CHRIST'S LOVE (RE)MOVES BORDERS

Reflections from GETI 2022

Edited by Kuzipa Nalwamba and Benjamin Simon

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**World Council
of Churches**

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Kuzipa Nalwamba and Benjamin Simon (ed)

Contents

Preface

This publication is an outcome of the third meeting of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI), which took place in 2022 at the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. The first GETI, in 2013, was at the 10th WCC Assembly in Busan, South Korea; the second, GETI 2018, accompanied the World Mission Conference in Arusha, Tanzania.

GETI 2022 brought together 88 emerging ecumenical theologians from a broad spectrum of Christian traditions and all eight regions of the WCC. They engaged with one another on current critical theological issues under the theme *Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders*—echoing the WCC assembly theme, *Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity*. GETI 2022 participants reflected on the notion of Christ removing and moving borders as an incremental movement toward justice, reconciliation, and unity in our world. Conducted in two phases, online from 25 July to 20 August 2022, and in person from 28 August to 9 September, GETI 2022 immersed participants in academic and experiential reflection.

The essays presented in this publication by plenary speakers and participants are the fruit of that reflection. I invite you as reader to reflect alongside the writers as they show how justice, reconciliation, and unity—the heart of the gospel—are grounded in Christ's love. The emphasis on God as initiator of justice, reconciliation, and unity through Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:11–21) invites us to be witnesses to what God is already doing in the world.

The Corinthian epistle and other Pauline epistles undergirding the theme address restoration of unity among the people of that time, who were divided by enmity in a society marked by deep cultural and religious hostilities (Eph. 2:14–17). This is an enduring message and invitation to ongoing work toward justice, reconciliation, and unity. This task was valid in Paul's time, and still is in our fragmented world, even if the issues are different.

This publication explicates the six thematic areas that framed GETI 2022 as signs of our time. It thereby contributes to ongoing reflection on themes that characterize the current strategic period. I welcome this publication as the fruit of the academic and experiential learning of young and emerging theologians during GETI 2022. It is a contribution toward the pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity rooted in Christ's boundless, cosmic love for the flourishing of all of creation.

Within the wider goals of GETI, I hope readers find in this publication the inspiration to:

- Strengthen knowledge of current local and global ecumenical themes;
- Engage with past, present, and future issues in ecumenical discourse;
- Utilize interdisciplinary approaches for ecumenical studies;
- Express a theologically informed and contextually grounded ecumenical theology; and,
- Seek constructive solutions for challenges in changing religious and societal landscapes.[1]

I therefore welcome and commend this publication as a resource for continued reflection on and implementation of the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity that the WCC 11th Assembly mandated for the 2023–30 strategic period.

Rev. Prof. Jerry Pillay
WCC General Secretary

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1. Extract from the CAS-GET objectives, the basis for the accreditation of GETI by the University of Geneva.

Introduction

Kuzipa Nalwamba and Benjamin Simon

The Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2022 was organized as a short-term, intercultural academic study and exposure programme. It was a six-week blended learning experience—four weeks online and two weeks inperson—held from 28 August to 8 September 2022 alongside the 11th WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. The programme explored the theme "Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders."

In Chapter 1, "Christ's Love and Borders," Vinoth Ramachandra explores political borders and borders between human and machines in the wake of AI. The hard questions that borders pose about migration, economic and environmental exploitation, and human identity require Christians to develop a counternarrative based on Christian theological principles.

In the second chapter, Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué's "Intangible and Embodied Desires: Healing Memories in Church and Society" explores the healing of memories. She emphasizes the importance of healing memories and offers a framework that could facilitate this healing against the backdrop of complexity and contestation concerning those very memories. She posits the love of Christ as God's liberating invitation to renew life through acts of remembrance such as the eucharist. In "'The Past Cannot Be Changed, but We Can Change the Way the Past Is Remembered': The Lutheran-Mennonite Dialogue as an Example of Healing Memories," Jennifer Wasmuth responds to Ekué with a case study of healing memories through interchurch dialogue.

Dietrich Werner explores eschatological planetary realism as a theology of ecological hope in "Kairos for Creation: Theological Perspectives in the Context of a Global Climate and Biodiversity Emergency, or What Does It Mean to Do Theology in the Anthropocene?" This theology is based on the conviction that God will never give up this earth and its creatures (Rom. 8:24; Gen. 9:12); at the same time, it advocates for human ethical responsibility towards creation.

