



Christian Conference of Asia

# **Towards Revitalising the Ecumenical Movement in Asia**

## **Report of the International Consultation**

Chiang Mai, Thailand  
11–12 July 2017



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# **Towards Revitalising the Ecumenical Movement in Asia: An Overview**

**11–12 July 2017 | Chiang Mai, Thailand**

The International Consultation, ‘Towards Revitalising the Ecumenical Movement in Asia,’ was an attempt by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) served as a prelude to the commemoration of the CCA’s Diamond Jubilee year to reflect on the ecumenical movement in Asia.

The consultation was held from 11–12 July 2017 at Payap University in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and addressed a wide range of themes, such as the global and Asian ecumenical movements; emerging challenges; peace and reconciliation in Asia (with special emphases on the Korean peninsula, South Asia, and the Philippines); religious intolerance and the threat to freedom of religion and rights of minorities in majority Islamic, Theravada Buddhist, and Hindu societies; migration, statelessness, and human trafficking; as well as ecumenical formation and ecumenical leadership development.

The consultation brought together sixty specially selected participants representing different categories of ecclesial and ecumenical organisations. The participants were invited from the World Council of Churches (WCC), Council for World Mission (CWM), the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), the Asian Evangelical Alliance (AEA), the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC), and the Asian Christian Women’s Conference (ACWC).

At the opening session of the international consultation, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of the CCA, stated, “Churches and ecumenical councils in Asia must constantly engage in dialogue with each other and ensure a renewed commitment, as well as a shared vision to revitalise the Asian ecumenical movement. The deliberations during the consultation facilitated a collective search for strengthening our common goal of mission and witness in Asia through our common ecumenical engagements.”

Dr Mathews George Chunakara further added that the consultation aimed to initiate serious reflections to envision and plan actions to collectively revitalise the Asian ecumenical movement. “As we move forward with firm convictions of strengthening and revitalising the ecumenical movement in Asia, we must ensure and recognise the role of the ecumenical movement in today’s Asian contexts. It is this conviction that motivates the CCA to bring together representatives of churches, councils, and ecumenical and mission organisations to reflect upon the future of ecumenism and the ecumenical movement in Asia,” he said.

“The need for increased ecumenical cooperation and journeying together by ecclesial, ecumenical, and mission partners in a spirit of mutual solidarity is more urgent today, for which greater coherence and coordination among all stakeholders in the ecumenical movement is essential,” said Dr Mathews George Chunakara.

Delivering the thematic address on ‘CCA@60 and Beyond: Ecumenical Movement in Asia and Emerging Challenges’, the CCA General Secretary said, “What we experience today in Asia is a lack of coherence and coordination within the ecumenical movement.”

“In a continent where the number of Christians is profoundly small, division makes Christian witness still more difficult, less effective, and more fragmented. In such a situation, concerted efforts for dialogue and communication with mutual accountability should be a priority, to address the emerging challenges more efficiently.”

“The need for regaining lost vision in our ecumenical journey should be a priority of all those who are concerned with mission and witness,” said Dr Mathews George Chunakara.

Dr Ioan Sauca, the Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) delivered a thematic address on ‘Global Ecumenical Movement: Challenges to the Concept of Ecumenism and Christian Unity Today, and the Need for New Expressions and Paradigms’, and said, “Ecumenism is a journey that God has called us to undertake in doing his will for the final purpose he has for the world. The main purpose and goal of our common journey thus remains the search for unity— so that the world may believe in the view of the unity of the whole cosmos as the reason and final goal of eschatological explanation.”

The WCC Deputy General Secretary also placed a strong emphasis on nurturing ecumenical formation as a priority of the churches. “Unless we listen to our children, we cannot hope to move the ecumenical movement forward,” he added.

Rev. Dr Ahn Jae Woong, the former General Secretary of the CCA, delivered a presentation on ‘The Asiatic Ecumenical Movement’. He outlined the special characteristics of the Asiatic ecumenical movement as ‘Christo-centric in nature, Ecclesio-centric in character, and Anthro-po-centric in manifestation’.

Rev. Dr Woong also specified six ecumenical ideals vital to Christian living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as: faith in God (requiring metanoia); love for each other (requiring koinonia); hope in building communities of peace (requiring Diakonia); justice for all people (requiring martyria); care for God’s creation (requiring oikonomia); and obedience to God (requiring Gloria in excelsis Deo).

In various sessions of the consultation, panellists shed light on the domineering challenges to which ecumenical responses are warranted in Asia.

While sharing the experience of the Philippines’ peace process and the churches’ contribution towards peacebuilding, Rev. Rex Reyes, Jr., the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) said, “The systems and powers of the world come together to regularly plan how they can remain dominant, while the people of the Philippines continue to suffer and long for peace.”

Speaking on the shift in policies in the Korean peninsula, Rev. Dr Jae Cheon Lee, the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) said, “As people are gradually coming together in support of Korean reunification, the perspective of the South Korean government is also changing. However, the issue of how we can reconcile different approaches towards peacebuilding still remains an important factor.”

Rev. Krise Anki Gosal, the Associate General Secretary of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, delivered a presentation on religious freedoms in Indonesia, saying, “The changing perceptions of preferential treatment to certain religions, especially the attitude of the Indonesian government, is a major concern for religious minorities in the country. Indonesian churches have developed



interreligious programmes to respond to discrimination based on ethnicity and religion.”

The deliberations of the second day of the consultation addressed issues such as migration and human trafficking, ecumenical theological education, and ‘Being the Church in Asia today’.

Rev. David Das, the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh, spoke on ‘Religious Intolerance and Freedom of Religion in Bangladesh’. He spoke of the challenges of mission in Bangladesh’s pluralistic context, especially given the rise in religious extremism and religious fragmentation of society. He said that the response of the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh entailed safeguarding the faith, transcending all conceivable boundaries, and witnessing Christ in a pluralistic society, so as to revive and strengthen the ecumenical movement.

Rev. Dr Roger Gaikwad, the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in India, delivered a presentation on ‘Religious Intolerance and Freedom of Religion in India. He outlined the symbolic violence, structural violence, and physical violence enacted upon the Christian minority by those who followed the exclusivist and narrow Hindutva ideology in the country. He shared the partnerships of the National Council of Churches in India with the Catholic Bishops’ Council in India and other civil society organisations to safeguard and advocate for the rights of the Christian minority in the country.

The representatives of three leading ecclesiastical and ecumenical bodies in Asia – the FABC of the Roman Catholic Church, the AEA, and the CCA jointly addressed the theme, ‘Being the Church in Asia: Our Witnessing Together’. The panel emphasised in unison that the churches in Asia needed to find a more relevant and unique Asian ecclesiology to witness amidst diverse and pluralistic realities with the vision of seeking to build the Kingdom of God.

“For Being the Church in Asia, we must together enter into positive relations with people of other religions. This is where we can witness together. We need to face challenges in Asia, especially when violence and terrorism plague Asia’s multicultural and pluralistic societies today. This is the context which God has given us and in which we are called to be his witness,” said Bishop Joseph Chusak Sirisut, of the FABC in a plenary session on ‘Being the Church in Asia: Our Witnessing Together’.

The General Secretary of the AEA, Rev. Dr Richard Howell, stated, "A worldview that values power, domination, and violence will see Christ's meekness and humility as a vice; in contrast, Christians see Christ as the very exemplar of virtue, and so we elevate his meekness and humility as virtues to which we aspire. The telos for Christians is Christ: Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of what we are made for, of the end to which we are called. This is how we become human. This is what we are here for."

Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza, the General Secretary of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) said, "Yesterday we used the imageries and metaphors of 'walking together' to describe the ecumenical movement. But there is also repentance; not just finger-pointing or playing the blame-game, but a critical reflection of our past and present, a process of self-criticism. I would call this our 'wailing together'. By doing that, perhaps, the winds of the Spirit may once more breathe on us and rekindle the flame so that our lament and mourning may be turned into joy and dancing. Perhaps then we can, in God's kairos, 'waltz together' in celebration."

The session on Migration and Human Trafficking was led by Dr Reiko Harima, the Director of the Asian Migrant Centre (AMC). She highlighted the major concerns for churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia and suggested ways to engage the issue of the suffering people in collective ecumenical actions while being engaged in prophetic witness.

Dr Henry S. Wilson, the Director of the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia, spoke on 'Retrofitting Ecumenism as a Movement'. He said, "The need of the time is to discern the nature of Ecumenism in Western 'post-Christian' and a globalised world. The process of retrofitting begins by creating renewed awareness of the integral nature of faith and the secular/social existence of Christians." He specified two challenges of the Asian ecumenical movement, namely 'independence from Western models of Christianities', and 'means of witnessing in multi-faith and multicultural ethos'.

Prof. Dr Manhong Lin, a WCC Central Committee member from the China Christian Council, gave a unique presentation on 'Ecumenical Formation and Ecumenical Theological Education: A Chinese Perspective'. He mentioned the background of the formation and the features of the post-denominational Church in China. He also suggested some methods of ecumenical cooperation, such as the

intentional inclusion of ecumenical studies in the curriculum for theological education, the organisation of a teachers' academy for ecumenical studies to share teaching materials, methodologies, and jointly address challenges, and the compilation of essays on ecumenical studies, especially historical essays.

Nancy Caluya, an officer from the Association of Christian Institutes for Social Concerns in Asia (ASISCA) raised a pertinent question in her presentation on 'Ecumenical Theological Education and Ecumenical Formation'. "Ecumenical education is limited to academicians, theologians, and a few stakeholders. The concepts of ecumenism must go to people and not the other way around. We must go where they congregate and boldly declare the message. We often talk about the tension between ecclesial-oriented ecumenism and secular-oriented ecumenism. We often insert the word 'versus' between them. I prefer the word 'and', instead. Why cannot we, by now, find a new paradigm that is accommodative of both?" she asked.

At the end of the consultation, the participants called on churches, councils, theological institutions, and various ecumenical organisations in Asia to be engaged in the process of revitalising the Asian ecumenical movement and 'to ensure the coherence of the ecumenical movement in Asia and greater unity of the churches and work for all God's people with a sense of togetherness, as well as to participate in God's mission'.

# **CCA@60 and Beyond: Ecumenical Movement in Asia and Emerging Challenges**

***Dr Mathews George Chunakara***

*General Secretary, Christian Conference of Asia*

“The ecumenical movement faces a complex situation at all levels – global, regional, and national,” is an oft-quoted statement these days. While trying to decipher the declining trends of the ecumenical movement since the end of the last century, several concerns have been expressed and various reasons have been pointed out. Increasing denominationalism, resistance against responding to the call to wider fellowship, a tendency to affirm specific ecclesiastical and confessional identities, efforts to strengthen institutional and organisational profiles, the proliferation of ecumenical organisations and structures, decrease in the membership of mainline Protestant churches in the North, lack of vision and commitment on part of leaders to promote ecumenism, lack of interest in ecumenical formation among the younger generation, etc., are identified as valid reasons for this trend. A lack of commitment to strengthening ecumenical fellowship at all levels and negative attitudes or disinterest among the church leaders at national, regional, and global levels have also been pointed out as reasons for the general decline of ecumenism in recent times.

In this context, Konrad Raiser’s observation is valid when he said, “In most churches, ecumenism no longer seems to have the quality of a vision which mobilises people to transcend inherited traditions and engage in acts of renewal. The younger generation which, in the early stages of the ecumenical movement, was its main protagonist, is now less and less attracted by the search for visible institutional forms of church unity and cooperation. While there is a spiritual quest, the concern for ‘Being Church’ cannot easily be communicated. Simultaneously, church leaders defending the commitment to ecumenical fellowship find themselves confronted with conservative and fundamentalist positions that identify ecumenism with tendencies that weaken the foundations of

culture and religion. For many, even the term ecumenism provokes suspicion and rejection.” He observes, “The complex situation full of uncertainties that marks the ecumenical movement is also reflected in a lack of coherence and overall integration at its organisational level.”

We see these trends as global phenomena, with regards to a lack of commitment to ecumenism and a tendency for the decline of the ecumenical movement in various contexts, it is pertinent to undertake a self-examination of the current Asian scenario. It is important for us, at this stage, to look at the current situation of the ecumenical movement. The Asian ecumenical movement is not detached from the global ecumenical movement. We believe in one ecumenical movement and the need for affirming and strengthening the value of one ecumenical movement. Changing landscapes of ecumenism, changes in the ecclesial landscapes, etc., are certain terminologies that have been repeatedly used in ecumenical circles for almost two decades now. However, the question is, how successful have we been in addressing emerging challenges in various contexts thus far. On the one hand, we try to analyse the existing landscapes and often end up with the same old analyses or use of exaggerated symbolism or analogies to illustrate the situations of ecumenical and ecclesiastical structures. As time passes, no effective actions are taken to understand and respond to the challenges in the ecumenical or ecclesial perspectives with a certain authentic approach or commitment. In the Asian context, we can identify various examples of increasing divisiveness which are fragmenting the ecumenical ethos and values of ecumenism. In other words, what we see today is a more visible expression of a lack of coherence and coordination of the ecumenical movement in Asia or other parts of the world. This is often initiated by those who are expected to ensure the coherence of one ecumenical movement.

### **Asia’s Ecumenical Impulse**

The Asian contribution to the ecumenical movement has been widely recognised at all times and every level. When we acknowledge the contributions of the ecumenical movement, which provided new insights and impetus toward developing socio-political involvements, one must acknowledge the great contributions by Asian churches and the Asian ecumenical movement which have been rendered for almost a century. Asian church leaders have provided profound leadership in the global ecumenical movement. However, during the current discussion about the nature of ecumenism and the future of the ecumenical movement, Asian contributions, to such debates,

have been minimal or not visible, and irrelevant. It is in this context that I am trying to attempt to link this discussion on the current Asian ecumenical scenario at the regional and national levels with that of the early ecumenical initiatives in Asia and the contributions of Asians to the global ecumenical movement.

Although the Western missionary and ecumenical historians recorded that the Western missionary in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the originator of the modern ecumenical movement, Asian Church historians, such as the late Dr T.V. Philip, argued on various occasions that this claim is only partially true. In this connection, Philip stated:

“Western historians cite as evidence for their argument that the missionary conferences in mission fields and the West led to the great World Missionary Conference in 1910 at Edinburgh, which is considered to be the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement. It must be noted that the missionary conferences in mission fields were concerned with cooperation in mission for the sake of evangelistic efficiency, but not with unity as such. The real impetus for Christian unity came from Asian Christians, who under the inspiration of the national movements took the initiative for Christian unity and the building up of indigenous churches. It was the protest of the Asian Christians against Western denominationalism and missionary paternalism which led to church unity discussion in some of the missionary conferences. Asians not only initiated ecumenical ventures in Asian but also contributed, through the missionary movement, to the ecumenical developments in the West.”

Philip categorically argues that the ecumenical movement in Asia was born in the context of opposition against Western colonialism in Asia. The growth of nationalism had its impact on the life of the churches. Indigenous movements sprang up within challenges. Native Christian leaders, who were under the nationalistic movements, echoed their voices to liberate the churches from their colonial connections and influences.

In a nutshell, we can understand Philip's argument that the ecumenical movement in Asia received its inspiration from the national movements and thus was part of the historical process in Asia. It came as a movement of liberation, the liberation of the churches from the ecclesiastical, cultural, and theological colonialism of the West, and it aimed at the manifestation of a truly Indian or Chinese or Japanese Christianity. However, it did not succeed at that

time, mainly because of the opposition from missionaries. Indeed, the ecumenical spirit did not completely die out; the spirit of this earlier ecumenical impulse continued in Asia. It was in Tambaram (India) in 1938 that an organisational step for the ecumenical life of the churches was conceived and the churches of Asia met one another in strength for the first time on their own Asian soil. At the Tambaram Conference, churches in Asia were given the opportunity to realise their need for one another and also their need to forge procedures whereby they could begin a common life together in Asia.

Despite the fact articulated by Dr T.V. Philip that 'the real impetus for ecumenism came from Asia', in all its fairness it is true to acknowledge that the concrete steps of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ecumenical developments in Asia were mainly due to influences from the West after the formation of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1910 and the work of its continuation committee under the leadership of John R. Mott. The IMC Conference in Tambaram marked further developments in the Asian ecumenical movement and played a significant role in shaping the idea of the formation of an Asian ecumenical movement in the future. It was a result of the work of John R. Mott and the work of the IMC that National Missionary Council/Councils of Churches were organised in different parts in Asia. Those councils played a significant role in bringing together churches, missionary societies, and other Christian institutions for mutual cooperation and unity.

It was the missionary movement in Asia which helped the formation of such councils at an early stage. Through such efforts, missionaries played the role of 'midwives' of the ecumenical councils at national levels in Asia. However, the real impetus of the regional expression of a coherent ecumenical platform and structure was initiated by Asian church leaders themselves, although some other missionary initiatives also occurred without any consultative process or involvements of the Asian churches. The formation of an Asian Council on Ecumenical Mission (ACEM) initiated by the United Presbyterian Church in the USA in 1954 in Hong Kong was one such development which even provoked the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). It was in this context that the WCC and IMC jointly convened a meeting in 1956 in Bangkok which reviewed the implications and possibilities of several developments concerning an organised structure for the ecumenical movement.

## **Early Initiatives and Enduring Vision of Ecumenism in Asia**

The 1956 Bangkok consultation recommended to the WCC and the IMC to call together a representative conference of member churches of the WCC and member councils of the IMC in the area. The Prapat Conference was an outcome of such an initiative and vision. Prapat was a conference of the member churches of the WCC and the member councils of IMC in East Asia which convened around the theme, 'The Common Evangelical Tasks of the Churches in East Asia'.

The Prapat Conference saw churches and missions as instruments of evangelism and the main ecumenical task was to discover a means of bringing together the crying needs of Asia and the resources from abroad. The Conference recommended to the member churches of the WCC and member councils of IMC in East Asia that an East Asia Christian Conference (EACC) be constituted as an organ of continuing cooperation among the churches and Christian councils in East Asia within the framework of the IMC and the WCC. However, Rajah B. Manickam, who was the Secretary of the East Asia Secretariat of WCC and IMC wrote about the roots for initiating Asian ecumenical bodies or structures since the time of the World Missionary Conference held in Tambaram in 1938. Subsequent efforts were made in 1946 by IMC and the WCC, which was then in the process of formation.

D.T. Niles observed in his report at the 1968 EACC Assembly that three impulses went into the making of the East Asia Christian Conference:

“...the impulse created by the churches coming together in each country, the impulse born of the awareness from the churches of the region finding one another, and the impulse born of the awareness from the discharge of the churches’ mission... But, there was also a fourth impulse, created by the tides of secular history which made it increasingly difficult for the churches of Asia to find relevance in those movements which had their motivations and power structures in the West. Self-government and independence for the nations of Asia demanded that the churches in these countries fully recognise the actual secular context within which they had to live.”

The enduring vision and abiding mandates of the CCA were declared at the launching:

“Believing that the purpose of God for the churches in East Asia is life together in common obedience to Him for the doing of



His will in the world, the EACC is hereby constituted as an organ of continuing cooperation among the churches and National Christian Councils in Asia within the framework of the wider ecumenical movement.”

