyingla Ao, National Council of Churches in India
517. Washinton, Saya, Pathein Council of Churches in Myanmar
518. Wei Chung Tseng, Council for World Mission
519. Welhemina Samy Francis, Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor
520. Wesley Ariarajah, Emeritus Professor of Drew University, Methodist Church of Sri Lanka

521. Wichian Bangsiri, Glory Hut Foundation in Thailand
522. Willem. T.P Simarmata, Archbishop, Batak Protestant Christian Church in Indonesia
523. William Premkumar Ebenezer Joseph, National Christian Council of Sri Lanka
524. William Stanley, Integrated Rural Development of Weaker Sections of India – Ecumenical Council for Drought Action and Water
525. Win Than, Kyone Pyaw Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
526. Wing Sze Tong, Hong Kong Christian Council
527. Ya Ku, Saing Taung Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
528. Yan Aung, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar
529. Yan Linbin, China Christian Council
530. Yang Ho Lee, Korea Evangelical Church
531. Ye Ja Lee, Presbyterian Church Korea
532. Yesu Das, Pyin-OO-Lwin Regional Council of Churches in Myanmar
533. Yohanna Farid Bestawros, Fr., Coptic Orthodox Church, Diocese of Sydney
534. Yoon Hee Nam, Presbyterian Church of Korea
535. Young Ju Kim, National Council of Churches in Korea
536. Yu Ya Myo Myint Daw, Precious Grace Baptist Church in Myanmar
537. Yuen Hoi Park Patrick, Hong Kong Council of Church of Christ in China
538. Yun Fang Hsieh, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
539. Yusmiati Vistamika Wangka, Communion of Churches in Indonesia
540. Yusuf Nakmofa, Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor
541. Yvonne Dawkins, Council for World Mission

- 542. Zarni, Pathein Council of Churches in Myanmar
- 543. Zaw Dan, Lashio Council of Churches in Myanmar
- 544. Zaw Hla Than, Youth for Christ in Myanmar
- 545. Zaw Win, Myanmar Baptist Convention
- 546. Zin Mar Kyaw Daw, World of Hope in Myanmar
- 547. Zo Hming Thangii Daw, Myanmar Council of Churches
- 548. Zothan Mawia, Emeritus Bishop, Methodist Church in Lower Myanmar

Local Arrangements Committee

Local Central Committee and Steering Committee

- 549. Rev. Dr. Zau Lat, Co-Chairperson
- 550. U Saw Patrick Loo Nee, Co-Chairperson
- 551. Rev. Dr. Yam Kho Pau, Co-Secretary
- 552. Rev. Mahn Palmerston, Co- Secretary
- 553. Rev. Dr. Zaw Win
- 554. Bishop U Lu Aye
- 555. Rev. Paul Myint Htet
- 556. Rev. Dr. Van Kung
- 557. Rev. Saw Crainer
- 558. Rev. Saw Samson Latt
- 559. Rev. Mahn San Thein Tun
- 560. Sayama Mai Kaythi Min Din
- 561. Sayama Daw Nant Aye Mu Mu Aung
- 562. Rev. Saw Shwe Lin, Coordinator

Working Group

- 563. Saw Kayah, Liturgy and Worship

- 564. Sayama Nant Aye Mu Mu Aung, Registration
- 565. Saya Johnson, Registration
- 566. Mahn Handel, Transportation and Settlement Facilitation
- 567. Saw Phyو Maung Maung Mya, Transportation and Settlement Facilitation
- 568. Saw Crainer, Finance
- 569. Maung Maung Kha, Finance
- 570. Saya Hlaing Lynn Htet, Information and Documentation
- 571. Saya Saw Khu, Information and Documentation
- 572. U Kyaw Myint, Security, Health and Sanitation:
- 573. Aung Win Thein, Security, Health and Sanitation:
- 574. Van Kung, Exhibition
- 575. Kaythi Min Din, Programmes
- 576. Saw Mar Bwe Gyi, Programmes

Stewards

- 577. Angel Za Dim
- 578. Angela K Jang, Presbyterian Church of Korea
- 579. Charles Amedengan Gawidan, Episcopal Church in the Philippines
- 580. Dochai Dz. Mara
- 581. Eon Kim, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea
- 582. Fusi Tafaonga Ungajilifaki Vea, Methodist Church of New Zealand
- 583. Ja Seng Pu
- 584. Ka Da Zaw Seng
- 585. Kairos William Anggadol, National Council of Churches in the Philippines
- 586. Leonardo Imanuel Mura Lily, Indonesia Christian Church

- 587. Luke Thawng Lian Uk
- 588. Gracy Suh Nun Mawi
- 589. Maran Win Aung
- 590. Maung Myo John
- 591. May Chit Po
- 592. Meta Ose Margaretha Ginting, Batak Karo Protestant Church in Indonesia
- 593. Min Htet Khant
- 594. JM Lat Aung
- 595. Htoi Nan
- 596. Hnin Htoi San
- 597. Mung Ngaih Lian
- 598. Myo Ra
- 599. Nant Hanny Zin, Church of the Province of Myanmar
- 600. Nant Mi Mi Wai Zin, Church of the Province of Myanmar
- 601. Naw Elizabeth Htoo
- 602. Naw Thant Thant Kyawt
- 603. Nang Kywe She San
- 604. Nant Yunn Barani Tha
- 605. Ngwar Sar
- 606. Ni Cuai Cin
- 607. Piula Perenise Deborah Lasi, Methodist Church of New Zealand
- 608. Pranita Sandela, Church of North India
- 609. Rosiana Indah Purnomo, Gereja Isa Almasih in Indonesia
- 610. Salai Walar Min Khaing

- 611. Sangeeth Sailas Santhosh, Madras Christian College in India
- 612. Saw Jasper Thain
- 613. Saw Jeremiah
- 614. Stephanie S. S. Peranathan, Church of Ceylon
- 615. Sunny Mollick, Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha
- 616. Tirzah Shomita Malakar, Church of Bangladesh
- 617. Van Dawt Lian
- 618. Van Irene
- 619. Myat Hsu Naing Oo
- 620. Vanlal Malsawmsangi
- 621. Vinod Shemron Saduri, National Council of Churches in India

Co-opted Staff

- 622. Boonyarid Promsuttipong
- 623. Han Byeol Angela Kim
- 624. Hlaing Yadanar Htun, Meemee
- 625. Liezl Formilleza Dunuan,
- 626. Mongkol Nitirosakul
- 627. Patricia Bruschweiler
- 628. Roshin Mary George
- 629. Santosh Digal
- 630. Sudeep Sonawane

CCA Staff

- 631. Mathews George Chunakara
- 632. Jung Eun Grace Moon
- 633. Reynaldo Racaza Ty

- 634. Ngur Lia Na
- 635. Chuleepran Srisoontorn
- 636. Saw Shwe Lin
- 637. Sunila Ammar
- 638. Ronald Lalthanmawia
- 639. Janjarut Saedan
- 640. Ramarao Gollu
- 641. Patchayotai Boontama
- 642. Christopher Sonawane
- 643. Gianina Fay Cortez Vecino
- 644. Maureen Mata'u Akeripa
- 645. Nant Myat Noe Aein, Salome