In Chapter 5, "Witness from the Margins," Carlos E. Ham analyzes four verbs in Matthew 4:23 as models for the church's diaconal work. Jesus went, taught, proclaimed, and healed, responding to the real needs of people for wholeness. In her response to Ham, Fundiswa Kobo's "The Margins as the Centre of Epistemology, Diakonia, and Life!" explores Ham's theme from a feminist decolonial standpoint.

Dyron B. Daughrity explores the interreligious question as necessary for solidarity and common action in "'I Refuse to Speak During this Session': Interreligious Dialogue and the World Council of Churches 11th Assembly." He takes as his case in point the issue of engaging pluralism and its challenges at GETI 2022.

In Chapter 8, HyeRan Kim-Cragg's essay is entitled "Body Politics: Uprooting Systems and Unsettling Practices that Degrade Bodies." She reflects on the role of preaching in light of body politics and asks what Christian practices we should cultivate to echo the Psalmist's confession, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" in the image of God. She invokes gender, race, disability, and sexual diversity as examples of God-created diversity. Responding to Kim-Cragg, Matthew Ryan Robinson uses his own life as a point of departure to engage with this theme in "'Body Politics' from Inhibiting to Inhabiting: Intersecting Discourses in a Confession of Creatureliness."

Rudolf Von Sinner's "Ecumenical Lessons from the War against Ukraine: Passionate Protest and Loving Patience" draws lessons for ecumenical peacebuilding. He invokes the Christian duty to persist in passionate protest and loving patience.

Chapter 11, "Multidirectional and Multilayered Intersectionality: Future Issues in Ecumenical Theological Education," concludes the first section of the book. Here, Septemmy E. Lakawa ties the themes together to point to the future. In light of the issues explored here, what should theological education and formation look like?

The second section of the book begins with Benedikte Emilie Steensgaard Thorup's critical reading of Genesis 3 in "The Devilish Mirror in Our Eye: An Eco-theological Reading and Retelling of Genesis 3."

In Chapter 13, Christopher Latchman's "Witnessing from the Margins through a Liberating God" reflects on the question of centring the margins. In the following chapter, Elio Jaillet's "Stumbling on the Border: Reflections on the Church from the Perspective of Multitudinism" offers a critical perspective on

when the church's focus on the multitude may cause individuals to stumble at the border.

Hannah J. Andres offers a framework for healing memories in Chapter 15, "Healing Memories: The Central Bloodline of One Heart." In Chapter 16, "Sabbath for the Caretakers," Jack Veatch explores creation care using Sabbath as his hermeneutical key.

Jebin Thankaraj reflects on human identity in the context of AI in his chapter on "Humans in the Era of Artificial Intelligence." Karla Maria Steilmann Franco's "Feminist Theology, Body Politics, and Biblical Narratives" reads body politics into feminist theology using biblical narratives. In "A Political Diaconal Common Prayer: Political *Diakonia*—Witness from the Margins," Kristine Lyng commends political *diakonia* as an entry point for witness from the margins.

Nurseli Manurung's chapter on "Ritual and Agriculture of the Indigenous Peoples of Sihaporas: Eco-theology from the Experiences of the Indigenous Peoples of Toba Batak, North Sumatra, Indonesia" is a case study in witnessing from the margins. In Chapter 20, "Creation Justice: Addressing the Ecological Woes of Our Dying World," Peculiar Onyemaechi Umesi frames the human quest for justice as inclusive of the rest of creation. In the following chapter, "Taizé and 'Third-Way' Ecumenism," Allen M. Ross highlights Taizé spirituality as a dimension of, and model for, ecumenism that can undergird Christian action in the world.

Sofie Maria Carolina Halvaarson's chapter, "The I-Thou Relationship as a Model of Christ's Love When Geographical Borders Have Become Social Ones," deconstructs social borders using geography as reference. Tavis Donta Tinsley offers an autobiographical and critical poetic reflection on body politics with reference to race in "Walking While Black: A Collection of Poetry." In Chapter 24, Jamir Tiakala presents a case study of witnessing from the margins in "Remarkable Witness from a Marginalized Group: The Case of the Naga Mothers' Association."