The salient points and constitutive elements of this vision are clear. It is of the life and for the life of the mission of the Church in Asia that is not its own but one that is of God and is therefore grounded in the acknowledgement of, and engagement in, common obedience of witness to God’s mission. The CCA is a servant of this vision of the Church and exists as an organ and a forum of continuing cooperation among churches and national Christian bodies, in its service within the framework of the wider ecumenical movement.

The CCA’s purpose is to continue as a regional ecumenical body rooted in the life, and the cultural, economic, social, and political realities of Asia. The spiritual and theological gifts of the churches in Asia are another prime mandate. As Feliciano V. Carino, former General Secretary of the CCA (1995–2000), in his report to the 11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the CCA observed, “The challenges and imperatives that emerge from the changing conditions and transformations in Asian life are enormous. They are fertile ground for ecumenical engagement and work.” The CCA has been instrumental in various ways in shaping the ecumenical movement and its ethos over the years and decades.

### **CCA@60: Ecumenism in Action in Asia**

As the phrase, described at the beginning of Charles Dicken’s novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” In the lifespan of any organisation or movement, there are times experienced with both, best and worst parts. This also holds for when we think of the history or even the metamorphosis of ecumenism in Asia. It is indeed a fact that, like in many other parts in the world, the ecumenical movement in Asia is in a state of a general decline in many ways today. There may be various factors and reasons for this. In my assessment, the decline we are currently experiencing is due to factors such as leadership crises, the proliferation of ecumenical organisations at national and regional levels, increasing denominationalism, a lack of ecumenical formation amongst the younger generation in churches, a lack of capacity-building efforts, a lack of vision and theological thinking, and our inability, or lack of sensitivity to respond to emerging and pertinent issues with a vision for wider ecumenism, rather than strengthening denominational or confessional fellowships. Unlike

in the past, the leadership of churches and ecumenical bodies in several Asian countries has not always been interested in responding to or addressing crucial issues in their respective situations. Secular NGOs (non-governmental organisations) or other organisations are more professional in their approach, hence they get more attention and better results. At the end of the day, the public witnesses of mainline national ecumenical bodies remain at a low ebb. At the same time, the other trend we face is due to the multiplicity of ecumenical organisations addressing the same concerns within the same constituencies without having any coordination or sharing of information. When we experience a lack of communication amongst various ecumenical actors and players, it affects the coherence of the ecumenical movement.

The significant contributions made by the CCA during the past decades have manifested themselves in various ways over time. Whether it was addressing the question of 'mission and evangelism' or human rights, leadership development, or ecumenical formation, theological issues, or Christian participation in the people's struggles, the CCA provided new insights and impetus. The Asia Mission Conferences were platforms to bring together Asian churches and non-Asian church representatives to contextually discuss Asian missiological issues. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the CCA had contributed significantly towards the development and promotion of an Asian theological agenda.

The CCA provided platforms and opportunities for Asian Christian thinkers and the theologians to explore the implications of people-centred theology, focusing on the areas of Christology and ecclesiology, interpreting salvation in terms of liberation and humanisation. The launching of the Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS) in 1997 was one such landmark. Through the CCA, the Urban-Rural Mission (URM) network mobilised a variety of Christian groups across Asia who were actively involved in the people's struggle for human rights, justice, and peace. The CCA was very much at the forefront of human rights causes in the 1980s when several Asian countries were under authoritarian military regimes. The CCA supported churches and national ecumenical bodies in their struggle against human rights violations. When severe problems cropped up at a time when the CCA could not use its name or platform to speak out about sensitive political issues, it was able to form the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and the Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC), as part of the CCA International Affairs which was then initiated and headed by Clement John, a Pakistani Lawyer who was the International Affairs Secretary of the CCA at the time. The

Youth programme of the CCA helped mould many young people in different Asian countries in the area of ecumenical formation; CCA Youth provided excellent services until the mid-1980s. The Asian Ecumenical Course (AEC) started in 1975 and became an annual event, making a major contribution to ecumenical formation for several years. The CCA played a vital role in establishing and strengthening relations between churches in former 'closed-door' societies and socialist countries like Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. People-to-people exchange programmes organised by the CCA helped many from these countries, and systematic efforts by the CCA brought the churches in these countries forward into the mainstream Asian ecumenical movement. The Asian Ecumenical Exchange programmes of the CCA provided opportunities for several Asian church leaders to be involved in exchange programmes, exposure, study, research, and the sharing of expertise.

However, the question before us is: what is the status and effectiveness of some of these programmes in today's Asian context?

### **The Church and the Ecumenical Councils in Asia**

The CCA member churches and councils which are spread across a vast geographical region, starting from Iran in West Asia to Japan in East Asia, from Nepal in the North to New Zealand in the South, are the strength of the CCA as a regional ecumenical organisation. If anything happened to its constituent bodies, it will reflect on the image or the face of the CCA. Their strengths, weaknesses, enthusiasm, and motivations are all as integral to the CCA as the oxygen-delivering blood vessels are to the brain. Nurturing the blood vessels and brain should be part of our regular caretaking to make the ecumenical movement vibrant or active; if not, it will be affected by paralysis.

In common parlance, a 'Council of Churches' is an association of separated and autonomous Christian Churches within a defined geographic area, through which its members seek to manifest their fellowship with one another, engage in common activities of witness and service, and advance towards the goal of visible unity. The councils are crucial expressions and instruments of the modern ecumenical movement. In Asia, the National Council of Churches (NCC) in each constituent nation are the vibrant expressions of the coordinators and facilitators of the ecumenical movement in their respective nations.

We are proud that some early national ecumenical councils were founded in Asia. The National Council in India, Burma, Ceylon in

1914, and the National Council in Korea in 1924, etc., are some examples of the formation of such initiatives as an outcome of the Edinburgh Conference. In 1910, there were two national councils through which limited cooperation was possible. By 1928 (the year of the first great meeting of the IMC), there were twenty-three councils formed in various parts of the world.

It has been a common trend in every continent that churches show only limited support and commitment to national or regional ecumenical councils. In many places, councils are facing hard times, especially because of shrinking financial resources which affect the day-to-day working of the councils. Asia is no exception to this trend. In Asia today, we have seventeen NCCs starting with the oldest ones in India (1914), Myanmar (1914/1949), Sri Lanka (1914), Pakistan (1914/1948), Bangladesh (1914/1949), Korea (1924), the Philippines (1929/1949/1963), Indonesia (1950), Malaysia (1947), Singapore (1948/1961/1974), Australia (1948/1960/1994), Taiwan (1966/1991), Japan (1948), Hong Kong (1954), Cambodia (1998), Nepal (1998), and Bhutan (2008). We can see the strengths and weaknesses of these councils in terms of their commitment, performance, functions, financial situations, sense of ownership by member churches, programmes, visions and new initiatives, staff capacities, and leadership – the list can go on with many other indicators. Among these Asian NCCs, NCC-Singapore is affiliated with the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC but has not maintained an official relationship with the WCC for some time. Since the CCA was expelled from Singapore, NCC-Singapore stopped its contacts and relations with the CCA. At the same time, some of the member churches of NCC-Singapore are also members of the WCC and the CCA (the Methodist Church in Singapore, Mar Thoma Syrian Church, and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church).

In other countries, such as East Timor, Thailand, and Laos, where the WCC and CCA member churches exist, NCCs have not yet been formed for various reasons. In East Timor, a joint committee with representatives of various denominations (mainly the Protestant Churches of East (IPTL), Assemblies of God, and the Bethel Pentecostal Church) has been formed as an initial step towards setting up a national ecumenical body. In Thailand, there existed a National Christian Council until 1932; however, it disappeared after the birth of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT). Christians remain a tiny minority, with the CCT as the main Protestant church in the country; the CCT and Roman Catholic Church have a joint committee. In Laos, the Lao Evangelical Church (LEC) is the largest. The LEC is a member of the CCA, and its application for membership

with the WCC has been accepted and will be admitted officially into the fellowship at the next Central Committee meeting of the WCC in September this year. The Roman Catholic Church is the second largest church in Laos. In Vietnam, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECV) is the largest Protestant church in the country. The ECV is neither a member of the CCA nor of the WCC. However, the ECV has been in direct contact with the CCA and the WCC for several years, even when the Church was not officially recognised by the Vietnamese government. Churches in Vietnam, Mongolia, and Bhutan are not yet members of the WCC or the CCA, and no national ecumenical bodies exist in Vietnam and Mongolia currently. In New Zealand, the national ecumenical body has become defunct. The Conference of Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand (CCANZ) no longer exists; the member churches have decided to shut down the CCANZ as of the end of 2005. A new group called the National Dialogue of Churches, which was set up in 2016, seeks to help churches consider the options for a new national ecumenical body. At the same time, the Maori Church Council has been functioning and its functions have been reactivated in recent times. In terms of membership, the two largest national ecumenical bodies in Asia are the NCC-India and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI). PGI has eighty-nine member churches and NCCI has twenty-nine member churches.

In terms of the programmatic involvement of the NCCs, not all of them are on an equal footing. There are variations in terms of staff capacities, programmes, and routine activities. Certain councils function only in a nominal way. In terms of addressing the issues and urgent priorities in the country, the churches normally look at the national ecumenical bodies which represent the entire Christian community or the entire Protestant community. However, several of these NCCs have a lethargic approach in terms of addressing social and political realities. In certain circumstances, the NCCs, as well as the churches, are not in a position to raise their collective voices or concerns publicly as they live in a minority situation, for example, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Pakistan. Several of these NCCs face leadership problems, and second or third-line leadership has not yet been developed in these NCCs. Due to a lack of human and financial resources, some councils are struggling to implement their programmes.

The reality is that most national ecumenical bodies do not represent the entirety of Christian communities in their respective countries as the majority Roman Catholic Church, or the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are not officially members of such councils. In Asia, the Council of Churches in Australia and the Council of

Churches in Taiwan have the Roman Catholic Church as a member. In all other countries, the Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the respective national ecumenical body. The relationships between the NCCs and Evangelical fellowships in certain countries have been developed and this is mainly based on certain issues they face in their social and political contexts- for example, some of the bodies have good relations and collaborations with the Evangelical Alliance of Fellowships mainly because of certain issues such as Anti-Conversion Bills, or they come together whenever they need to address issues such as attacks against minorities by Buddhist fundamentalist groups or to speak up on conflict and reconciliation issues. Similarly, collaborations and programmatic involvements exist between several national ecumenical bodies and the Bishops Conferences' of the Roman Catholic Church in Asia.

Even though these national ecumenical bodies have been playing significant roles in their respective countries, the trend is that several of these councils are struggling to escape from ecumenical fatigue and organisational or the institutional paralysis currently affecting them.

## **Prospects and Challenges**

Christianity, inspired by the Asian Jesus, his disciples and the evangelists, was reintroduced to many parts of Asia by Western missionaries; hence, it acquired a Western image over the centuries, which persists. The West introduced Christianity in many forms and varieties. It was in different templates when they brought it and introduced it here. Later, history records a great concern against Western denominationalism and missionary paternalism that was precipitated among Asian Christians during the missionary era. Asian Christianity has remarkable variety and that is, of course, due to various missionary activities that had taken place in Asia over the centuries. Today, the reality is that the reflection of that denominationalism as well as paternalism is very much evident in different corners and levels in Asia which adds more 'colour' to the Asian ecumenical movement. As we know, Asia's image of Christianity has been by and large associated with Western colonialism. Sardar K.M. Panikkar, in his book *Asia and Western Dominance*, observes, "With the disappearance of European dominance, Christianity assumed its natural position as one of the religions of Asia and missionaries ceased to have any special or privileged position." Fifty years after Panikkar made his observation, Edmond Chia, a former Secretary of the Interreligious Affairs Office of the Federation of Asian Bishop's Conference (FABC), says, "The notion of foreignness

is one of the most conscious characteristics of the Asian Church and so features in its theology..." Now, we can add to the list the notion of influence or addition of 'foreignness' in the name of ecumenism among CCA's member churches and some councils.

Even after the missionary era ended, to a great extent in most Asian countries, Asian churches remained very much under the influence of denominational identities, and in that manner are more enthusiastic in relating with their Western counterparts rather than relating and engaging with their sister churches at local or national levels. This is yet another reason for the lack of interest in nurturing ecumenism at the local levels in Asia. Some Asian church leaders think that the confessional link with the Western mother churches is more important than relating and witnessing together in the local context with other denominations in Asia. Although the Western missionary era has ended, the denominational or confessional links between various Asian denominations and their former mission boards and churches in Europe and North America are still more important for them. They are still stronger in terms of their ongoing relations, funding, and programmatic involvement. Ultimately, this is hindering ecclesial unity in Asia.

The multiplicity of denominations and freelance missionary evangelism is a real threat to Asian churches and Asian ecumenism. Countries like Cambodia, Nepal, Bhutan, and Mongolia are missionary battlefields now. Mainline denominations in several other countries face threats from aggressive missionary evangelism by overseas missionaries and churches, and this is not merely done only by independent evangelical churches or para-church groups, but mostly by mainline churches who are members of the CCA and the WCC. These groups of missionaries are only sowing the seeds of division and are aiding local churches in shifting their membership from one denomination to another. For example, Christians in Bangladesh are a microscopic minority and their total number may be only around 400,000. Despite that, there are some 150,000 Protestants divided into forty-six denominations, each of which competes with the other in the country. The statistics from Cambodia and Nepal are even more alarming.

What we lack in our Asian setting is a sincere effort towards the ecumenical movement which started as a youth movement. Many young people were instrumental in shaping ecumenical organisations, such as the SCMs, WSCF, YMCA, and the WCC. But, where is the youth in the ecumenical movement these days? Compared to Western countries, we can be proud of the fact that there are

more young people in our churches. Though these young people actively participate in their local congregations, their presence and participation beyond their local zone are limited. They have confined themselves to rural or town parishes and are not getting the opportunities for wider exposure which normally might help them to become the ecumenical leaders of tomorrow. As a person who has been responsible for organising ecumenical programmes in various Asian countries continually for the past twenty-three years, I can share with you several stories illustrating how difficult it is to convince church leaders of the need for sending young people for meetings and training. The churches and ecumenical bodies in Asia have not been engaged to identify and promote young people and encourage them to use their talents for the ecumenical movement. The churches and ecumenical bodies are not taking seriously the ecumenical formation of young people. Ultimately, this is affecting the future of churches and the ecumenical movement at the national level.

There are several NCCs in Asia that have problems in recruiting committed and able staff members. Unless and until we make a systematic effort to build up the ranks of second or third-line leadership in our churches and ecumenical bodies, we will not be able to revitalise the ecumenical movement in Asia. Moreover, the ecumenical formation of all groups of people in the Church must be considered a priority as part of the struggle to overcome the divisions between Christians, which are sinful and scandalous, and challenge the credibility of the Church and her mission. As a process of learning, ecumenical formation is concerned with engaging the experience, knowledge, skills, talents, and the ecumenical memory of the Christian community for mutual enrichment. The ecumenical movement always called for the need for a rediscovery of the role of the laity of the Church. To strengthen the Asian ecumenical movement, we need to make a serious attempt to rediscover the role of the laity. The ecumenical formation of laity in the churches in Asia also needs to be treated with some urgency.

Another major challenge the Asian ecumenical movement needs to address is the issue of religious pluralism, or, to see ecumenism and its practical application in the multi-religious Asian context. Asia is home to some of the world's major religions, and the majority of the people belong to these religions. It is a known reality that most churches in Asia have not been able to come to terms with the presence of other religions present in their midst. Here, we need to frankly admit our failures in equipping Christians to come to terms with the presence of people of other faiths. The problem



we now face is our traditional missiological interpretations which we inherited centuries ago.

### **Has the ecumenical movement becomes more divisive and less effective?**

As the ecumenical agenda has been changing and moving away from the priorities of ecumenical commitment in the last three or four decades, there is no point in simply repeating the same jargon with certain cosmetic changes and prefixes and suffixes. Whatever may be the issues to be addressed, what we need is a strong and committed ecumenical movement with the full cooperation and support of its member constituencies. In addition to this, what is required is full cooperation and participation with all ecumenical partners and actors in our region. We find today a variety of organisations and institutions working on similar areas or concerns—NGOs, INGOs, faith-based organisations (FBOs), governments, multilateral organisations, etc. These groups are loosely connected with institutional churches or ecumenical organisations. In many contexts, collaboration with them is much easier, but often the problem we face is lack of ecumenical cooperation and collaboration among ecumenical partners and mission agencies who are working in the same region with similar agendas, where collective ecumenical actions are needed. It is important to demonstrate Christian unity and ecumenical visibility in actions when the same church-based organisations are trying to address similar issues in one region or country and in pursuit of a common goal. It is in this context that the relevance of a conciliar body like a Regional Ecumenical Organisation (REO), such as the CCA, has been valued over the years. In the past, WCC emphasised the special role of conciliar bodies – the WCC, REOs, and NCCs – and asserted that these ecumenical structures be seen as the backbone of ecumenical cooperation. WCC was specifically affirming the roles of the conciliar bodies on local, national, regional, and world levels which need close operations. At the same time, WCC made it clear that as a privileged instrument and world body to promote ecumenism, its role is not to implement programmes and projects in the region, but facilitate, interpret, connect, and provide the flow of communication for the entire multilateral ecumenical configuration. However, the policy is no longer valued, and what we see today is adding more polarisation and divisiveness due to a lack of clarity and vision in shaping unity in 'one ecumenical movement'.

The ecumenical and ecclesiastical landscapes in Asia have changed over the past decades. Different institutional and organisational manifestations also have emerged. But it is an accepted fact within

the ecumenical movement that the CCA is a privileged instrument responsible for ensuring the coherence and coordination of the ecumenical movement in Asia. But often, the CCA is helpless in performing its role today due to the multiplicity of ecumenical initiatives that have parachuted from outside Asia, creating more and more disharmony within the ecumenical family in Asia. This is what I described in one of my reports to the CCA Executive Committee: "What we experience now in Asia is a trend of 'Archipelago Ecumenism'. As a result of this trend, the ecumenical movement in Asia becomes a model of an 'archipelago of ecumenism' within Asia rather than promoting the values of a united ecumenical movement." This is a major challenge to the ecumenical movement in Asia, especially in ensuring its coherence as well as appropriate coordination and the determination of proper direction in its ecumenical journey.

When we talk about the Asian ecumenical movement, we normally include only the CCA and the NCC constituencies in Asia. That means we do not view another large group of Asians (those who are not members in these two ecumenical bodies), as those who should be within the fold of the ecumenical movement. As a result, the Roman Catholic Church, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, the Christians in China, Vietnam, and Mongolia are not considered a part of this movement. When we are not talking about and dealing with a more inclusive ecumenical movement, how can we revitalise the ecumenical movement in Asia without their participation? The fastest-growing Christian church and the largest Protestant churches are in Asia. Korea has been a remarkable success story for the churches, with Christian numbers swelling for several years since the 1970s, although there are certain indications of a reduction in church membership among some of the mainline churches. Estimates of the number of Chinese Christians today range anywhere from 30 to 40 million and the China Christian Council (CCC), the main Protestant church in China, has more than 30 million members. However, often it is perceived that the church in China or Chinese Christians are not part of the Asian ecumenical movement. Can we afford to not embrace the Church in China and the Christians in China within the mainstream Asian ecumenical movement? I have been informing the CCA leadership about this for some time now, and I openly brought this issue up at the seminar organised by CCA as part of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007. It has been my constant appeal to the CCA leadership to take this as a challenge for future constructive engagement.

## **CCA Beyond 60: Collaborative Ecumenical Partnership**

The CCA believes that our ecumenical commitment and calling gives us another reason to think about a more systematic approach in making CCA's witness more effective in partnership with other ecumenical organisations and platforms in the Asian region and beyond it. The CCA, as a Regional Ecumenical Organisation in Asia with a very vast constituent body, is in a unique position to enter into quality partnership arrangements with other ecumenical bodies in a creative way. The Executive Committee Meeting of the CCA held in October 2015 discussed the possibility of initiating collaborative partnership, which will help the CCA to maximise its ecumenical actions. The General Secretary's proposal for initiating 'Collaborative Ecumenical Partnership in Activities and Programmes' (CEPAP) was accepted in principle by the Executive Committee. Such partnerships will allow considerable leverage to pool together each partner's unique strengths and resources through collaborative ecumenical partnership in planning and implementing programmes and activities jointly. Financial support should not be the only criterion for developing this partnership and collaboration within the Asian ecumenical family; we should commit ourselves to embracing and cooperating with all ecumenical actors and players within the Asian ecumenical family. It was with this spirit and understanding that certain discussions have been taking place with some of the confessional bodies and ecumenical organisations such as FABC, AEA, YMCA-AP Alliance, ACISCA, and WSCF to initiate joint actions and programmes.

The specific responsibility and role of the ecumenical movement in Asia is to search for the expression of the Asian churches' common faith through its engagement in a pluralistic Asia and to work for visible unity despite doctrinal differences or confessional barriers. As we all agree, the central calling of the ecumenical movement is the quest for the unity of the Church. We are called to participate in witnessing and serving in unity for the reconciliation of all humanity and the whole creation in the Household of God. A new way has to be found for all ecumenical actors and denominational and confessional bodies engaged in their mission in Asia to work together. The need for revitalising the ecumenical movement in Asia and regaining the ecumenical vision of Asian churches should be a priority for all those who are concerned with the common witness and future of the ecumenical movement in Asia. It is high time that the Asian ecumenical movement is revitalised so as to reposition its role and respond to the challenges of contemporary Asian realities.

# **Global Ecumenical Movement: Challenges to the Concept of Ecumenism, Christian Unity Today, and the Need for New Expressions and Paradigms**

***Dr Ioan Sauca***

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## **Grassroots ecumenism versus institutional ecumenism**

The present-day realities present to all the churches a myriad of new challenges. After half a century of Christian collaboration and the search for Christian unity, signs of tendencies towards strengthening of confessional identities, dogmatic integrity, and close traditionalism are experienced in all Churches.

- Ecumenical enthusiasm and commitment has decreased in many places; instead, there are manifestations of strengthening one's confessional identity;
- Ecumenism has become in many places a strategic and diplomatic function dealt with from a specialised office based in the Foreign/External Church affairs department of the churches;
- There is a satisfaction with the mere 'lukewarm' understanding of ecumenical fellowship as cohabitation and cooperation rather than an advancement towards greater koinonia in faith, worship, and Eucharistic fellowship;
- Ecumenical institutes which were famous and flourishing in the past are now being closed in many places or have enlarged their horizons and have been transformed into interfaith institutes;
- National Councils of Churches have lost their importance and impact; Consultative Council of religions are now preferred or favoured;
- The term 'ecumenism' has become a sensitive and problematic word. In some contexts, it is equated with an ideological movement of the past. While in some cases

ecumenism is questioned or even condemned, the great majority of Christians will accept the need for inter-Christian cooperation and dialogue.

### *Conclusion*

While institutional ecumenism is seriously questioned today, some speaking even of a 'crisis', ecumenism as a grassroots experience and practice is alive and working; but under new circumstance and situations, it needs new expressions and vision.

### **Contemporary debate on the concept of 'Unity' as the purpose and goal of the Ecumenical Movement**

Although once widely accepted, the paradigms on unity as developed within the World Council of Churches are being subjected to serious questioning today not only by Christians and Churches which are not members of the WCC (such as Evangelicals and Pentecostals) but also by the younger generation of theologians and faithful coming from those churches which have been members of WCC since its foundation.

Contextual realities are very important if we are to understand where we come from, where we are, and where we should go, if we desire to strengthen and give a future to the ecumenical dream and vision. There is a need for contextual analysis and reflection on ecumenical paradigms proposed and coined within the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

- As expressed as a concern during the Missionary Movement (Edinburg 1910), the need for unity in witness was asked for to overcome the hindrances of Christian divisions that affected the impact of the Gospel on the world and on its final goal of bringing the whole world to Christ, or 'evangelisation of the world in this generation'. Within that context, the Faith and Order program was initiated with its emphasis on ecclesial unity, one apostolic faith, and Eucharistic sharing while the Life and Work initiative was presented with its paradigm of unity in action. These 'ecumenical initiatives' were coined and developed in the context of the major social and political aspirations and preoccupations of the time- the formation of the League of Nations, UN, other international organisations, Magna Carta of Human Rights, etc. Paradigms which included

concerns of all these initial movements were elaborated and evolved over the years and were very much related to the contextual realities of the unity of the whole creation (macro-ecumenism) (including the relationship with the people of other faiths).

- There have been attempts to depart from the Christocentric basis of the earlier ecumenical movement, which has been criticised for being rather exclusivist in its arrogant Western missionary project of bringing the whole world to Christ in that generation. The shift has now been towards Trinitarian and pneumatological bases which provide the space for new paradigms, such as that of 'the household of life'. (Konrad Raiser and Lesslie Newbegin)
- The transition from an ecclesial-centred ecumenism to a world-centred approach (the shift started in particular after the 1968 WCC General Assembly in Uppsala). With the arrival of several churches from the South in the fellowship of the WCC, social and political issues have also entered the ecumenical agenda – the famous Programme to Combat Racism was founded; Martin Luther King was invited to deliver a speech in Uppsala but was assassinated before that. Consequently, the search for the unity of the Church came to be understood and looked for in relation to and together with the need for common action in serving the world. Unfortunately, these two approaches have been presented over the years as somehow mutually exclusive in an 'either/or' discourse.

Two well-known Dutch theologians (Witvliet and Hoedemaker) expressed uneasiness and critical remarks of the initial vision and goal of the Ecumenical Movement, saying that the old dream of unity as the goal of the ecumenical movement died in 1988–1989. For them, unity, as proposed in the ecumenical movement, was as if a straitjacket was controlling and limiting diversities. In their view, this was an 'imperialistic' mindset, inherited from the Roman Empire. They argued in favour of affirming diversities rather than unity.

On the other side, there were immediate strong and pertinent reactions: The Strasbourg Statement in 1993; The Princeton Proposal of 2003; Michael Kinnamon, *The Vision of the Ecumenical Movement and how it has been impoverished by its friends* 2003.

## **The new contextual situation of our times and its impact on ecumenical vision**

The WCC's initial vision was deeply influenced by the context of the time when the majority of Christians were based in the North and within the socio-political challenges following World Wars I and II.

The world map of Christianity has changed very much since the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, which is often considered to be the starting point of the modern ecumenical movement. Materials with statistics prepared for the 2010 Edinburgh Centennial eloquently show the same (The Atlas of Global Christianity edited by Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Christianity was the dominant religion in Europe and the Americas: 66.3 per cent of Christians were living in Europe, 27.1 per cent in the Americas, and only 4.5 per cent in Asia-Pacific, 1.4 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 0.7 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa.

In our days, its 'centre of gravity' has moved away from Europe and North America to the Global South. In 2010, 25.9 per cent of the Christian population was living in Europe, 36.8 per cent in the Americas, 23.6 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, 13.1percent in Asia-Pacific, and 0.6 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa.

The new contextual realities have a great impact on the Ecumenical Movement as experienced today. The old theological debates which created tense discussions and divisions seem to be souvenirs of the past. Faith and Order-type people speak today the language of Life and Work and vice versa. Church unity as a theological concern and the concern for the unity of humankind and the survival of our world is no longer dealt with in separation. Even the old debate, which in some contexts separated evangelicals and ecumenists, seems to have been overcome. Ecumenical concerns and care for world issues and social justice have also become concerns for Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and neo-Pentecostal movements. There is an increased wish for active cooperation, which was not the case in the past.

One may ask the question, 'What has happened', and which new realities have changed these new ecumenical relations and brought closer old ecumenisms with the Evangelicals and Pentecostals? Analysts will say that this is again due to the change of the centre of

gravity of Christianity from the North to the South. One of the most recent expressions of this was the creation of the Global Christian Forum in 1998, which brought together representatives from the WCC, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU, Vatican), World Evangelical Alliance, and the Pentecostal World Fellowship.

From the 60s to the end of the 80s, the opposition of the Evangelicals to the WCC was obvious. The socio-political issues which entered the WCC agenda especially after 1968 and the entrance of the Orthodox Churches from the former Soviet Bloc as members in the WCC made the Evangelicals very critical of the WCC. The WCC was accused of having lost its missionary and evangelistic passion of proclaiming the Gospel to the world and the suspicion of relationships with communist governments via the Churches from communist countries which entered the WCC became very acute.

Nowadays, things are different. According to Wes Granberg-Michaelson, a century ago, 90 per cent of the world's evangelicals were in the USA and Europe, but today they are no more than 25 per cent. Evangelicals are growing now in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

As the centre of Evangelicalism has moved to the South, the concerns of the South have become concerns of the Evangelicals as well. Such concerns are about economic justice, peace, care for creation, and religious freedom as part and parcel of the concern for mission and evangelism.

The same is true for Pentecostalism as well, which is growing very fast, particularly in the South. The concerns of the South as mentioned above have become the spiritual concerns of Global Pentecostalism.

All these new realities have changed the shape, vision, and goal of the Ecumenical Movement and will change the face of global Christianity even more.

### **Global post-modern values and the need for new ecumenical paradigms**

Today's world is marked by post-modern values and concerns, and our young people, no matter in which continent they live, are equally sharing and are being touched and affected by such values:



- There is no one truth but many truths, there is no unity which makes one but there is the cohabitation of different identities;
- The institutional expression of any kind of ideas is challenged and rejected. All international institutions now face serious challenges, the institution of the family included. Even the idea of 'universal human rights' has been deeply challenged and questioned as a value of the West which was imposed on the whole world, and the term 'human dignity' has been preferred instead;
- The concept of the 'international' or the 'global' which was much valued in the recent past is being replaced today with bilateral relations;
- Councils of Churches are being replaced with the concept of 'Churches together';
- Platforms and forums are now being preferred to councils and other official institutionalised structures.

To sum up, in a sentence, the older paradigms of Christian unity as promoted by the WCC since its inception with regards to the major political and social trends of the time are considered by the younger generation today as arrogant and imperialistic, a kind of centralised unity which expects the dilution of identities and differences.

There is a need, therefore, for new paradigms within the Ecumenical Movement and the understanding of Unity in the context of the serious challenges of our times. Bringing a personal reflection, I will use two biblical images and I will make an attempt to interpret them in relation to Pneumatology and its eschatological significance and meaning as *already and not yet*:

1. The One Holy Spirit which came on the Apostles did not come as one cloud or cover but as diverse tongues of fires, giving each of them a diverse gift of language. The descent of the Holy Spirit did not make the Apostles one, in a kind of one 'spiritual Kolkhoz' but a koinonia of diverse gifts. That diversity of gifts and their koinonia in unity are expressed clearly in the ancient Christian prayer of invocation of the Holy Spirit: "... who are everywhere present and fills all things..."
2. Reference to Revelation 22 which speaks about one river which feeds the tree of life which are found on one side and other of the river and each of the trees having twelve kinds of different fruits (crops) every month.

A very recent speech that Pope Francis delivered in the Latin Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Istanbul praised diversity in the church and warned against trying to 'tame' God by forcing uniformity.

### **Conclusion: a possible way forward to an ecumenical journey of the future**

The sources of our faith could bring us new possibilities for new paradigms of advancing towards the search for the unity that Christ prayed for and was given to us as a mandatory commandment.

1. The call to unity is not an option; it is imperative and a vocation. It is the very desire of Christ and the heart of the Gospel message. Either we like it or we do not. It is not a historical imperialistic view; it is not an arrogant desire of uniting the world by force, but a spiritual force of bringing together in harmony and koinonia God's creation and His people.
2. I fully endorse the Trinitarian basis of any theological approach and a greater emphasis on the Holy Spirit and its work in the whole world. Furthermore, I agree with those saying that an arrogant Christocentrism which limits God's work and cares to the limits of the Christian community could be an exclusivist approach. But I would dare say that I am open to the Trinitarian approach because of my Christocentric lenses and perspective. I see the Holy Spirit working in the whole of God's creation because of the Christocentric basis. I continue to say that I am open to dialogue with people of other faiths and with any other people of goodwill, and will affirm and see their whole value because of my Christocentric perspective. In affirming these things, we cannot depart from our Christological foundation which gives us meaning and identity as the community created around the Risen Christ.
3. The Church and the world cannot be looked in antagonistic terms or terms of priority. The Church is God's creation as the world is God's creation too. The Church has no finality in itself. It is not or should not be seen as a human institution. Rather, it is a community filled and empowered with God's Spirit towards the service and the transformation of the world. Diakonia to the world is an expression of one's faith and spirituality, not an extraneous and optional good action. In the Church, the vertical should meet with the horizontal realities. Keeping the cross together gives balance and stability to the ecumenical movement.

*'Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace' as a new overarching ecumenical paradigm for our times*

The last WCC Assembly in Busan offered a renewed statement on Unity that attempted to bring together all these dynamics and approaches and proposed a new ecumenical paradigm for the future that has been widely embraced in all Churches: the *pilgrimage of justice and peace*; a spiritual journey with other fellow Christians as well as with all people of goodwill, together affirming and cooperating in the implementation of the signs of the Kingdom in today's world. Unity in doctrines and commonly-agreed theological statements leading to unity in faith and full communion among Christians remains a great desire and goal but that is not a condition of walking together on the way of the pilgrimage of justice and peace. Despite differences, by walking and serving together, unity and koinonia may be strengthened on the way.

*From Staying Together to Moving Together*

The first WCC Assembly in Amsterdam put forth the invitation 'to stay together'. This paradigm remained the major approach to ecumenical dialogues and encounters until recently. The main emphasis was on searching, finding, and agreeing on common theological statements with the hope that once such a common basis was found, churches could start moving together toward fuller or full communion. During that period, churches were involved in doing things together, but often those efforts were perceived as 'Christian activism', as additional or parallel to theological concerns. Early WCC documents contain many instances wherein debates on the need for balance between vertical and horizontal, between theological and socio-political concerns, were often confrontational.

The difficult contextual situation of our times – which brings serious challenges not only to witness of the churches but to their very existence – as well as the new perception of ecumenism and unity for the younger generation of Christians led the Busan Assembly to adopt a new profile, direction, paradigm, and discourse for and on ecumenical togetherness today– that is, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. The churches, and also all the people of goodwill, were invited to join the pilgrimage. The main invitation, different from that which has been predominant from Amsterdam onward, states, "We intend to move together."

This is a shift from static to dynamic, from status-quo stability based on a solid theological agreement to a movement together forward.

The newness of the paradigm and its direction provoked discussion, questions, and debate. Some welcome it with enthusiasm and commit themselves to embark on the pilgrimage. Others, however, feel that the concept is still vague, unclear, and confusing and requires more time for reflection. Others raised their voices against it, saying that the new concept lacks theological depth and voiced fear that by adopting the new paradigm and shift, the WCC will lose its clear constitutional focus on theology and the search for the unity of the church.

In what follows, I will try to make a short and succinct reflection on the new paradigm.

As a theological and ecumenical concept offered to the younger generations of our times, I find it meaningful, attractive, and clear and carrying a message that can be understood and followed. I also find in it a deep theological meaning, arising from the very roots of our faith and our liturgical and spiritual tradition. It opens new ways of reflection and lays the basis for renewed possibilities of openness, dialogue, and cooperation with the world.

### *Definition of the Meaning and Content of the Concept*

The first dilemma, as I see it, comes from the fact that different people understand the term 'pilgrimage' in different ways, conditioned by the contexts in which they live and their historical connotations. For a Catholic or an Orthodox, it may immediately point to a trip one is making to a holy place. For a Protestant, while the term might be understood to have the same meaning, it remains problematic. The concept of travelling to a holy place with the expectation of receiving certain spiritual or even soteriological 'benefits' can be theologically controversial. As a result, while many churches are eager to respond to the invitation and embark on the pilgrimage, there is still a need to clarify and come to a better understanding of what we are talking about. Where are we to go? What is the final target and goal we envisage? With whom are we expecting to journey?

As it is formulated, the concept qualifies itself, defined specifically as a pilgrimage 'of justice and peace'. Others argue: Why cannot it be 'toward justice and peace' or 'for justice and peace'?

Such questions are also being asked by those in Roman Catholic and Orthodox circles. Yet, it is interesting to note that the paradigm of ‘journeying together’ was very strong in the common statement and their individual affirmations during the historical meeting<sup>1</sup> in Jerusalem between Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

If one analyses more deeply the concept launched in Busan, it becomes clear that the word ‘pilgrimage’ was chosen to convey that it is a journey together, but a journey with spiritual meaning and profound theological connotations and implications. It is not a journey toward a historical place, nor is it an ethical journey through which some ‘activism’ is to be practised. It is a journey that God has called us to undertake in doing his will for the final purpose he has for the world. The main purpose and goal of our common journey thus remains the search for the unity of Christians— so that the world may believe in the view of the unity of the whole cosmos as the reason and final goal of eschatological expectation.

The fundamental constitutional basis of the WCC reiterated in the document, *The Common Understanding and Vision of WCC*, has thus not been altered. The difference that Busan has made is essential: we will no longer wait to agree on all details of our unity in theological statements and formulations before we start journeying together. Rather, we will discover our unity while walking side-by-side, with one another, doing and witnessing to the kingdom that is to come and to its signs manifested as a foretaste already here and now. In other words, the two signs identified as ‘justice’ and ‘peace’ lie at the heart of the beatitudes and of the gospels. Justice and peace are God-given gifts for the world. They are concrete signs of the kingdom that is to come, but they are also a foretaste of the kingdom that is to be incarnated and lived out in concrete ways in history – here and now. We are partakers of those gifts and struggle to implement them.

But it is God who finally brings his peace and justice, and not we alone without him. Our activism without God’s presence remains futile. In embarking on the journey of justice and peace, we become pilgrims toward God’s kingdom, living and accomplishing his will for

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1 Common Declaration signed by Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, from <http://www.news.va/en/news/common-declaration>, accessed on 12 June 2014

the world. And we walk with one another in this journey, together with all people of goodwill and together with God, toward the final eschatological purpose he has prepared for his world. For this reason, the pilgrimage we are invited to embark on is 'of justice and peace' and not for, or to, justice and peace.

To achieve all these desiderata, there is a need for education, information, and most of all formation. Ecumenical formation of the future generation of church leaders and the people in the pews is the only key to assuring the stability and strengthening of our faith and communities.

In short: Ecumenical formation should be built on a solid and strong theological and biblical basis and should be holistic and spiritually-oriented.

# **The Asiatic Ecumenical Movement**

***Rev. Dr Ahn Jae Woong***

*Former CCA General Secretary*

First of all, I would like to share with you briefly what the ecumenical movement is all about. We all know that the CCA and other related Asian ecumenical organisations have produced many outstanding ecumenical leaders in the past. I hope that this unique tradition will continue within this generation and future generations as well.