The book concludes with Tijana Petkovic's chapter entitled "Online Dialogue: Building the Ecumenical Family with Innovations in Technology. This demonstrates how technology can play a positive role in ecumenical settings."

The tapestry of voices in this volume brings together keynote contributions of plenary speakers with the perspectives of GETI 2022 students. It is an intergenerational and interdisciplinary theological discussion grounded in scripture and in Christ's love. May God's Spirit make the words in this book serve to contribute to the breaking of borders so that all of creation may have life abundantly (John 10:10).

Faculty and Keynote Lectures

Christ's Love and Borders*

Vinoth Ramachandra

"How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" asked the ancient Psalmist. But Jews, along with other exiles and migrants, learned to sing their songs in strange lands, questioning and enriching the new worlds they entered. And the good news of Christ has been carried by traders, sailors, artisans, musicians, artists, educators, and refugees to the far reaches of the earth, translated into multiple tongues, and fleshed out in cultures remote from its place of birth; and, through their actions, Christ has been discovered afresh by the carriers of his message.

The COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, environmental pollution, and global terrorism do not respect national borders. These challenges remind us that what we do in a small and what may seem an insignificant corner of the world, such as the Hindu Kush mountains or a wet market in Wuhan, has the potential to affect the entire globe. And then we have the internet, which has connected billions of people in a way our ancestors could never have imagined. Proximity no longer defines who our neighbour is.

At the same time that we are reminded in various ways that we belong together, formidable barriers emerge between peoples, within nations, and between nations. Indeed, the pandemic spread so quickly because our increasing interconnectedness through travel has not been matched by a corresponding

degree of global cooperation. The "borderless world" celebrated by globalization pundits a generation ago has proved to be true only for digitized financial flows that destabilize and often impoverish nations. The hoarding of vaccines by rich nations and a system of patents outlawing their manufacture elsewhere have left many poorer nations bereft of life-saving treatments. A handful of giant technology companies wealthier than many nation-states control the infrastructure of the internet and therefore control who hears what and with whom. Even as the technology of communication has become incredibly sophisticated, the content of communication has largely shrivelled, and the web has fostered silos or echo chambers where people connect with similar folk to reinforce each other's perceptions and prejudices.

We need to recall that our interconnectedness is not ultimately a matter of technology but rather stems from our status as creatures made in the image of God. The planet belongs to God, and all of us, wherever we happen to live, are *coram Deo*—before the face of God. To be a person is to know at your centre a unique point of view on the world: it is what gives you your own integrity, a sense of your own particular, unrepeatable reality. At the same time, our unique bodies are what connect us with others in a network of relationships that would not be possible without them. We receive our "selves" through others, even as we give our "selves" to others. In the words of Gilbert Meilaender, a US bioethicist, "Distinctive, singular, and unrepeatable as each of us is, none is ever an isolated individual, and individualism does not have the last word. For to be a person is to be someone who exists always in relation; it is to be an individual who is never alone."[1]

Whenever our bodies, our physical boundaries, are encroached upon without our consent, our personal identities are destabilized and even shattered. Loving, respectful touch enables us to grow and thrive; abusive, power-driven touch causes who we are to shrivel and die.

In a roughly similar way, cultural or national borders or boundaries are often necessary. But they should also be bridges rather than heavily protected fortresses, enabling genuine encounter (with the ethnic, national, or religious other). Encounter is neither the attempt to assimilate the other into my being nor the elimination of the other because they are perceived as a threat to my freedom and fulfilment.

Alberto Rios, born in 1952, and who grew up on the Mexico-US border, has written in his poem "Border Lines" how the border is what joins, not separates, us.[2]

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1. Gilbert Meilaender, "The Unrepeatability of Persons," in *Bioethics and the Character of Human Life: Essays and Reflections* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2020), 174.

2. See Alberto Rios, "Border Lines," in *Border Lines: Poems of Migration*, ed. Mihaela Moscaliuc and Michael Waters (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020), 235.

Borders: Political

Until the 20th century, the vast majority of humankind lived within multinational empires. The rise of nation-states accompanied the breakup of empires, with closely guarded borders replacing frontiers. Nation-states, like other political configurations, are not natural entities like families but arise, arguably, from the human needs for security, justice, and cooperation. However, they have often been formed through acts of aggression and conquest. Processes of state formation and nation-building belong together: in some places, states created national identities, while in other times and places, pre-existing national communities formed themselves into states.