The ‘evangelisation of the world in this generation’ was the dream and vision of John R. Mott, a chief architect of the modern ecumenical movement. Although his dream was never realised, the unfinished mission task and this vision must be carried out by the generations to come.

Many ecumenical leaders in those days felt, “It is the decisive hour of the Christian mission.” As a result, they worked hard to recruit, train, send, and evangelise the world through this generation, with endeavours like the WCC, CCA, YMCAs, and WSCF.

Gideon Goosen’s book, *Bringing Churches Together: Popular Introduction to Ecumenism* (1993) helps provide more clarity on the overall meaning of the ecumenical movement. Let me borrow some ideas from Goosen’s interpretation. According to Goosen, the word ‘ecumenism’ or its adjective ‘ecumenical’ has changed its usage over the centuries. The Greek word ‘oikoumene’ literally means ‘that which pertains to the whole inhabited world’. Moreover, Matthew uses it in this sense in 24:12, “This good news of the Kingdom will be proclaimed to the whole world, ‘oikoumene’ as a witness to all the nations...” Initially, it was used in this sense in the life of the Church.

There is a second meaning of the word ‘ecumenical’, about Christian unity. Thus, the ‘ecumenical movement’ is “The process towards a great expression of unity and cooperation among all Christians.” Although it refers to Christian unity in the first place, by extension, it is also sometimes applied to the efforts towards greater understanding and cooperation between Christians and adherents of the world’s other religions, for example, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, or Jews. In this case, the expression ‘wider ecumenism’ or ‘integral ecumenism’ is sometimes used. As all this can be confusing, I think it is clearer to use the term ‘interfaith’ or ‘interreligious’ when at least any two of the world’s faiths are involved.

There is another substantial difference between the 'Christian' ecumenical movement and the interreligious 'religions of the world' dialogue. The first has Christian unity as its goal, the second aims at better understanding and tolerance between world religions; not an organic or any other type of unity, which would be impossible because of radical differences in belief. When one speaks of interreligious dialogue, it is important to point out in passing that the Christian-Jewish relationship is a unique one because of the related histories of these two faiths.

It is often thought that ecumenism is something which only started in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This is not, strictly speaking, correct. Although it is correct to speak about the recent ecumenical movement having its beginning at the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, we shouldn't forget that there were other attempts at Christian unity.

Already in the New Testament times, disunity created problems. We know from our reading of the letters that there were tensions and divisions among some of the communities. Paul makes a strong exhortation to unity in belief and practices in 1 Corinthians 1:10–16 because there were factions within the community pulling in different directions. Some supported Paul and others supported Cephas and Apollos. In Ephesians 4:1–6 and Philippians 4:2–3, the same sort of problems are mentioned. One could find other examples of divisions and tensions in the New Testament communities, but the point has been made that divisions and attempts at reconciliation were already there in our religious history from the beginning. There has been a constant tension within Christianity created by the forces that work for unity and those that tend to destroy unity.

However, we have to mention the pioneers of the modern ecumenical movement in many ways, namely the youth and student groups, such as the Young Men's Christian Association (1844), the World Young Women's Christian Association (1855), and the World Student Christian Federation (1895). These young people, not representing any particular denomination, were pioneers of ecumenism; they nurtured many ecumenical leaders and frequently gave people their first taste of ecumenical prayer. They took an active part in the conferences that led up to the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948.

Concerning actual church unions, much has happened in recent decades. There has been some good news from all parts of the world. In Canada, in 1925, the Methodist, Congregational, and nearly half the Presbyterian churches formed the United Church of Canada (UCC).



The most significant event of the period for ecumenical movement in Asia was the inauguration of the Church of South India (CSI) in 1947, the United Church of Episcopal and non-Episcopal Churches. The formation of the Church of South India was unique in that for the first time in history a church that has maintained the historic succession of the episcopate succeeded in entering into full corporate communion with non-Episcopal churches. Also, for the first time since the great cleavages of the Reformation period, there has been a realisation of agreement, as the act of church unification in which Episcopal and non-Episcopal traditions, such as Methodist and Presbyterian churches have been brought together into the unity of a single Church. Thirty years later in 1977, the Church of North India (CNI) was formed by the union of Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Brethren, Disciples, and Methodists.

In Australia, there was also an encouraging sign of vitality in the ecumenical field with the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) in 1977. Here, the partners were the Methodist, Congregational, and some Presbyterian churches.

China Christian Council (CCC) was founded in 1980 as an umbrella organisation for the Protestant churches in the People's Republic of China with Bishop K.H. Ting as its President. It encourages the exchange of information among local churches in evangelism, pastoral work, and administration. It has formulated a Church order for local churches and seeks to continue to develop friendly relations with churches overseas. The China Christian Council and the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM) together are often called the Lianghui (two organisations). The China Christian Council should thus be known as post-denominational.

At Prapat (Indonesia) in 1957, the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC); later known as the CCA, was conceived as a part of the first regional ecumenical organisation. Then, the inaugural Assembly was held in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) in 1959 and the Preamble of the Constitution was adopted as follows:

“Believing that the purpose of God for the Church in Asia is life together in common obedience of witness to the mission of God in the world, the EACC/CCA exists as an organ and a forum of continuing cooperation among the churches and national Christian bodies in Asia within the framework of the wider ecumenism movement. The CCA is committed to the equal participation of women, men, youth, clergy, and laity in Church

and society. To achieve this purpose, the CCA shall have the following objectives and will act as per the principles of policy on participation and representation below:

- The promotion and strengthening of the unity of the Church in Asia;
- The exploration of opportunities and the promotion of joint action for the fulfilment of the mission of God in Asia and throughout the world;
- The encouragement of Asian contributions to Christian thought, worship, and action through the world;
- The development of mutual awareness, fellowship, and sharing among the churches in the region, and the relationships with other regional ecumenical organisations and the World Council of Churches;
- The promotion of common study and action in such fields as evangelism, service, social and human development, and international relations;
- The stimulation of initiative experiments in dynamic Christian living and action;
- The development of effective Christian responses to the challenges of the changing societies of Asia;
- The development and promotion of relationships with people of other faiths in Asia; and,
- The protection of human dignity and the promotion of caring for the creation.”

We have been examining the overall ecumenical movement. Now, it is our task to focus on local ecumenism (oikoudome), in other words, to highlight the new ecumenism in our contextual life situation. What can ordinary persons do in order to be involved in the ecumenical movement through their day-to-day lives? How we can commit to nurturing the ecumenical spirit in our times? Here are some simple ways of doing ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the changing context in which we now live.

Let me share with you Jill Hawkey’s summary of her booklet, *Mapping the Oikoumene* (2004), with some questions for our consideration and a better understanding for our practical action:

- Can we develop a common vision for the work of the whole of the ecumenical movement which is relevant for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and owned by various actors?

- What would our national and global churches look like if we seriously address the Lund question: “Should our churches not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?”
- How can those churches whose only involvement in ecumenism is either through participation in their respective National Council of Churches or Christian World Communions (CWCs) be encouraged to participate further in the ecumenical movement? How can other actors in the ecumenical movement ensure that they include these churches in their work?
- Do we need to reduce the ‘levels of belonging’ for member churches? If so, how is this best achieved?
- What is the ideal structural relationship between NCCs, sub-regional fellowships, regional ecumenical organisations (REOs), and the WCC? Are there aspects of the work being undertaken by the All Africa Conference of Churches, which can assist our reflection?
- What is the most appropriate structural relationship between WCC and CWCs that would be more effective if done ecumenically?
- In the history of the ecumenical movement, where has our collaboration on issues been most effective? What are the ingredients for successful collaboration and what is preventing us from working together on issues?
- What other processes could be in place so that competitive relationships are avoided? How can we foster stronger personal relationships with each other? How can ecumenical leadership be developed?
- What processes can be put in place to promote greater understanding of the role, mandate, and funding criteria of the agencies? How do we broaden/strengthen the funding base of the ecumenical movement in all its facets?
- Within the myriad of roles that the WCC has, what are those that only the WCC can undertake or the WCC is best positioned to undertake?

Our regional consultation on ‘Towards Revitalising the Ecumenical Movement in Asia’ embodies a true ecumenical spirit dependent

upon the prayer of Jesus Christ for his followers, "...that they may all be one (ut omnes unum sint)" in John 17:21. I am very much inspired by the early leaders of the World Student Christian Federation who adopted this particular biblical passage and put it into their insignia (YMCA), or as a motto for the WSCEF.

I am always advocating for the ecumenical movement to be focused on being 'gospel-centred' and 'life-centred'. I also insist that the ecumenical movement be involved in 'mission-oriented', 'peace-oriented', 'justice-oriented', and 'value-oriented' programmes and activities.

Let me suggest the following seven points as virtues of the ecumenical movement.

- Respect life
- Reject Violence
- Remove conflict
- Promote just peace
- Protect human rights
- Preserve common values
- Build communities of peace

As Christians living in Asia, we have a special task to develop an Asiatic ecumenical movement. As far as I am concerned, the Asiatic ecumenical movement should be characterised as:

- Christo-centric in nature, where the God-Christ event needs to be highlighted;
- Ecclesio-centric in character, where the God-Church needs to be understood; and,
- Anthro-po-centric in manifestation, where the God-People-World needs to be interrelated.

The Asiatic ecumenical movement should concentrate on the whole idea of *bona fide*, undertaken in good faith as a base for its values. *Bona fide* will help in overcoming any fear of confronting the multi-faith and multicultural realities in Asia. However, problems remain within the ecumenical structures, because anything that is *mala fide*, undertaken in bad faith, jeopardises all the good nature of *bona fide* in the Asiatic ecumenical movement. This internal *mala fide* has been creating unnecessary tension and conflict among groups and individuals. The Asiatic ecumenical movement continues to popularise its *bona fide* at all levels of human lives in our times.

In general, the Asiatic ecumenical movement should deal with:

- Crossing national boundaries to achieve the ideals of oikoumene.

- Overcoming theological and ecclesiological barriers to be faithful to God.
- Confessing Christian beliefs to propagate biblical messages.
- Witnessing Christian values to be good neighbours.

Moreover, the Asiatic ecumenical movement should tackle the following areas:

- New ecumenical vision, mission, and strategy
- Missionary vocation of the churches
- Church and society issues
- Peace and fullness of life
- Discrimination and exclusion
- Environmental degradation and climate change
- Poverty, hunger, and unemployment
- Negative impact of globalisation
- Militarisation and nuclearisation
- Partnership with other faiths
- Religious fundamentalism
- New kinds of pandemic
- Plight of refugees, migrants, and internally displaced people
- Differently-abled persons
- Domestic violence
- Advocacy work together with social movements

The basic elements of the Asiatic ecumenical movement can be highlighted as:

- *Theo-ecumenics*: Our ecumenical vision should have a theo-centric emphasis on God as creator, God as liberator, God as sustainer, God as comforter, and God as redeemer.
- *Eco-ecumenics*: Our ecumenical mission should be eco-friendly so that God's whole creation can be nurtured.
- *Geo-ecumenics*: Our ecumenical task should be geo-contextual so that Asia's unique plurality of religions, cultures, races, languages, and thoughts can be affirmed and helped to flourish.

Until today, the ecumenical movement has been mostly dominated by the West. But it is now time for the East to contribute to the larger or wider ecumenical movement with its new thinking, new theological perspectives, new missiological tasks, new leadership, and new resources. From the East, we have a wealth of resources,

of wisdom in the literature that has been preserved for thousands of years. But we have not made use of these resources for our own theological and ecumenical thinking. I would, therefore, like to suggest that the CCA, YMCAs, YWCAs, WSCF, and other Asian ecumenical organisations highlight some of the Eastern thinking and wisdom within our ecumenical and theological thinking and practices. Above all, a way to read the Bible through Asian eyes must, in my opinion, become the utmost priority for the Asiatic ecumenical movement.

The need for the Asiatic ecumenical movement should observe a way of reclaiming the radical meaning of the essence of oikoumene. By radical meaning, I mean a much wider meaning than our too-often narrow ones— which is confined to specific groups of people, especially Christians, and sometimes, Protestant Christians only. We, therefore, need to expand our outlook from being inward-looking within our Christian family to being outward-looking to others, our neighbours who are a part of God's own family and God's own creation.

I am convinced that the following six ecumenical ideals are important to living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for all God's people.

- Faith in God (requiring metanoia)
- Love for each other (requiring koinonia)
- Hope in building communities of peace (requiring diakonia)
- Doing justice for all people (requiring martyria)
- Care for God's creation (requiring oikonomia)
- Obedience to God (requiring Gloria in excelsis Deo)

We have to reshape a new Asiatic ecumenical movement to revitalise the entire ecumenical movement in our time. I would like to reiterate what M.M. Thomas expressed in his article on 'Ecumenism in Asia: An Assessment' in the book, *Voices of Unity- Essays of Visser't Hooft on the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (1981). Let me quote M.M. Thomas, "The Christian Church is not a minority community. Theologically, the church is the sacrament of the union between God and man, and the sign of the goal of humankind, and therefore, it represents all men and women in their search for their humanity in freedom and justice. From this perspective, the Church is not concerned with being the minority and majority, but being a servant of all men and women as they speak their social and spiritual wellbeing." As we think about the Asiatic ecumenical movement, the statement made by M.M. Thomas should serve as a good foundation.

Also, as Miguez Bonino clearly expressed, "There is no socially and politically neutral theology; in the struggle for life and death,

theology must take a side.” In fact, in every moment of life, Christians are called to take sides with the poor, oppressed, marginalised, victimised, powerless, and weaker sectors of the societies.

We, in Asia, live and experience a multi-contextual continent, we are called to be peacemakers. Today, more than ever before, peace-making or peacebuilding is God’s ordained ecumenical task. The major religions of the world teach us about peace. Faith-based communities are deeply involved in peacebuilding efforts. Profound words like Shalom, Salam, and Shanti should not only be chanted but also practised in our families, workplaces, communities, and in our day-to-day lives.

During my General Secretary report to the 12<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, which was held here in Chiang Mai in 2005, as well as in my Keynote presentation to the Executive Committee meeting of the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs in Hong Kong in 2015, I suggested setting up an Ecumenical Peace Congress (EPC) as a forum to explore possible ways of peacebuilding in our time. The EPC may serve as an autonomous body to coordinate peacebuilding efforts. The proposed Ecumenical Peace Congress could comprise several ecumenical organisations and bring together those who wish to promote peace from their own contexts and networks. The EPC could meet occasionally or periodically to coordinate common peacebuilding mandates.

Sometimes, ecumenical organisations have limitations in expressing their views and critical comments on certain issues. However, if we have a forum like the EPC, we may clearly express our comments and responses based on people’s aspiration. Let us remember what Jesus taught us: “For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). Peace-making ethos and peacebuilding pathos are not that difficult because it is Jesus Christ who has taken up this task. We need to evolve new mechanisms for new situations.

Therefore, let us join hands, to build a society where God’s peace, God’s justice, and God’s love prevail over every sphere of life for all God’s people and God’s creation. In this context, the Asiatic ecumenical movement should be asked whether:

- Our vision is clear;
- Our task is relevant; and,
- Our action is ready.

As part of my concluding remarks, I would like to read a portion of Scripture taken from the Gospel according to Luke, Chapter 17, verses 11 through to 19.

“On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called it out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. Then, one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He proclaimed himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him— and he was a Samaritan. Then, Jesus asked, “Were not all ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Were none of them found to return and give praise to God except the foreigner?” Then, he said to him, “Get up and go on your way, your faith has made you well.”

What about the other nine, where are they?

We should ask ourselves the same question!

Where have all the Asian ecumenical leaders gone?



## ***Towards Revitalising the Ecumenical Movement in Asia: Ecumenical Responses***

### **Peacebuilding and Moving Beyond Conflict in the Philippines**

***Rev. Rex R.B. Reyes, Jr.***

*General Secretary, National Council of Churches in the Philippines*

My sincere thanks and gratitude goes to the Christian Conference of Asia for this opportunity to share our story in the Philippines.

Underlying the involvement of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) in the peace process is the unwavering belief in the vision of the prophet Isaiah: “He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more...” (Isaiah 2:4). It is likewise informed by the affirmation of Jesus of his mission as the Son (Luke 4:18) and his post-resurrection message of peace.

Peace as the hope of all people is not simply disarmament or the absence of war but is characterised primarily by just and meaningful change for the majority. It must be tangible and manifest like food on the table, decent wages, clothing, shelter, and access to health and education. Peace with justice means sustainable communities where people live without fear or threat and where migration is more of a right than a compelling necessity. If this is not established, and the hunger and suffering of the majority continue, the violence of the past and its manifestations in the present will surface, escalate, or heighten no matter how much negotiations take place. The road to peace is long and arduous, fraught with dangers. But, it must be pursued with earnest. Peace can be achieved through principled negotiations with people’s welfare at the core of the negotiation. A negotiated peace settlement one that is truly transformative addresses the roots of armed conflict— poverty, landlessness, the inaccessibility to services, and the inequitable distribution of resources.

The peace negotiations in the Philippines started in 1992. Under the present administration, four rounds of formal peace talks took place. On the agenda is a comprehensive agreement on socio-economic

reforms. This is at the core of the negotiations. But, much earlier was a preliminary ceasefire agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in December 1986, following the People Power that ousted a dictator. The engagement of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) in the peace process began one month later.

Through a statement in January 1987 titled *On the Search for a True and Lasting Peace*, issued in connection with the preliminary ceasefire signed by the GRP and NDFP, the Council expressed its support for the opening of negotiations toward the settlement of the existing civil strife: “We are committed to peace. On this matter, there can be no equivocation on our part. It is a commitment that is not born out of practicalities of political adjustment or the vagaries of military strategy. It is a commitment rooted in our being Church.”

In 1989, NCCP General Convention bannered the theme, ‘Seek Peace and Pursue It’. It emphasised the need to talk with sincerity to unearth and resolve the root causes of the conflict that has raged since 1969. To ensure a programmatic expression, the NCCP created the Special Program Unit on Peace under a Peace Committee, composed of representatives from our member churches. The Unit’s ministry was: to help work toward a return to negotiations by the various warring parties; to campaign for strict compliance with established international humanitarian law to safeguard the welfare of civilians and other non-combatants; and, to encourage partners in the international ecumenical community to offer their ‘good offices’ to help bring about peace talks and other initiatives.

In 1993, President Fidel V. Ramos created the National Unification Commission (NUC) to create a comprehensive and participatory consultation process and develop strategies for engaging in exploratory talks with all armed groups in the Philippines. The NUC produced the government’s ‘six paths to peace’. President Ramos named the NCCP, through its then General Secretary Feliciano Carino, a member of the NUC. On 12 May 1994, a Joint Peace Consultation between the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and the NCCP, was held to identify areas of collaboration around peacebuilding. The result was the creation of the Joint Peace Committee, described by participants as the “fruit of the Spirit — nurtured into existence by long years of sacrifice,

advocacy, and dedication by both bodies, to the pursuit of a just and lasting peace for our nation". The Joint Peace Committee released timely statements in support of the peace negotiations. The formal peace talks began in 1992.

In recognition of the vital role of international partners in its peace program, the NCCP organised the International Peace Advisory Committee. As the name indicates, it was meant to advise the NCCP on the appropriate role or roles it could play in the negotiations. This Committee met for the first time in Bossey, Switzerland in 1997 for a substantial discussion on the status of the GRP-NDFP peace talks.

At one point, the NCCP was a third-party depository of official documents (for example, identities of NDFP negotiators). This role was performed by NCCP General Secretary, Bishop Roman B. Tiples, Jr. and subsequently by Obispo Maximo Tomas Millamena of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) who was the Chairperson of the NCCP then. The Council also provided a credible, unofficial, and discreet communication channel between the two parties. The role of the third-party depository was passed on officially to Archbishop Joris Vercammen of the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands, a church in concordance with the IFI.

A major break took place in 1999 when the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL), the first of the four substantive agenda of the peace talks agreed in 1992, was signed by both parties. The other three are the Comprehensive Agreements on Socio-Economic Reforms, Constitutional, and Political Reforms, and the Cessation of Hostilities and Disposition of Forces, in that order. Since then, the formal peace talks has hit snags and several impasses.

On 18 April 2001, following the inauguration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the Joint Peace Committee of the CBCP-NCCP hosted the Solidarity Conference for Just and Lasting Peace. This featured representatives of the GRP and NDFP panels who talked about the previous gains of the peace negotiations and prospects for the negotiations regarding the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms. Present were more than a thousand advocates of peace from the churches, non-governmental, and people's organisations, government line agencies, members of the Philippine Senate and Congress and members of the diplomatic

corps. The message to the panels: resume the formal peace negotiations!

Records will bear that the core of the NCCP's ecumenical vocation is peacebuilding as expressed in its programmes and in the public statements and announcements it issued especially when there were impasses and outstanding issues. The NCCP supported the peace process consistently and persistently from the start. Needless to say, the NCCP supported the peace processes for other warring groups in the Philippines, such as those with the Moro National Liberation Front and later the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

Holding on to the indelible relationship between human rights and peace, the NCCP engaged in peace education, forums, and fact-finding missions related to the promotion of peace. It sustained lobbying efforts to government and inter-government bodies here and abroad to support the calls for the resumption of the formal peace negotiations. The peace efforts of the NCCP were also manifested in the different resource materials it produced. The NCCP took leadership in organising the Ecumenical Voice for Peace and Justice in the Philippines that engaged the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and the churches in North America.

On 30 August 2002, the NCCP and the Philippine Peace Centre (PPC) jointly sponsored a forum marking the tenth anniversary of The Hague Joint Declaration, the primary agreement that bound the two parties to a formal peace talk with the four-point agenda cited above. Peace advocates and representatives of the GRP and NDFP panels discussed the prospects following the stalled negotiations. This forum germinated the seed of the broad network of peace advocates now known as the Pilgrims for Peace. The Pilgrims for Peace (Advocates for a Just and Lasting Peace Based on Freedom, Democracy, and Social Justice) is a multi-sectoral alliance of peace advocates formed to sustain support for the peace talks between the GRP and the NDFP, and between the GRP and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The NCCP, through its General Secretary, is the co-convenor of this multi-sectoral alliance.

That same year, the Pilgrims of Peace gathered signatures calling for the resumption of the formal peace talks. It happened in a full-page advertisement in a national broadsheet. Pilgrims for Peace also became active in launching forums, symposia, and other activities not only in calling for the resumption of the talks but also on

other issues like the war on Iraq and the all-out-war in Mindanao. In 2011, following the resumption of the short-lived formal peace talks between the government of President Benigno Aquino III and the NDFP, the said alliance conducted consultations with different social sectors on possible recommendations for the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms.

In 2007, following several exploratory visits by the ecumenical advisor of the Norwegian Ecumenical Peace Platform (NEPP), the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP) was established. The PEPP is an expression of the partnership between Philippine Churches and the NEPP. The PEPP is a platform for five church federation or groups, namely, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEP), the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP), and the Ecumenical Bishops' Forum (EBF), in working for a just and enduring peace by supporting the peace process in the Philippines starting with the call for resumption of the formal peace talks between the GRP and the NDFP.

The PEPP has a Core Group drawn from the member-federation or group. The organisational structure of PEPP is set up to function on three levels: the national level composed of church leaders who meet directly with the GRP and the NDFP; six regional levels; and, the groups of the regional levels which organise activities.

In 2010, the PEPP held its first National Assembly, which strengthened the engagement and capacity of the church leaders to push the peace process forward. The participating church leaders attended workshops in their respective regions, previously. The CBCP and the NCCP co-chair this body. Its Secretariat holds office at the NCCP.

Since July 2011, the PEPP has held annual Ecumenical Church Leaders' summits. During its second Ecumenical Church Leader's Summit held in February 2012, the PEPP offered to provide a collective custodial guarantee for the release in recognisance (ROR) of detained political prisoners, in particular, detained NDFP consultants. It was clear to PEPP that the release of the NDFP Peace Panel consultants could pave the way for the resumption of the talks. PEPP is also active in providing peace education through a module called the Ecumenical Training Course on Peace. It also holds Regional Workshops for

Church Leaders on the GRP-NDFP Peace Process actively engaging these leaders for prophetic advocacy for peace.

The NCCP, Pilgrims for Peace, and PEPP are one in supporting the peace process as a means to achieve a just and lasting peace in the country by addressing the roots of the armed conflict. We hold that the peace process is not only for just peace but also a lasting, durable, and sustainable one. These organisations also believe that all previous agreements should be respected because they are the results of principled negotiations between the two parties.

Churches in the Philippines have their own initiatives for peacebuilding and all subscribe to the necessity for collaboration and accompaniment with both parties in the arduous task to achieve a just and lasting peace in our lifetime. It is a political process. How we wish peace could be achieved in the twinkling of an eye! Yet, we know it must be approached deliberately. A just and lasting peace which means land and liberation, food and wellbeing, jobs and equal opportunities is no utopia. These are real and can be realised. It is also at a great cost to the churches, one we know only too well.

At this stage of the negotiations, it is crucial to heighten support to the socio-economic reforms responsive to the aspirations of the grassroots sectors. We continue to exhort both parties to implement fully the CARHRIHL. Following this to the letter will show fidelity by both sides to the process and ensure the rights of combatants and non-combatants alike. The siege in Marawi City and the declaration of Martial Law in the whole of Mindanao are recent compelling reasons to pursue the peace talks.

Finally, we recognise the crucial role of the international community — the World Council of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia, and you who are gathered for this occasion — in supporting countries going through a peace process like the Philippines and elsewhere. Yet the initiative is largely a local one motivated by a prophetic response to the issues of the day. Not all nations can play the role that the Royal Norwegian Government has done and continues to do as the third-party facilitator for GRP and NDF peace talks and of Malaysia in the case of the GRP and the MILF. But countries can start by going into conversations to collaborate. For instance, the Councils of the churches in the Philippines and Sri Lanka are at a germinal stage on how to work together through international mechanisms

like the United Nations. On several occasions in the past, some Asian councils of churches wrote to our government in response to our call for support from the international community. As the systems and powers of the world have the means to come together regularly to plan how they can remain dominant, we who suffer and long for peace because of that domination must find a way to speak as one. The CCA can shepherd this process.

*NB: This paper is a slightly revised version of a paper delivered at a symposium on the peace processes in Columbia and the Philippines at the UN, New York, in January 2017.*

# **Ecumenical Response: Religious Intolerance and Freedom of Religion in Indonesia**

***Rev. Krise Gosal***

*Associate General Secretary, Communion of Churches in Indonesia*

Indonesia is a pluralistic society in terms of the diversity of cultures, religion, and social status. According to the national 2010 population census, the population of Indonesia in 2010 was 237.6 million and is projected to reach 258.7 million people in 2016.

The founding parents of Indonesia were keenly aware of the plurality of Indonesian communities, their ethnicity, culture, religion, and social status. The 'motto' of the nation is 'Bhineka Tunggal Ika', meaning 'unity in diversity'. Around half the population (49.79 per cent, or 118,320,256 people) reside in urban areas, while the other half is rural (50.21 per cent, or 119,321,070 people).

'Pancasila' is a way of life, and is the foundation of the nation. 'Pancasila', or the 'Five Principles' originated as a result of the heroes of the nation came from various ethnic, religious, and racial backgrounds, as a consensus of diversity. These five principles include:

- Belief in the One and Only God (Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa)
- Just and Civilised Humanity (Kemanusiaan yang adil dan beradab)
- The Unity of Indonesia (Persatuan Indonesia)
- Democracy guided by inner wisdom from the unanimity arising out of the deliberations amongst the representatives (Kerakyatan yang dipimpin oleh Hikmat Kebijaksanaan dalam Permusyawaratan dan Perwakilan)
- Social Justice for all people of Indonesia (Keadilan, Sosial bagi seluruh Rakyat Indonesia)

## **The Problem of Religious Freedom in Indonesia**

Certain obstacles prevent the full realisation of religious freedom in the country. Briefly, these include:



- the requirement of state approval via letters for the construction of places of worship;
- the intervention from the state in internal problems of religions;
- the perception of the state on religion; and,
- the status of 'recognised' and 'unrecognised' religions by the state.

As the gap between the rich and the poor continues to significantly widen, poverty and injustice are rampant in Indonesia communities. The benefits of the rapid development of Indonesia's economy accrues to, and is enjoyed by, only a handful of people, thus generating social resentment and hatred. Discrimination based on one's ethnicity, religion, and/or social status is commonplace and exacerbates social tensions.

Religious issues are also related to the advent of the Wahabiah Movement from the Middle East which calls for a pan-Islamic Indonesian society based on Syariah law, and the influence of new Christian fundamentalism (especially from the USA), resulting in 'Evangelism explosion', and 'winning the soul' paradigms in mission that neglect holistic understanding and dissemination of the Gospel of Christ (i.e., the traditional paradigm of mission introduced by the missionaries to the country in the past).

#### *The Requirement of State Approval letters for Construction of Places of Worship*

In a Joint Decree by the Minister for Religion and the Minister for Domestic Affairs, Nos. 8 and 9 in 2006, each house for worship needed to fulfil a minimum congregation number of ninety persons and needed also to have the agreement of sixty other persons residing in the immediate environment. It also needed to be accompanied by the recommendation of the Joint Forum for Religious Tolerance (FKUB) before the building permit is issued by the government.

#### *Church Closure and Destruction*

Due to the difficulties in obtaining permits to build their places of worship, many churchgoers fulfil their religious obligations in temporary houses of worship, or at storehouses, or churches built without permits. Inevitably, the forcible closure of the said houses of worship is either carried out by people residing in its immediate

environment, or by the state's security apparatus. During 2004–2007, at least 108 places of worship were shut down. There were fourteen such cases in 2008, fourteen more in 2009, and twenty-eight cases in 2010.

In some areas, the forcible closure of houses of worship was accompanied by their destruction as well as by violent reactions in the form of the torture of congregation members who were simply fulfilling their religious duties. What is pitiful is that no action was taken against the miscreants who damaged the places of worship and hurt the congregation members. These anarchist actions took place with impunity.

The implementation of the joint decree bore negative consequences for Christians living in Muslim-majority areas, as they found obtaining permission extremely difficult. The permits were issued after ten or twenty years, and on some occasion were never granted. While many churches were forcibly demolished by authorities, many were dismantled by Muslim groups.

#### *State Intervention in the Internal Problems of Religions*

Based on Law No. 1/PNPS/1965 as mentioned above, which then included and became the clause 'religion disgracing' (Article 156a Book of Criminal Law/KUHP), the state assumed all final rights on determining the truthfulness of religious teaching.

The Law of Blasphemy against Religion has had many victims, particularly among other streams within Islam itself. Besides the obstacles in observing their doctrines and carrying out their worship services, the communities' social, political, economic, and cultural rights were destroyed.

#### *Perception of the State on Religion*

The state perception of religion is dominated by the mainstream understanding that every 'valid' religion has its own God, prophet, and Holy Scripture. This discriminative treatment meant that certain belief systems are not even recognised by the state as they do not have prophets or written Holy Scriptures.

#### *'Recognised' and 'Unrecognised' Religions by the State*

Factually, several religions exist in Indonesia. Long before the arrival of major world religions such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism,

or Hinduism, Indonesian people held religious beliefs in God (animistic and dynamistic). In the context of miscellaneous religions embraced by the Indonesian society, the government has officially limited 'recognised' religions and does not recognise the validity of indigenous religions. These limited religions include Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholic Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Konghucu (Confucianism).

Any other religion is not official and is not recognised. Law No. 1/PNPS/1965 Article 1 and TAP MPRS NO. XXVII/MPRS/1966 stipulate that there are only six officially recognised religions in Indonesia. Meanwhile, followers of other beliefs, although acknowledged in the 1945 Constitution, are not officially recognised. Tap MPR No. IV/MPR/1978, a decree by the Minister for Religion, discriminates precisely against followers of the belief in One God.

## **Church Response**

The Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) is actively involved with national legislations, such as PUB, Blasphemy Law, and others.

PGI advocates strongly for the freedom of religion, appealing to the Parliament, National Committee on Human Rights, the police (executive), and the central government. The response has not been promising.

Some member churches have developed their peaceful interreligious programmes, such as the Protestant Church in the Moluccas' propagation of the indigenous local wisdom, 'makan patita', meaning 'brotherhood in diversity'.

PGI has completed the compilation of its 'de-radicalisation' module in conjunction with other religious institutions. Last week, the government requested that the grassroots module be used as a pilot training project in conflict areas (West Java, East Java, and Central Sulawesi provinces). PGI also initiated its live-in interfaith programme for children and young people in 2011.

# **Ecumenical Response: Religious Intolerance and Freedom of Religion in Bangladesh**

***Rev. David Anirudha Das***

*General Secretary, National Council of Churches in Bangladesh*

## **Religious Solidarity**

### *Religious Pluralism*

- A term that denotes the ability of people from different ethnic groups and faiths to live side-by-side, even if separately.
- Establishment of patterns of social tolerance and stability.
- Hallmark of religious diversity.

### *Inter-Communal Relationship and Multicultural diversity*

- Observable as the plurality of cultures and religions.

## **Rise of Extremism in the Recent Past**

- Not long after the emergence of the nation-state as Bangladesh, Islam re-emerged as an important factor in the country, both socially and politically.
- In recent years, religious extremism has become an extremely dangerous issue.
- IS or Islamic State extremist groups have claimed responsibility for it, although the government has always disputed the group's existence.

## **Causes of Fundamentalism in Bangladesh**

In 2017 alone, there were twenty-eight clear instances of extremist violence by militants.

- British Colonial powers planted the seeds of religious communalism.
- Lack of fraternity, distinct cultural barriers, lack of supportive and faith-based approaches.
- Less dialogue.
- Social injustice issues.

- Ecological injustice.
- Poverty and miserable living conditions.
- Manipulation of Online Channels of Communication and Social Media:
  - o Extremist groups and affiliates use the internet to disseminate information.
  - o Information is misleading.
  - o However, new audiences are reached by using new tools and means.

#### *Injustice towards Religious Minorities*

- Religious minorities have undergone agony, torment, and trauma.
- Minority peoples do not incite hostility or violence against Muslims but are subject to injustice and violence.
- They are powerless and look on in horror and fury.
- Numbers of minority communities are on the decline.

#### *Injustice towards Ethnic Communities*

- Ethnic minorities in Bangladesh are discriminated against and continually subject to increasing marginalisation.
- Systemic and persistent forms of discrimination imply that we as a nation have failed to ensure the rights of such communities.
- Accountability, transparency, and monitoring are key.
- The government must enact policies that aim to empower.

### **Present Trends of Churches**

#### *Ecumenical Perception of Christians*

- The church must have a clear perception and contemplation.
- Ecumenical movement.
- Globalisation characterises our condition in all its ambiguity.
- Dialogue on day-to-day life is more important.
- Ecumenism is an ascetical activity.
- Prayer life.
- Unity as a regular practice.

#### *Evangelical Churches/Groups: Aggressive Evangelism*

- Western NGOs are opening in all parts of the country.
- Their hidden agenda — of creating misunderstanding and complexities — is now evident. These organisations bring in

billions of dollars to help the poor, but only 5 per cent goes to the target group.

- The policy of most Christian NGOs is to employ Muslims last and to favour those who convert.
- Some hold that the idea is to create an economically and educationally influential community of converts.

## **Effects of Climate Changes**

### *Geo-political Environment in Bangladesh*

- Bangladesh bears political significance in South Asia.
- It shares both land and maritime borders with India and Myanmar.
- The major land border crises are border killings and illegal migration.
- Two million illegal Bangladeshi immigrants are staying in different parts of India.
- Rohingya communities are now a major concern.

### *Geo-Economic Environment in Bangladesh*

- Geographical features of this deltaic nation have emerged from the changing courses of three of Asia's great rivers: the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, and the Meghna.
- Geo-economy of Bangladesh is the inter-state economy of the country dependent on its territory.
- South Asian countries are dependent on external sources of finance, investment, and technology for their indigenous development.
- The balance of trade is enormously adverse against Bangladesh.
- Legal economic activities are conducted through various land ports; nevertheless, smuggling remains a lucrative and ever-expanding business.
- Border relations and business relations with both India and Myanmar are not good.

### *Geo-strategic/Regional Cooperation*

- Geo-strategy of Bangladesh is the regionally strategic influence exerted to protect national interests and geographical integrity.
- Regional relationship and cooperation.

- Two key influencing issues are:
  - Bangladesh's future national security will impact its neighbours' foreign policy of this region; and,
  - Chittagong port facility to monitor growing Indian and Chinese presence in the region.

## **Contemporary Challenges**

### *Human Rights Violation*

- Political turmoil in Bangladesh.
- Opposition political parties mainly Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami, dissenting voices, and the young people make up the majority of victims of human rights violations.
- The present government came to power through controversial and farcical elections.

### *Political Violence and Law and Order Situation*

#### *From Legal/Constitution points of View*

- Laws are made for the welfare of the people.
- Rule of law can be ensured in the society or country.
- The ruling party is abusing power for their own sake.
- Incidents of extortion, smuggling, political violence, torture, and other problems faced by minority groups.
- The recent deterioration in the law and order situation in the country.
- People feel insecure, worried.
- Police along with other law-enforcing agencies abusing their power.
- Many others do not have legal clarity about this situation.

### *Freedom of Speech and Media*

- The threat of terrorism, which is now a global issue.
- Free speech in the country, however, is not free from scrutiny and undermining.
- Mass media strictly controlled and manipulated by the government.
- Threats from extremist groups that monitor blogs and social media networks.
- Threats extended to an array of independent publishing houses.

### *Injustice to Overseas Labourers/Migrants*

- Millions of Bangladeshis work abroad.
- Bangladeshi workers in the Gulf continue to report being deprived of food and forced to endure psychological, physical, and sexual abuse.
- No adequate provision of protection and assistance to many Bangladeshi nationals abroad.

### *Lack of Good Governance*

- Governance-related insufficiencies and complexities, both structural and non-structural.
- Meaningful participation of rural people not ensured.
- Corruption is one of the biggest obstacles.
- Inefficient and communal Bureaucracy is seemingly inevitable in any society or state.
- Crossfire and extrajudicial killings.
- Government mechanisms are not accountable and transparent.