Some borders followed geographical logic, but many were arbitrarily carved out by imperial powers to serve their own political or commercial interests, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa in the late 19th century and, following the First World War, in North Africa and the Middle East. National passports as markers of national identity were created in 19th-century Europe, and at the end of the First World War, passports became obligatory documents for international travel and were often accompanied by visas. Attempting to limit the exodus of Jews from Nazi Germany to its shores in the 1930s, the US severely tightened the visa regime.[3]

The mere fact of a legally recognized territorial border is not inherently unjust. A political authority needs to know the scope and limits of its legal jurisdiction and responsibility. While borders may need to change sometimes for the sake of justice and should not be impermeable, we cannot do away entirely with border controls, as otherwise we would be allowing illicit drugs, terrorists, and criminal gangs to flood our nations. Another side effect is that it would be easier to give carte blanche to despotic regimes to "export" their opponents and unwelcome minorities to other shores.

Indigenous communities threatened by settler encroachment welcome laws protecting their traditional lands. Ethnic and linguistic minorities resist absorption into the assimilationist tendencies of the modern nation-state; in situations where states have been insensitive to such vulnerabilities, this has led to bloody civil wars and ethnic conflicts.

The 21st century has seen a resurgence of "populist" demagogues, not least in Western nations, as well as movements for ethno-cultural independence from larger political entities. Such developments testify to a widespread feeling of disillusionment with a globalizing capitalism that has undermined associational bonds

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3. See "Immigration to the United States 1933–41," in *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, https://encyclopedia
.ushmm.org/content/en/article/immigration-to-the-united-states-1933-41.

in local communities and left many in traditional forms of employment without jobs. Such folk are rooted to their local neighbourhoods, which experience increasing degradation since they are starved of public funding. They view with resentment the cosmopolitan elites who pursue the call of global capital and are always somewhere but never at home anywhere.

Living within an economy that drives people apart and a pace of social change that leaves them feeling powerless and forgotten, they become easy prey for extremists and populists. These sell them dreams of a mythical golden past or divert their resentment toward recent immigrants and the mythical hordes of asylum seekers who are poised to invade their shores. Thus, economic insecurity, historical ignorance, and institutional distrust combine to form a toxic political mix.

Border Crossings: Asking the Hard Questions

Refugee camps have become permanent settlements for many people, as in Palestine since 1948. Children born in such camps may spend their entire lives there, lacking citizenship rights, let alone access to basic education and health care. These camps become the breeding ground for political and religious extremism. Pakistan, Iran, and Lebanon are hosting more refugees than any other countries yet receive scant financial help from the rich world (whose politicians only complain about the numbers, even though relatively meagre, of those who end up on their shores). Humanitarian organizations working with such people are also massively underfunded.

Anti-immigrant rhetoric in Western media is thus based on ignorance. Many people in Western nations forget that the vast majority of the world's refugees are not making their way to Western Europe, North America, or Australia but to neighbouring countries that are often as poor as their own. Furthermore, a fair number of the conflicts raging today in the world have their origins in Western colonial histories. And, of course, global warming has created huge numbers of environmental refugees. Severe weather events are destroying traditional seasonal patterns of food growing, forcing families into urban vagrancy and extreme poverty, and provoking civil wars. In 2009, the G8 nations promised 100 billion US dollars a year in aid to poor nations to help build resilience against the disastrous effects of climate change. A mere trickle of that money has materialized.[4]

So, can we honestly discuss the problem of asylum seekers and refugees without attending to such betrayals and hypocrisies, as well as the widening economic

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4. For feelings of betrayal by poor nations, see Matt McGrath, "Climate Change: Bonn Talks End in Acrimony over Compensation," BBC News, 16 June 2022, https://rb.gy/yeyrgo.

exploitation and environmental devastation in the global South? And what about the deluge of arms shipments from the West (and Russia and Israel) into conflict situations and the way these strengthen repressive regimes around the world? These are some of the hard questions that European governments and their citizens need to address if they are to prevent the present trickle of refugees into Europe from turning into a massive flood.