### *Injustice to Women and Children*

- Percentage of girls marrying before age 18 declined from 65 per cent in 2014 to 52 per cent in 2016, but is still a problem in many places.
- Stalking, sexual harassment, and violent retaliation against, and even murder of women.
- Prompt investigation and prosecution in such cases continue to be rare.
- In Bangladesh, a large number of children are deprived of their basic human rights.

### *Injustice to Labourers/Workers*

- The rapid growth of the population.
- Bangladeshi labour force almost doubled in a decade.
- 1995–96 only 12.34 per cent of the labour force had formal employment, while 40 per cent were considered ‘employed in family-based’ business, 29.6 per cent were considered ‘self-employed’, and 17.9 per cent had their jobs on a ‘daily basis’.

### *Challenge of Mission in Pluralistic Context, NCCB’s Responses*

- Safeguarding the faith.
- Transcending all conceivable boundaries.
- From static dogmas to dynamic truths.
- Witnessing Christ in a pluralistic society.
- Reviving/strengthening the greater ecumenical movement.



# **Ecumenical Response: Religious Intolerance and Freedom of Religion in India**

***Rev. Dr Roger Gaikwad***

*General Secretary, National Council of Churches in India*

After the formation of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in 2014, there has been a sudden spike in reports of violence against India's Christians in 2015. Violence against religious minorities was mostly perpetrated against followers of non-Indic religions, i.e., Christians and Muslims. The injustice inflicted upon the minority communities in the Hindu majority country could be interpreted in terms of discrimination and violence.

However, a distinction must be made between Hinduism (a religion) and Hindutva (an ideology). It is Hindutva which is responsible for the discrimination and violence inflicted upon the minority communities.

## **The Ideology of Hindutva**

Hindutva, or 'Hindu-ness', a term coined by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1923, is the main driving force behind Saffron terror in India and Nepal. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Hindutva is an ideology seeking to establish the hegemony of Hindus and the Hindu way of life. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Hindutva, or Hinduness, is an ideology that seeks to define Indian culture in terms of Hindu values'.

Hindutva revolves around the following principles:

- The homeland of the Hindus is believed to be the entire Indo-Pak subcontinent, including countries ranging from Afghanistan to Indonesia.
- The belief that India is the fatherland (pitribhumi) and holy land (punyabhumi).
- Constant emphasis placed on the historical 'oppression' of Hindus by other groups like the Muslims and the Christians, to 'reverse' the influence resulting from these intrusions.
- Opposition to British colonialism (even though the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) actively collaborated with the

British against other liberation movements and remained aloof from the Indian freedom struggle).

- Opposition to communism, as it caused weakness of unity among Hindus.
- A call to form a 'Hindu nation' (Hindu Rashtra).
- A call to ban the slaughter of cows in India.
- A demand that Sanskrit be taught compulsorily to all students in schools.
- A conviction that most modern scientific discoveries were already known and described in the Vedas.

The discrimination and violence embodied in Hindutva, which increases intolerance and affects the freedom of religion of others, manifests itself in three ways:

- Physical
- Structural
- Symbolical

**Physical Violence** refers to the physical confrontation between individuals (interpersonal) and groups/communities/states (inter-group). According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, a total of 3,466 incidents occurred in India during 2011–2015. The unusual increase just before the 2014 elections could be explained as arising out of the sectarian politics of different political parties. Post the general elections in 2015, communal incidents rose to be about 17 per cent from the previous year, 2014.

**Structural Violence**, according to Johan Galtung, is 'a form of violence wherein some social structure or social institution may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs'. It is nothing but inequalities in the distribution of wealth, power, and privilege. It manifests itself through state policy, economic conditions, the attitudes of the police and law-enforcement agencies, implementation of the anti-conversion law, educational institutions, and its impact on women.

*Vicious Cycle of Poverty* was highlighted by Justice Rajinder Sachar, who said that Muslims are rendered as victims of prolonged structural violence and are trapped in it. As per the report of the Sachar Committee, Muslims have poor access to credit facilities.

*Denial of Affirmative Action and Legal Protection* to the Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians of the state.

Under *Anti-Conversion Laws*, people who convert from one religion to another are mandated to seek permission from government agencies. In Gujarat, Rajasthan, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh, seeking permission from authorities is compulsory — this is against the right to the freedom of religion.

The *bodies of women are made battlegrounds*, and they are always the worst victims of communal riots. For example, in the morning on 8 September 2013, seven women were raped during the Muzaffarnagar riots.

**Symbolic Violence** manifests itself through the attack on core symbols, through the open challenging of citizenship rights and questioning of nationalism, and through several campaigns, such as the Anti-Cow Slaughter campaign, Ghar Wapsi (Home Return), Love Jihad or the 'Beti Bachao Bahu Lao' (which means 'save daughter, bring home daughter-in-law'), Muslim population control, and against Christian conversion activities.

There has been a *rise in hate speeches* inciting violence against religious minorities. Yogi Adityanath (Ajay Singh Bisht), Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh commented, "In places where there are 10–20 per cent minorities, stray communal incidents occur. When there is 20–35 per cent of them, serious communal riots take place. When there is more than 35 per cent, there is no place for non-Muslims." Niranjana Jyoti, MoS for Food Processing industries at a rally stated, "It is you who must decide whether the government in Delhi will be run by Ramazaade (sons of Lord Rama) or by haraamzaade (bastards)."

Since 2014, Christmas Day (25 December) has been declared as *Good Governance Day*, thus seeking to supplant Christmas by Good Governance Day. The Indian government decreed Good Governance Day to be a working day for the government, thus hurting the religious sentiments of Christians.

## **Ecumenical Responses**

National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) have been observing 10 August every year as Black Day, because it was on this day that the Presidential Order of 1950 was promulgated. Para 3 of the Presidential Order of 1950 denies equal rights to Christians and Muslims of Dalit origin based on religion. This is contrary to and violates the fundamental rights assured by the Constitution of India to all citizens.

NCCI and CBCI, along with churches, Christian NGOs, and Muslim friends, have been holding protest rallies every year in Delhi when the Parliament is in session. The protestors include bishops, nuns, priests, and leaders of different church traditions.

The Prime Minister met NCCI, CBCI, and Muslim Leaders on 12 December 2013 to listen to the demands of the communities regarding the rights of Dalit Christians and Muslims. A Public Interest Litigation case was filed in the Supreme Court of India in 2004 (Civil Writ Petition No.180/2004), challenging the validity of the 1950 Presidential Order. The NCCI and CBCI have been pursuing this matter.

The National United Christian Forum comprised of the NCCI, CBCI, and the Evangelical Fellowship of India Council of Churches have also been addressing the challenges of the present situation. On 17 March 2015, members of the National United Christian Forum came together for a National Consultation on 'Upholding Constitutional Rights of Minorities, with Special Reference to Christians' and sent a statement to the government. Discussions were held on three important topics which the Christian communities were facing, that is, the Uniform Civil Code, the National Education Policy, and the Juvenile Justice Act. It was decided to make a joint response about these concerns to the Government and the Churches.

### *Key Messages from the Presentations*

#### Uniform Civil Code (UCC)

- Pluralism is a core value of India and enshrined in our constitution. We are called to speak out in support of it.
- Human rights have religious or moral principles from which they spring.
- The notion of a Uniform Civil Code is antithetical to the very concept of India which is a country of diversity of language, culture, and customs.
- Gender equality and reform in the personal laws is a separate matter and must be dealt with due consultation with the concerned religious communities and must not be linked with the Uniform Civil Code.

#### Draft of National Education Policy

- The Preamble glorifies the ancient Gurukul system of education and goes on to invoke luminaries such as Charaka

and Sushruta Aryabhata, Bhaskaracharya, Chanakya, and others in history. One senses in such articulation an implicit justification for the implementation of a 'Hindu-ised' system of education.

- The Preamble does not refer to the enormous contribution made to education by the Christian community in India over the past 200 years. The contribution has been made not only through English medium and vernacular language education but has also cultivated values of love, compassion, justice, integrity, and peace.
- The push for internationalisation of education raises concerns of educational equity. For the majority of the Indian population, such education would not be affordable. It would again reinforce a class divide because of the commercialisation of education. The government should aspire to offer free and high-quality education to all; it would become a game-changer for the Indian education system.

#### Juvenile Justice Act (JJA)

- The recent amendments call for more stringent monitoring of agencies providing care and protection to children.
- Many agencies have shut down due to inadequate awareness of procedures and lack of resources to implement the very detailed guidelines provided in the act and subsequent policies or notifications.
- The government has thus restricted the vital support being provided to some of the most vulnerable sections of society — children who are destitute, homeless, and suffering from physical and mental disabilities.

### **NCCI and Civil Society: Wider Ecumenical Response**

NCCI initiated a study (2013–15) on the Discrimination and Violence against Christians and Muslims in India. The researchers did an in-depth study gathering data from all possible governmental and non-governmental agencies and covering all states of our country.

The study has recommended:

#### *Immediate measures*

- Unity among denominations, sectarian groups, and religious minorities against threats of violence.
- Secure justice for victims of physical violence through legal mechanisms within State laws.

- Minorities should be aware of the legal provisions in the Constitution.
- Minorities must be active in social and political engagements from local self-governance to the Union government.
- Minority communities should approach, apart from NCM (National Commission for Minorities), the Human Rights Commission, the National Commission for Women, National Commissions for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).
- Minorities should take initiative in the promotion of secularism.

#### *Medium-term measures*

- The perception of the majority about religious minorities as ‘outsiders’, ‘non-Indian’, or ‘aliens’ should change.
- Interfaith conversations should happen to eliminate misunderstandings about other’s religious precepts and practices.
- Understanding and acceptance of the principle of equal opportunity.
- Transparency in political-legal systems should be instilled.
- Minorities should be aware of international laws and provisions.
- Reformation inside churches needs to be undertaken – specifically among youths.
- Minorities must create new forums to address the concern on freedom of religion and minority rights in India.

#### *UPR Recommendations*

- Repeal all the anti-conversion laws (promulgated as the ‘Freedom of Religion Acts’).
- The Presidential Scheduled Caste Order (1950) should completely delink the Scheduled Castes status from religion. Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims should be able to avail the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act.
- Enact legislation on the ‘prevention of communal violence’, so that state machinery may effectively work and initiate transparent action against perpetrators.
- Enact a special witness protection law to protect the lives of witnesses involved in cases of communal incidents.
- Amend the Whistle Blowers Protection Act (2011) to include human rights defenders and Right to Information (RTI) activists.

- Ratify UN Convention against Torture (CAT) and enact domestic legislation.
- Put in a place an 'equal opportunities' commission to eliminate discrimination of vulnerable sections and minorities.
- Provide more autonomy, power, and resources to human rights bodies such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), National Commission for Minorities (NCM), etc.
- Strengthen human rights training in all educational institutions, focusing on religious harmony and pluralism.
- Maintain disaggregated data on caste- and religion-related discriminations and ensure its access to citizens.
- Invite 'UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief' to provide constructive suggestions.

#### *Global community responsibility*

- Express solidarity with minority communities in India.
- Create awareness about the situation in your community, church, and government.
- Ask your government to actively participate in the UPR and other Human Rights mechanism related to India.
- Pray for us!

The question remains: How can the ecumenical movement make its responses more effective?

## ***Our Prophetic Witness and Common Action:***

### **Key Issues Facing Migrant Workers in the Mekong Sub-Region**

***Reiko Harima***

*Director, Asian Migrant Centre*

#### **Overview of Migration in the Mekong**

There are about 3.4 million migrants in Thailand alone. Migrant workers are employed in construction, the fishing industry, agriculture, domestic work, factory work, the entertainment industry, as garbage collectors, and mines and quarries, and their families.

Issues faced by migrants include:

- Extremely low wages
- Substandard OHS
- No paid days off or sick leave
- No maternity protection
- Risk of being deported if pregnant
- Fear/threat of arrest, detention, deportation
- Poor living conditions
- Social exclusion
- Abuse
- Racism, discrimination, xenophobia
- Trafficking, forced labour

#### ***Exclusion from Labour Protection***

A large proportion of migrants are employed in sectors that fall outside the labour law protection, i.e., agriculture, fishing, domestic work, entertainment industries, piece work/home base work, etc. Migrant workers in informal sectors are unable to enrol for any form of social security or protection and are more likely to find it difficult to register or access regular/legal migration channels. Workers in many of these informal sectors stated above are predominantly women. Hence, migrant women have less access to registration/legal migration, social security, and other forms of social protection,



### *Precariousness*

Destination countries treat migrants only as temporary labourers and lack long-term vision (the Mekong and Asia). Many migrants in the Mekong continue to be undocumented despite the recent 'regularisation of documents' efforts. Even if documented, the terms and conditions attached are restrictive, and migrants' status still precarious. Migrants in low-skilled sectors have no possibility of acquiring permanent residency or naturalising as citizens. Despite residing and working in the country for decades, they are accorded the 'temporary' status that exacerbates their precariousness.

### *Social Exclusion*

Migrants live side-by-side with local people, but not together. Several factors contribute to the social exclusion of migrant workers, including:

- a sense of precariousness,
- cultural intolerance emanating from mainstream society,
- exclusion from the political process,
- exclusion from access to justice,
- exclusion from access to public welfare schemes including social security, health care & education,
- lack of mobility in the labour market and access to decent work,
- discrimination in the allocation of resources and other rights, goods, and services, and,
- stigmatisation, scapegoating, and criminalisation.

All these result in a negative spiral of poverty and deprivation and inhibit upward social mobility.

### *Regularisation, but...*

In recent years, GMS (Greater Mekong Subregion) countries have focused their policy development on regularising migration, which has been long characterised by its informal/undocumented nature. Governments often assume that migrants' situation will automatically improve once their status becomes regularised and that there will be less exploitation and fewer abuses. But is it that case?

Opting for legal migration channels implies the payment of higher costs and dealing with complex processes. Migrants have so far seen only limited evidence that legal migration will lead to greater

protection. The regularising process adds more actors (immigration authorities of both countries, recruitment agencies, brokers, money lenders) — any of whom may be corrupt, coercive, deceitful, or deny responsibility, passing the buck down the chain. Thus, most migrants have continued through informal channels.

#### *A recent response by Thailand – 1*

On 17 June, the Thai military government signed a royal ordinance that would apply a new labour law meant to inhibit illegal migration and employment. The fines determined for working without registration was up to THB 100,000 (USD 4,300) and for hiring unregistered workers was up to USD 25,000. Workers' rights were violated; jail sentences were increased to ten years for brokers and five years for migrants.

#### *A recent response by Thailand – 2*

Immediately, small businesses complained that the law disproportionately affected them. Reports of mass migrant arrests began to surface, and large numbers of migrants also began to voluntarily return home. Two police checkpoints along the Thai-Myanmar border were closed because of reports that Thai police officers were extorting money from migrant workers returning home. There were reports of employers firing migrant workers in the wake of the new law. The fishing and construction industries reported large absences of workers. Schools of Myanmar migrant children along the border were also closed.

#### *A recent response by Thailand – 3*

After news of mass arrests and voluntary returns, the Thai Prime Minister then admitted that the new law was too stringent, and he specifically cited problems of labour shortages. On 1 July, the Thai government said that it would institute a 120-day stay on the enforcement of some parts of the law, and migrant workers would not be arrested during this period. On 4 July, the Thai government announced that it would delay the enforcement of some articles (101, 102, 119, and 122 concerning penalty) until 1 January 2018, to give employers and workers enough time to comply with the same. The Thai Prime Minister defended the labour decree as necessary to address international concerns about human trafficking in Thailand.

## **‘Managing’ Migration vs ‘Facilitating’ Migration**

The current policy response by Thailand is one example in the region which begs the question, “What is ‘migration governance’ and what is ‘migration management’?” In the recent Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in Berlin, Special Representative on International Migration to the UN Secretary-General, Louise Arbour, urged UN member states to focus their efforts on ‘facilitating’ migration and not ‘trying to stop or prevent’ migration. It was reasoned that the latter would simply lead to an increase in irregular migration, make migrants more vulnerable to exploitation and lead to further loss of lives.

Current trends on migration management in the region is leading to legislations on stricter migration rules, imposing mobility control (for example, the ban on domestic work), and keeping migration temporary for ‘unskilled’ workers while encouraging and facilitating migration for ‘professionals’ — for example, in ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) there is an increasing gap in opportunities, thus augmenting further the marginalisation of the poor. The need of the hour is longer-term, more comprehensive, and more rights-based migration policies and vision in the region. Migration ‘governance’ also requires the rule of law and participation of stakeholders in decision-making.

### *Roles of Countries of Origin*

While the bulk of discussions around migration and our advocacy focuses on destination countries, there are also many actions that migrants’ countries of origin can play in protecting their nationals.

These include:

- Setting up migration mechanisms
- Information dissemination
- Regulating recruitment agencies
- Providing overseas assistance
- Setting up/Managing Worker’s Welfare Fund and Social Security
- International cooperation
- Facilitating reintegration

## **Mekong Migration Network**

The Mekong Migration Network (MMN) was initiated in 2001 as a network of organisations conducting collaborative research on migration in the Mekong. Coordinated by AMC, the partners jointly carried out a mapping of issues, needs, and responses. The organisation was formally launched in 2003 in response to the need for a sub-regional collaboration on labour migration in the GMS. It currently has forty member organisations.

Its areas of joint action include information monitoring, research, advocacy, capacity-building, and networking.

The MMN will launch a report on the roles of countries of origin and organise a policy dialogue on this theme on 20–21 July in Yangon, Myanmar. MMN will also look into emerging new migration patterns such as Mekong countries – Japan.

### *Strategies*

1. Monitoring on Impact of Regularisation
  - Advocating for improvised protection and rights for migrants, as opposed to simply higher fees and bureaucracy.
  - Close monitoring of the impact on those who fall outside the regularisation process.
  - Convincing governments that regularisation will work only when migrants see the real benefit in doing so.
2. Advocacy with multiple-level targets
  - Destination countries
  - Countries of origin
  - National level
  - Provincial levels (led by members)
  - ASEAN: ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour, AICHR, ACWC
  - Government, business, media
3. Research and advocacy with thematic focuses
  - Roles of countries of origin
  - Recruitment practices
  - Social exclusion
  - Migrants in agriculture and fisheries
  - SEZs
  - Bottom of ASEAN/Supply Chain
  - Healthcare

4. Capacity-Building
  - Regional training on ASEAN Advocacy
  - National training on responses to labour migration (Myanmar)
  - Country exchange visits
  - Regional exchange
5. Networking/Solidarity building
  - ASEAN People's Forum
  - World Social Forum on Migration
  - Global Forum on Migration and Development
  - World AIDS Conference

# **Retrofitting Ecumenism as a Movement: A Few Perspectives on Challenges**

***Henry S. Wilson***

*Director, Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia*

*“Continuing with the past does not mean being identical with the past...”*

## **Insight from Institutional Management**

‘Retrofitting’ implies adapting to a new purpose or need; furnishing, with new or modified parts or equipment that were not available at the time of manufacturing or creation.

### *Continuing Three Foci of Ecumenical Movement*

- Church Unity (engaging with ‘other’ Christians)
- Church in Society (engaging with ‘others’, larger society)
- Church in mission (ambivalence engagement with ‘others’ including ‘Christian others’)

### *Concept of ‘the Other’*

Paradoxical nature necessitates regular reviews to reorient Ecumenical Movement:

- Coherence between three engagements mentioned above
- Interest, finance, personnel, and structures
- Education, reception, and implementation

Residue of tension continues...

- Michael Kinnamon observes that within the ecumenical ministry, there is an “increasing split between two sets of priorities, that is the integration of Faith and Order, and Life and Work”; this prevails even today. (p.150)
- I would phrase it as the tension between ‘ecclesial-oriented ecumenism’ versus ‘secular-oriented ecumenism’.

The need of the time is to discern the nature of Ecumenism in both the Western ‘post-Christian’ and the globalised world. The process of retrofitting begins by creating renewed awareness of the integral nature of faith and the secular/social existence of Christians. Social changes have always impacted Christian faith and practices as faith communities exist in a symbiotic relationship with larger communities.

The search for an appropriate articulation of Christian faith and practice has become universal. Even in the West, Christian and cultural identities are no more in an affable relationship. The West, having undergone the process of secularism, now has to deal with multiculturalism and the plurality of religions and spiritual practices. Positively engaging with them is changing the ethos of Western Christian cultures.

Rapidly changing worldviews of younger generations has made Christian leaders of Western churches plead for renewal: examples include John Shelby Spong (Bishop for twenty-four and priest for twenty-one years) in *A New Christianity for a New World: Why Traditional Faith is Dying and How a New Faith is Being Born*; J. A. T. Robinson; scholars associated with 'Jesus Seminar'; and Paul Knitter.

The vision of ecumenism has always focused both on the Christian community and the whole of humanity and creation:

- Unity of Christians for the sake of the unity of humanity; and,
- Striving towards the vision of reign (kingdom) of God for the sake of justice, peace, and integrity of creation (whole gospel for the whole world).

The historical contexts of the desire to address the scandal of division have varied. In the West: World Wars I and II followed by the ideological divide of the Cold War contributed to thinking about the role of churches in unity for peaceful socio-political resolutions (Kinnamon).

## **Asian Context**

### *Urgent quest*

- To be independent of the models of Western Christianities, especially in the context of Western colonial rule.
- Emerging nationalism and identities.
- For effective witness (mission) in the context of the multi-religious and multicultural ethos of Asia.

Two challenges remain:

1. Independence from Western models of Christianities:  
A plea for the Church in Asia to emerge as the people-oriented church of Asia led to a CCA consultation on 'Tradition and Innovation: A search for a Relevant Ecclesiology in Asia' in 1983.

Bold visionary pronouncement:

- o The consultation noted that Asian churches are burdened with inherited Western irrelevance;
  - o Liturgies, church structures, and decision-making processes;
  - o Theology(ies), denominationalism; and,
  - o Christian exclusivity (Koshy I: 268): Alternates, basic Christian communities (indigenous, Minjung) etc. did not succeed.
2. Means of witnessing in multi-faith and multicultural ethos:
- o Emerging from the missionary movement, ecumenism is tainted with the notion of Christian superiority —the old ghost has not left us.
  - o The tendency of Christians to be preachers and teachers (Gandhi) with a condescending attitude; innocently or deliberately (Kitagawa) has resulted in the failure of Christianity in Asia (Panikkar).

## **Renewed Challenge: Christianity from being the only true religion in Asia**

*Christianity being a religion in Asia*

United Nations Millennium World Peace Summit (2000):

New 21<sup>st</sup> century began with the World Peace Summit on 28 August 2000. This was the first time for the UN. In attendance were over 1,000 spiritual leaders, from more than fifteen major faith traditions and many of the world's indigenous tribes.

Kofi Annan (UN General Secretary) said, "The United Nations is a tapestry, not only of suits and saris but of clerics' collars, nuns' habits, and lamas' robes; of mitres, skullcaps, and yarmulkes...There is a basic affinity between the teachings of the great religions of the world and the values of the Charter of the United Nations."

*Christianity as a religion*

- The challenge is to work out strategies to appropriate that reality, and evolve a re-formed ecumenism that is needed to pursue it;
- Focus on wider interfaith ecumenism (Samartha and others); and,



- The (A) People of God Among All God's Peoples: frontiers in Christian Mission (CCA, 2000).

#### *Criticism for the slowness of change*

- The ecumenical movement has borne real theological fruit, but "what began as a daring experiment has decayed into bureaucratised complacency...dull round of interdenominational statements..." (Ross Douthat of New York Times, Kinnamon, p.2)
- As a result, experiencing 'ecumenical winter', 'lost in the fog' (Koshy, p.24)

#### *Reckoning with theological shift and exercising flexibility*

- Christo-centric to Salvation-centric; Theo/God-centric to Life centric approach.
- The flexibility of structures to accomplish them with some initial experimentations.
- Addressing the issues of reception–implementation (for example, BEM, Accra confession, Evangelism).

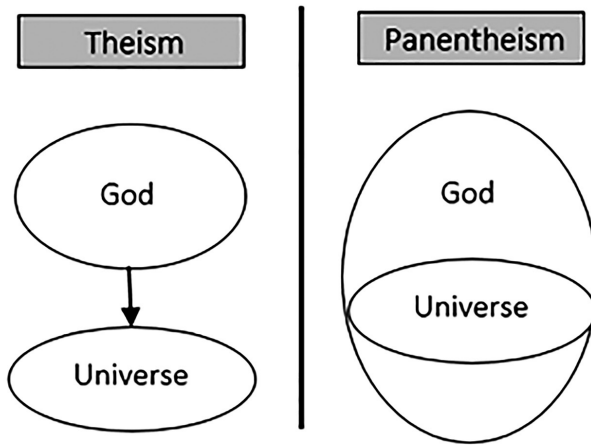
#### *Human dilemma, fear/anxiety, desire, and mystery of life*

- Humans require religion(s), with components of doctrines, dogmas, rites, rituals, myths, magic, and identity as long as they are at the present state of awareness and consciousness.
- The sense of non-being (Paul Tillich) and the desire to compensate that with the relationship with Being will govern the human psyche as they try to find meaning in life, as individuals and communities.
- To overcome the sense of being 'cultural orphans' in the context of rapid social changes.

#### *Modesty on the Claim of Knowledge of God*

- Miroslav Volf notes that "[O]ften, it does not take even a mind trainer in the school of the great masters of suspicion — Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud — to notice that we use God to achieve our own ecclesiastical or political ends rather than aligning these ends with God's purposes". (Dancing for God: Evangelical Theological Education in Global Context)

*Access to God is Reconceived Panentheism*



*Ecumenical openness with variety of discipleship with discernment*

- Non-church movement
- Non-baptised
- Anonymous (churchless/religionless)
- Post-denominational (China)
- Cultural Christians
- 'Third church' – indigenous churches
- Christian humanist

*Variety of historical approaches to theological education*

- Disciple Formation (Guru-Shishya model)
- Apologetic Formation (Defence model)
- Priestly Formation (Serve/preserve community)
- Clergy Formation (Serve/equip the community)
- Deaconate Formation (Assist social ministry)
- Missionary Formation ('Glocal' Outreach)
- Discipleship Formation ('Glocal' Witnessing)

*The emergence of independent seminaries in 19<sup>th</sup> century*

- Free-market environment primarily in North America
- Theological seminaries were founded primarily for theological reasons (as a firewall from other confessions)
- To cater to the internal standards than to challenge them, and sometimes reform them

- Hampered the broad base theological education
- Got marginalised from higher education (M.E. Brinkman, *Theology between Church, University, and Society*, Van Gorcum, 2013: 49ff)

*A long tradition and continuing (Brain Edgar: Theology of Theological Education)*

- Jerusalem: to make disciples – reach out
- Antioch and Alexandria: apologetic to defend Christian faith
- Post-Constantinian: Cathedral and monastic (bi-vocational) – serve the community
- Elizabethan (1559): shifted from monasteries to universities. Priests as religious civil servants – part of the ruling class

*Protestant (tr)addition*

- Geneva (confessional-teaching, for educating Christians of Reformers time): John Calvin founded Geneva academy in 1559 (preaching and teaching)
- Berlin (vocational, to strengthen the community): 1810–1834 Fredrich Schleiermacher
- Mission training schools for world mission: Hermann Francke Foundation (1698) in Halle, Germany

*Implementation in Asia*

- Elizabethan (16<sup>th</sup> century), Franke (17<sup>th</sup>), and Fredrick Schleiermacher (19<sup>th</sup> century) hybrid.
- Asians have done quite a bit of improvising also further borrowing from British, European-German, and North American models but still struggling with Elizabethan-Franke-Schleiermacher gift-ghost-legacy.

*Historical legacy with consequences*

- Has the inherited hybrid mode constrained emergence of the Asian model?
- Since education and academic degrees are highly desired and socially respected accomplishments, recently education has taken precedence over holistic character formation.

*Future possibilities*

- In Asia, academic theological education to be done in Christian colleges and universities that provides a larger community of scholarship and resources.

- Theological/Religious departments have to claim the space as contributors to the moral fibre of society.

## **Asian Genius/Input**

*In the era of the claim for the contribution of Asia*

- Church/Christians in reflection (scriptures and traditions)
- Church in pilgrimage (emergence of world Christianity, histories of Christianities and theologies)
- Church in action (ministerial practices and advocacy engagements)
- Church in relations (ecumenical, interfaith, and engaging with communities of science and technologies)

*Daniel Aleshire (Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada)*

- Theological education is a socially constructed enterprise, and when times and issues change, the case for theological education needs to be reconsidered, if not reconstructed.
- Can the same be said of ecumenical ministry structures?

*Reorienting education*

- Most Christians do not have the privilege to explore the wide dimension of Christian faith but leadership involved in ministry and ecumenism, and theological educators can be a channel and help them to re-envision Christianity in Asia, as change can come only through the full participation of informed laity.

*Two pearls of wisdom from the secular world*

- Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result is insanity. (Albert Einstein)
- If you want something new, you have to stop doing something old. (Peter Drucker)

## **Key points from the concept paper on the Ecumenical Movement**

- Turning of the world into the Kingdom of God
- The ecumenical movement is not an addition or appendix, but an integral part of the witness of the church
- The renewed search of one's own denominational identity has become virulent in many parts of the world

- Reintroduce awareness of the risk of old prejudices and animosities
- New ecumenical enthusiasm with a renewed missionary spirit and theology
- Lack of ownership by churches (contrary to this, it is controlled too much by church leaders and professional ecumenists)
- Promote increased ecumenical cooperation and accompaniment
- Faith – Eschatological community
- Social – Existential community

#### *Domain of Theology*

- Doctrines and dogmas
- Rites and rituals
- Structures and institutions (Holy offices)
- Histories and traditions
- Cults and cultures
- Anthropology
- World views: Spiritual

#### *Domain of Ideology*

- Social orders
- Political structures
- Economic systems
- Science and technology
- Language, Race, and Ethnicity
- Marketing and finance
- Ecology

#### **Key references**

- Ninan Koshy, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia*. Volumes I and II. (Hong Kong: WSCF, YMCA and CCC, 2004)
- Michael Kinnamon, *Can a Renewal Movement Be Renewed: Questions for the future of Ecumenism*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014)

# **Ecumenical Formation and Ecumenical Theological Education: A Chinese Perspective**

***Rev. Dr Manhong Lin***

*Associate General Secretary of China Christian Council  
Academic Dean, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary*

In my presentation, I will share with you some of the efforts that the Chinese church has made in the journey of ecumenical formation and propose some suggestions for future cooperation, especially in ecumenical theological education.

## **Formation of the Post-Denominational Church**

Plainly speaking, we hope to see, in the near future, a united Christian Church without any denominational distinctions. This may seem somewhat peculiar to some of you; but friends, do not forget to view us from our standpoint, for if you forget to do that, the Chinese will remain always as a mysterious people to you! – Cheng Jingyi, World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (1900)

We Chinese Christians who represent the various leading denominations express our regret that we are divided by the denominationalism which comes from the West. We recognise fully that denominationalism is based upon differences, the historical significance of which, however real or vital to the missionaries from the West, is not shared by us Chinese. Therefore, denominationalism, instead of being a source of inspiration, has been a source of confusion, bewilderment, and inefficiency. We firmly believe that it is only a united Church that can save China, for our task is great and enough strength can only be obtained through solid unity.

Nevertheless, the post-denominational church was only established in the 1950s when Chinese churches were no longer under the control of Western missionaries and China regained its national unity.

## **Features of the Post-Denominational Church**

- A different ecumenical model following the principle of keeping the common ground while reserving the differences.

- Unity within the Chinese post-denominational church is not coercive: differences on certain issues of theology or church practices are not regarded as divisive.

#### *Why the post-denominational church has become possible*

- Low emphasis on doctrine plus traditional Chinese understanding of religion
- Active use of the Bible and respect for the authority of the Bible
- Spiritual and ecclesiological poverty: willingness and readiness to give up confessional pride

Ecumenical formation includes the actualisation of the fullness of life for all beings in the household of God. In seeking to reach this goal, the Chinese church has faced great challenges.

#### **The concept of Cosmic Christ addresses some challenges**

In Ting's understanding, the significance of knowing Christ's cosmic nature for Chinese Christians is to help them understand both the universal extent of Christ's domain, concern, and care, and his love as the essence and foundation of this universality. This is to say that God's love revealed in Christ extends all over the world to all of God's people, and therefore, correspondingly, as Christ's disciples, Christians should also learn to interact with and love others with God's all-inclusive love reflected in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Rather than wait for ecumenical themes to regain prominence in the academe, we need to demonstrate their importance to the students, though there may be a waning interest in ecumenism in the seminaries and in the churches.

#### **Suggestions for Cooperation**

- Ecumenical studies should be intentionally included in the curriculum for theological education and effectively taught in the seminaries with a broader understanding of ecumenism, which sees the whole world as the 'household of God' that neither limits God's all-embracing love to a selected or chosen few, nor puts any select group in opposition to all others outside the group.

- Organising seminars or a teachers' academy for ecumenical studies regularly for the faculty members to share their teaching experience, including sharing the teaching materials, methodology, and the challenges they face, for the course development for a comprehensive understanding of the Asian ecumenical movement.
- Put some efforts into writing and/or updating our history or stories of ecumenism, or perhaps even just in compiling a collection of essays on ecumenical studies.
- Conferences on ecumenical themes, or visits of theological students and/or faculty members to promote mutual understanding and ecumenical relations.

As long as we keep the ecumenical vision of the visible unity in the shared faith and ecclesial ministry, of God as sovereign over all the earth revealing Godself in the Cosmic Christ, of developing attitudes of openness, dialogue, and collaboration with all in God's household, and of theological education that endeavours to make personal, ecclesiastical, and social change, both for individuals and for society, all efforts and possibilities should be considered seriously and taken to action.



# **Ecumenical Formation and Ecumenical Theological Education: A Response**

***Nancy Caluya***

*Association of Christian Institutes for Social Concerns  
in Asia (ACISCA)*

Since yesterday, we have been discussing the need to revitalise the ecumenical movement and, more importantly, how to make it fresh and relevant to Asians.

Asia is a unique context because it is the home of many, many people of different races and languages, tastes and values, views and sensitivities. Therefore, the challenge of mobilising peoples of diverse backgrounds into doing the same thing is, understandably, a very tall order.

Our speakers emphasised that the ecumenical movement must change its old ways of doing things without touching its three focuses: church unity, the church in the society, and the church as mission. The old must be replaced by the new, the fresh, and the relevant.

The old ways of the ecumenical movement in Asia were heavily influenced by Western models of Christianity. Looking back, we find these paradigms less effective in Asia, which has diverse cultures, faiths, values, ways of life, and sensitivities.

The presentation is correct when it said that it is insanity to expect a different result when you do not do anything differently. Someone also said we must know our history so that we can avoid repeating the same mistake. Therefore, we must review seriously our past experiences and how these failed to help achieve CCA's vision and mission.

We mentioned our burden in the form of the Western models of Christianity. We say their text is outside of the Asian context. They hamper our efforts to advance ecumenism in this part of the world. What we need is to send a message to a multi-faith and multicultural audience. The latter could simply not get the message of the former. There is a disconnect somewhere.

Yes, we need to revisit our past. There is no avoiding it. We use all alibis available to avoid self-criticism. We are hurting right now. Something must be corrected, albeit the process of correcting is painful. Who says that dreaming and realising it is for the faint-hearted, anyway? Striving towards a vision is serious business. It is reserved for the brave one who is strong enough to face his or her faults and weaknesses and is ready and willing to face the pains and sacrifices of correcting them.

I can see that we are ready to set aside our pride, eliminate barriers that hinder us from achieving our vision, let go of the old and the pains of the past, and dare to try new things in search for relevance and effectiveness.

I am amazed at the depth of the analyses I have heard. I must confess I could hardly understand even half of them. Maybe because I am not a theologian. I am a lay person. There is strength in being a lay person. Maybe I am here for a reason— to articulate the need of the lay people. The lay people have specific needs. We — the women, children, youth, men who are not necessarily church leaders — love to be stakeholders.

We are willing to carry some of the burdens. We believe in cooperation. We love to be counted in. We, too, want to be relevant. According to the presentation, there is a need for ecumenical education 'to be included in the curriculum of seminaries'. I agree. However, I also would like to propose that ecumenical education be included in church programmes, liturgies, Bible studies, Sunday schools, and especially sermons or messages on the pulpit.

Remember, we, the lay people, also want to know ecumenism to discuss it. We need to understand and believe in it to allow us to voluntarily become part of its movement. The clergy may spread the 'whys' and 'wherefores' of ecumenism, but it is still the people, the ekklesia, who will make ecumenism a movement. But it is the clergy who has the responsibility in packaging message that will make it acceptable or unacceptable.

Lay people want simple things— simple activities, simple thoughts, and simple paradigms. Complex ones tend to make our minds wander and think of something else we can grasp. Maybe that is why Mahatma Gandhi was able to mobilise millions. His purpose became a movement that was embraced by a whole people. "Free India" was his vision. Millions got it and embraced it as their own. They allowed this vision to mobilise them. In time, they won their freedom from

Great Britain. Gandhi became a 'Prophet', someone who had the right message at the right time.

In dire times, God has messages of vital importance to the people for their survival. God appoints someone to send this message. Prophets of old get their marching order directly from God. Today, a person or group may be called. This calling may come as an overwhelming burden to perform something or deliver God's message even if such is inconvenient or even dangerous.

God's prophets go to the people (not the other way around) or to a place where people congregate, such as the marketplace, where they would occupy the most prominent space or stage and speak loudly and boldly for everyone to hear.

I can see that CCA and the ecumenical movement still feels an overwhelming desire or burden to perform something for God. What we are trying to figure out is our understanding of the marketplace and the people in it to whom we will speak loudly and boldly.

We need to speak in tongues like the Apostles during the Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection. Although those listening were people from different backgrounds, they were able to understand the same message.

Aside from the drive to prophesy, we need the ability to do it efficiently and effectively. Hence, we need preparation and education. We must not only educate ourselves but also educate or prepare the minds and intellects of the people who are our audience. A relevant (at least to our judgment) message will only go down the drain if the people fail to appreciate its meaning. Hence, part of the prophets' duty is to educate the people.

In my observation, ecumenical education is limited to academicians, theologians, and a few stakeholders. The concepts of ecumenism must go to the people and not the other way around. We must go to where they congregate (online marketplace) and tell the message boldly. We talked about the tension between the ecclesial-oriented ecumenism and the secular-oriented ecumenism. We often put the word 'versus' between them. I would rather see the word 'and' instead. Can't a new paradigm accommodate both?

There are moral constants that apply in every situation and context. Some truths must not be compromised. We cannot retrofit Truth. The 'how' is something we must figure out and manipulate. The Truth is non-negotiable.

## **Being the Church in Asia: Our Witnessing Together**

***Bishop Joseph Chusak Sirisut***

*Bishop of Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand  
FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA)*

I would like to begin by first of all thanking the CCA for having taken the initiative for this consultation to revitalise the Asian ecumenical movement and also to thank the CCA for having invited someone from the Roman Catholic Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) to be a participant in this consultation.

The FABC would also like to acknowledge and thank the CCA for its recent inclusion of the FABC in the planning and the working group for the mission statement for the upcoming CCA Asian Mission Conference in October at the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCA. All of this offers us a bright future in ecumenical cooperation. I will offer now in advance my congratulations to the CCA on your 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Just a word about the FABC— the FABC is not an ecumenical body as such, unlike the CCA, that is by its nature an ecumenical body. The FABC is an expression of Church communion, collegiality, and solidarity among the Roman Catholic bishops of Asia through the different conferences of bishops. From the very beginning of the FABC in 1972, it has stated that one of its functions is to 'foster ecumenical and interreligious communication and collaboration'. Among the first 'offices' created by the FABC was the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA).

For the FABC, the CCA has been its major ecumenical partner. I would like to recall just a few major events in our ecumenical history.

Thirty years ago, in 1987, there was consultation, which, we in the FABC, called BIRA IV/6 (Bishops Institute for Interreligious Affairs) that has also been called the 'Joint FABC-CCA Consultation'. There were fifty-five participants from fourteen countries. There were twenty-four Catholic bishops from twelve countries and fourteen CCA delegates from eleven countries together with seventeen resource people. This was the first such joint initiative of the CCA/FABC. The theme was: 'Living and Working together with Sisters and Brothers of the Faiths in Asia'; a theme that is still a present opportunity.

This led to the famous 1993 agreement between the CCA and the FABC drafted by the Joint FABC-CCA Task Force. The agreement was approved by FABC in January of 1995 at the Plenary Assembly in Manila, Philippines, and the CCA in June of 1995 at the General Assembly in Colombo, Sri Lanka. This agreement was approved by the highest assemblies of each group called for further consultation and collaboration in ecumenical endeavours.

After this in 1996, we jointly started the Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU). There have been seven AMCUs. In 2000, the Asia Conference of Theological Students (ACTS) was begun. There have been five ACTS. We have had joint office meetings and office visits over the years. There was some cooperation in the Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS) over the years. There was the Asian Ecumenical Committee which only began after AMCU in 1996 and it only met four times and has not met since 2006. We recall the joint venture of the FABC and the CCA in holding the Conference of Muslim-Christian Religious Leaders of Asia held in 2003. In 2007, jointly in CCA and the FABC invited the Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA) to both AMCU and ACTS. Since 2007 we in the FABC would consider both the CCA and AEA as ecumenical partners. The FABC has participated in the Global Christian Forum since 2007 as part of our ecumenical commitment.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara attended the last Plenary Assembly of the FABC in 2016, and he addressed the Assembly. He received great positive feedback from the bishops. This has often been done in the past. These types of mutual invitations are part of our working together.

I mentioned these few highlights of our ecumenical history to only remind us that much was done before our time. I do not mention these with a sense of nostalgia, meaning that we need to return to the “good old days” and to repeat what was done before, but to encourage us to revive, to give new life to, to find the new wineskins for the long-existing Asian ecumenical movement in our day.

We need to turn to the future. Where do we go from here? What more can we do to promote ecumenism? We must also be realistic. We have limited personnel and limited resources. How do we evaluate the past? How do we evaluate AMCU and ACTS? What should be continued? What can be done differently? What new things need to be done? What structures best serve ecumenism today?

We, in the FABC, view our involvement in ecumenism at the Asian level as important, yet we realise that while we hope to contribute, it is ultimately what is done at the grassroots level that is most important. We would evaluate our involvement over again how this promotes the grassroots level involvement in ecumenism.

We must constantly go back to the prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper in the Gospel of John. During the prayer, Jesus said: "As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world" (John 17:18). There are the same words of the risen Jesus on Easter Sunday night as well: "...for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may also be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." (John 17:20-21).

Jesus prayed for unity in himself and the Father and he connected this to the world believing. It is on this context of praying for unity that Jesus says that he sends the disciples on mission in the same way that the Father sends him. Mission and witnessing and unity go together. We know that we Christians do not live in that unity for which Christ prayed, through common faith, baptism, and Scripture, but we do share a real, if yet imperfect, communion.

We must return to this prayer of Jesus over and over again. We need to pray for a deeper understanding of having the zeal of Christ's will for the visible unity of the Church.

Our common faith, our common baptism, our common scriptures unite us as brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to promote what we have in common and recognise each other as fellow disciples of the Lord on our pilgrim way.

Let us all walk together, journey together with one another. Let us pray together. Jesus prayed for Christian unity, let us do the same. Our prayer for unity should be at the heart of our ecumenical activities.

We can intensify our celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, that which we already have in common. Let us do this at the grassroots level here in Asia. We have this common prayer prepared each year, how can we make better use of it?

Being the Church in Asia, we must together enter into positive relations with the people among whom we live, peoples of other religions. This is where we can witness together. Together as

Christians, we can face the issues of our time. But we must also do so together with the peoples of Asia from other religions. Together we need to face the violence and terrorism of what is labelled as religious extremism of our day. This is the context which God has given us and in which we are called to be His witnesses.

The Recommendations of the document *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct* speak of building relationships of respect and trust with people of all religions for peace and bring reconciliation. “In certain contexts, where years of tension and conflict have created deep suspicions and breaches of trust between and among communities, interreligious dialogue can provide new opportunities for resolving conflicts, restoring justice, healing of memories, reconciliation, and peacebuilding”. Also mentioned are Christians strengthening their own common religious identity and faith. Again in situations of conflict in particular Christians together with other religious communities need to cooperate for justice and the common good to be in real solidarity with those in violent situations.

We should help the poor and the vulnerable. “There was not a needy person among them,” says the Book of Acts (4:34). We will be judged on what we have done for Jesus. “Lord, when did we do this to you? When you did it for one of these little ones, you did it to me...” (Matthew 25:39–40). Works of charity, works of mercy are an eloquent witness we can offer. How can we do this together, in a realistic manner?

Together we need to face the reality of global warming and its consequences. All are affected by this. This is a threat to the planet and human existence. This is not something that can be delayed. It is a natural common ground for interreligious dialogue amidst ecumenical cooperation.

What are the new wineskins that we need to make use of today here in Asia as we attempt to revive the ecumenical movement? It is the Holy Spirit that creates unity. Let us be docile to that Spirit which is leading us into the future. May the Spirit lead us to new ways of thinking and collaborating.

# **Being the Church in Asia: Our Witnessing Together**

***Rev. Dr Richard Howell***

*General Secretary, Asia Evangelical Alliance*

## **Introduction**

- We worship the Living God revealed in history in the person of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus prayed for the unity of believers so that the world may believe that Jesus was sent by the Father. (John 17:21)
- “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)
- “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.” (Luke 6:32)

## **Need for Healthy Collaborative Relationships**

*Example of Global Christian Forum (GCF)*

- Creation of a ‘space’ where participants all meet on an equal basis, to foster mutual respect, and to explore and address together common concerns.
- The GCF is always asking ‘who is missing from among us? Who still should be invited to gather?’
- Relational, Testimonial, Missional. The forum is focused more on birthing, extending, and deepening relationships between churches than on theological dialogue producing consensus texts. Its theological mode is more testimonial and doxological than theoretical and analytical.

## **Aspects of Pope Francis’s Pontificate: As stated by Cardinal Walter Kasper**

- His pastoral motto: walking together;
- His insistence on the conversion of the Church, including papacy;
- His idea of a Church oriented towards peripheries;
- The prominence he brings to the synodical structure of the Church;



- His insistence on the sense of the faithful: *sensus fidelium*;
- His vision of unity as reconciled diversity;
- His personal contacts with ancient Eastern Churches and with mainline Reformation churches;
- His outreach to Evangelical and Pentecostal churches.

### **What It Takes to Revitalise Healthy Ecumenism**

The three key competencies needed especially for the task of connecting include:

1. Soft skills
  - Listening
  - Willingness to learn
  - Being sensitive and cooperative
2. Excellent communication
  - Freedom to speak the language of my faith tradition
  - Communicate honestly and positively
  - Need to stay in constant touch
  - Regular updates on the network, partnerships, collaborations
3. Building Solid Relationship
  - Friendship
  - Love

### **Prayer is the Language of Friendship**

#### **The Disciple is a Lover**

What do you want? (John 1:38)

In the Gospel of John, it is the first question Jesus poses to those who would follow him. Our wants and longings and desires are at the core of our identity, the wellspring from which our actions and behaviour flow. Discipleship is a way to be attentive to and intentional about what you love. Discipleship is more a matter of hungering and thirsting after God; to align our loves and longings with God's — to want what God wants, to desire what God desires, and crave a world where God is all in all — a vision encapsulated by the shorthand "your kingdom of God".

*"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them" (Luke 6:32).*

## **Model of Love**

Instead of the rationalist, intellectualist model that implies, “You are what you think,” the biblical conviction is: “You are what you love” — “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30–31).

The *telos* for Christians is Christ: Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of what we are made for, of the end of which we are called. This how we become human. This is what we are here for.

God does not liberate us from deformation by new information by merely giving us a book; God inscribes the biblical story on our hearts by bending our lives to Christ.

## **The Biblical Vision of Shalom**

Christian worship tells a story that makes us want to set sail on the immense sea that is the Triune God, birthing in us a longing for “a better country—a heavenly one”, that is, the kingdom that is to come. (Hebrew 11:16)

Worship in spirit and truth is the heart of discipleship. Worship takes hold of our inner being, recalibrates our heart, and captures our imagination. Christian worship does not just teach us how to think; it teaches us how to love.

*We are part of God’s Story of Love.*

If we are passionate about seeking justice, renewing culture, and taking up our calling and gifting to unfurl all of creation’s potential, we need to invest in the formation of our imagination. We need to educate our heart. We need to worship well; because we are what we love and we worship what/who is love.

For example, a narrative or worldview that values power and domination and violence will see Christ’s meekness and humility as a vice; in contrast, Christians see Christ as the very exemplar of virtue, and so we evaluate his meekness and humility as virtues to which we aspire.

## **Being the Church in Asia: Our Witnessing Together**

***Bishop Reuel Norman O. Marigza***

*General Secretary, United Church of Christ in the Philippines*

Let us have a game of trivia:

1. What was the former name of the Christian Conference of Asia?  
Ans: East Asia Christian Conference
2. When and where was this body decided on?  
Ans: In 1957 in Prapat, Indonesia
3. When and where was the inaugural Assembly?  
Ans: In 1959 in Kuala Lumpur
4. Who knows the theme of the founding/inaugural Assembly?  
Ans: "Witnessing Together"

So, we are coming full circle; the theme of this season being: *Being the Church in Asia: Our Witnessing Together*.

While many things have changed since then, many also have remained the same.

In 1957, the gathering was largely of churches and councils related to the World Council of Churches. Sixty years hence, the body deliberating on 'Witnessing Together' involves the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference and the Asian Evangelical Alliance, as well as other ecumenical institutes and organisations.

Yesterday and this morning, we were brought to a common place of understanding 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 new diseases, they have mutated to unprecedented forms and levels, and affected/infected a large population. Issues of migration and human trafficking, of peacebuilding and moving beyond conflicts, of the growing religious intolerance and extremism, the condition of extreme poverty in a region of plenty.

It is in this context that we look at our being the Church in Asia, and where we do our witnessing together.

The Introductory Paper to our gathering stated, “The ecumenical movement is not an addition or appendix, but an integral, organic part of the mission and witness of the Church.” We need not be reminded that the Lord wills this to be in his prayer that we may be one even as he and God are one. And we know that this unity of the Church has a missional thrust: “that the world may believe” (John 17:21). Can we then say that the ecumenical movement insofar as it manifests this unity willed by our Lord and as it embodies the mission of God, can assert its being the Church in Asia? I would hasten to add, what has already been voiced out here that the ecumenical movement is beyond the CCA (in our region), and the WCC (in the global community).

In a paper published in the CTC Bulletin in 1995 entitled, ‘Being Church in Asia and the Pacific in Partnership with God Today’, Franklyn J. Balasundaram summed up the context then. He wrote:

“Asian Christianity as preached and practised in the established Church in Asia and perhaps the Pacific inclusive is:

- rich and triumphalist
- in alliance with Capitalism and neo-Colonial structure
- unnecessarily involved in ideological battles with Marxism
- distorting the gospel message by presenting a one-sided picture about Jesus Christ
- burdened with outmoded and unsuitable imported theology
- interested only in her survival and self-preservation
- interested in social service and not social justice
- making no attempt to understand and seek dialogue with her hosts— the Asian religions, cultures, and ideologies
- a tiny minority
- patriarchal (male-dominated, with male symbols, language and practices), hierarchical, and oppressive
- alienating women and discriminating against them based on sex while its theology legitimises the low status accorded to them and,
- burdened with traditional and alienated spirituality...”

How much has changed? As it is said, the more things have changed, the more they have remained the same.

## The Dynamics of Being and Doing

You are what you do. What you do becomes what you are. It has been a dictum that 'The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning'. As 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..." [The Word and the World (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1931) p. 108].*

That mission is none other than the mission on God. As Jesus had said: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you..." (John 20:21). Our ecclesiology must, by nature, be missiological. Being the Church in Asia then means being in mission.

Adding the component of calling or vocation to being and doing, Titus Presler asserted: "Identity, vocation, and mission for Christians are not three separate realities, but are mutually dependent. Christian identity is realised through Christian mission. Mission defines and fulfils identity." Vocation, a word derived from the Latin verb *vocare* (i.e. to call), is the calling every Christian has both to be with God and to carry out God's mission. We can see all this as a theological expression of the relationship between being and doing, living and working.

One's being is only partly separable from one's doing, for just as our doing is grounded in our being, our being is realised through our doing. Our doing expresses who we are, but we also discover who we are through our doing. Just that intimate is the relationship between Christian identity and Christian mission. As the Swiss theologian Emil Brunner is reputed to have said, "The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning."

In the Roman Catholic Church, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences' (FABC) grappled with how it is to be the Church in Asia and came to reveal a uniquely Asian ecclesiology. This "new way of doing church" is rooted in six predominant propositions:

1. the Asian Church is called to be a "communion of communities" that is—
2. (shaped by, and responds to) the immense diversity and pluralism of Asia,

3. undergirded by a commitment and service to life,
4. inspired by an overarching vision of harmony,
5. oriented toward a threefold dialogue with Asian cultures, religions and the poor, and
6. seeking to build the Kingdom of God in Asia.

## **Ecumenical Movement or Ecumenical Stagnancy?**

It is either that we have a revitalised ecumenical movement or more of the stable ecumenical stagnancy—for that is the harsh reality, if we do not move, we grow stale.

If we do not pump in new life in our movement, we may have to pump out blood from it, so it can be embalmed.

Organisational Development practitioners often talk about stages or life-cycle of organisations:

Movers → Movement → Machinery → Monument → Mausoleum

Have we passed the movement stage? Are we now in the Machinery stage where we have institutionalised processes, procedures, policies, protocols? Hopefully, we have not yet reached the Monument stage where we revel in the ‘good old days’ or the Mausoleum stage, where we will now gather to bury the dead.

## **A Being for Others**

Jesus, who has called us to be the one and whose mission and ministry we bear, was described as a ‘man for others’ (Dietrich Bonhoeffer). The Jesuits would describe their educational ministry as forming ‘men-and-women for others’. I propose that for the ecumenical movement to be revitalised and for it to be able to live out as being the Church in Asia and become the channel for vital witnessing together, it must 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 most alive and dynamic. This was when it was:

- identifying itself and accompanying itself with the movements of democratisation against martial and/or repressive rule/regimes and dictatorships, such as in South Korea, Philippines, East Timor;

- organising urban and industrial workers as well as peasants to protect themselves from exploitation from rapacious and greedy multi-national corporations;
- campaigning against the proliferation of nuclear weapons (or even nuclear power);
- standing up for the environment and 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, but also our hopes and aspirations;
- re-reading the Bible through Asian eyes while listening to the cries of the people;
- reflecting theologically on the realities of Asia and articulating a theology, ecclesiology, and missiology that was incarnational;
- committed itself to follow her Lord, who emptied himself up and became obedient even unto death.

We began to lose fervour and lost 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 more busy focusing on our own denominational and confessional lines, than in the plight of the 'teeming billions crowding Asian streets'.

## **Witnessing Together**

Going back to the Introductory Paper to our gathering, again let me cite what was stated: "The ecumenical movement is not an addition or appendix, but an integral, organic part of the mission and witness of the Church." It then went on to say: "However, in recent times due to various reasons, the ecumenical movement faces fragmentation which hinders the central calling of the ecumenical vision". This reminds me of what Benjamin Franklin once said, "We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly, we shall all hang separately."

In the light of the many agencies and institutions claiming to be ecumenical, side-by-side with the move towards building and strengthening communions or denominational lines, can we still witness together?

Yesterday, we used the imageries and metaphors of 'walking together' (accompaniment, pilgrimage) and of 'working together' to describe the ecumenical movement; however, there was also talk of repentance, not just finger-pointing or playing the blame-game, but a serious critical reflection of our past and present; a criticism and self-criticism process. If you will, I would call this our 'wailing together' (as we don our sackcloth and gather ashes produced by the ecumenical ember breathing its last). By doing that, perhaps the wind of the Spirit may once more breathe on us and rekindle the flame so that our lament and mourning may be turned into joy and dancing. Perhaps then we can, in God's *kairos*, 'waltz together' in celebration.



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*Plenary Session*



*(from left) Fr. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca (Deputy General Secretary, WCC), Dr Park Sang Jung (former General Secretary (1985–1990), CCA), and Dr Mathews George Chunakara (General Secretary, CCA)*



*Participants of the International Consultation*



*‘Towards Revitalising the Ecumenical Movement in Asia’: Panel Presentation by Rev. Rex R.B. Reyes, Jr. (General Secretary, NCCP), moderated by Rev. Julie Sim (CWM)*



*‘Towards Revitalising the Ecumenical Movement in Asia’: Panel Presentation by Rev. Dr. Jae Cheon Lee (General Secretary, PROK), moderated by Rev. Julie Sim (CWM)*



*‘Ecumenical Responses to Religious Intolerance and Freedom of Religion’: Panel Presentation by Rev. Krise Gosal (PGI), Rev. David Das (NCCB), and Victor Azariah (NCC-Pakistan), moderated by Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian (Armenian Orthodox Church of Iran)*





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“The specific responsibility of the ecumenical movement in Asia is to search for the expression of the Asian churches’ common faith through its engagement in a pluralistic Asia and to work for visible unity despite doctrinal differences or confessional barriers. A new way has to be found for all ecumenical actors and denominational and confessional bodies engaged in their mission in Asia to work together. The need for revitalising the ecumenical movement in Asia and regaining the ecumenical vision of Asian churches should be a priority for all those who are concerned with the common witness and future of the ecumenical movement in Asia.”

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