The distinction made in the popular media between "legal" and "illegal" asylum seekers is spurious. An asylum seeker enters a legal process that determines whether they are to receive refugee status. A person fleeing for their life from a conflict zone or the secret police usually has neither the time nor the resources to apply for an entry visa at another country's embassy; and, in any case, visa applications even for tourism or social visits to Western nations are tedious, expensive, and often humiliating. Under international law, all of us have a human right to exit our country of birth or residence. But there is no corresponding right of entry to another particular country. Therein lies the rub.

As the adage goes, the nation-state has proved too big for local problems and too small for the global ones. Or, as the political philosopher Seyla Benhabib puts it, "We are like travellers navigating an unknown terrain with the help of old maps drawn at a different time and in response to different needs. While the terrain we are travelling on, the world society of states, has changed, our normative map has not."[5]

Anti-immigrant rhetoric in Western media is also profoundly hypocritical. Europeans or Australians who migrate to North America in search of better prospects are never referred to as "economic migrants." The latter term is used in a derogatory way of Africans and Asians who come to the West for the same reasons. In the United States, "undocumented" workers from Central America are the backbone of the hotel and restaurant industries in many states, and they work as housemaids and gardeners in the homes of celebrities. Agriculture in states like Texas and California would collapse without them. They are paid minimum wages yet pay taxes on their purchases and contribute disproportionately to the American economy. They are routinely the targets of right-wing political hysteria.

Furthermore, why are European governments not pressuring the Gulf states to do more for Arab and Afghan refugees? There are many European professionals living in these wealthy states, and Western governments have strong commercial links with them. These states can easily absorb and employ more Arabs from the region and, by doing so, would combat the widespread perception that Muslim

5. Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6.

refugees have to depend on non-Muslim peoples for shelter because their own leaders are too selfish, incompetent, or both. Indeed, the failure of many Arab governments to care for their fellow Muslims is being exploited by radical Islamist propaganda. It is the way Islamists try to justify their legitimacy to Muslim populations from Morocco to Bangladesh.

I have also observed that it is recent middle-class migrants to Australia, the US, and Britain (from places like India or Sri Lanka) who often appear to become most fiercely anti-immigration. It is as if they have to guard their recently acquired privileged positions. Did you know that two-fifths of all foreign-trained medical doctors in the US come from three poor Asian countries—India, Pakistan, and the Philippines? Rarely do we find anyone from relatively affluent Asian minorities in the US speaking out for the abused and marginalized or exposing the blatant hypocrisies in debates about "undocumented" Hispanic workers. Many Asian Americans voted for Donald Trump, and South Asians in the UK were also supportive of Brexit out of prejudice against Eastern European migrant workers.

For Christians to develop a counter-narrative to media and governmental portrayals about refugees and migrants, we need to be nourished by our theological foundations. Being displaced is an integral part of the whole story of the Bible, reaching its climax in the prologue to John's gospel: "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11). Even God experiences displacement. The Samaritan heretic in Jesus' best-known parable and the pagan Syrophoenician woman who startled him with her wit and persistence both stood outside the covenant community of Israel. But they echo a recurring refrain in the Old Testament where marginal and vulnerable people, especially women—Moabites and Canaanites—from neighbouring countries, despised by the devout Israelite, become exemplars of faithfulness to God: Rahab, Tamar, Ruth.

So might the church today be renewed by embracing foreigners, even from those our nations deem enemies.

Borders: Humans and Machines

From social networks to Zoom and other video conferencing platforms, information technology has become the new glue that binds us together across national borders. Checking social media apps like Twitter and Facebook is the first thing many of us do in the morning, often even before getting out of bed. While the democratic potential is considerable, so is the potential for incivility and the fomenting of violence. Social media have been instrumental in helping to raise awareness of social evils, local and further afield, and to mobilize large numbers of people in defying repressive political regimes. But the same instant connectivity,

coupled with text messaging, has also mobilized criminal activity and made it easier for large numbers of previously isolated extremists of every hue to find each other and talk only among themselves.

Far from bringing individuals and communities with conflicting values and perspectives to interact with each other online, the internet only seems to have added to the ghettoization of social life. The tendency of netizens to form self-contained groups is strengthened by what Eli Pariser, an internet activist, identified back in 2011 as the "filter bubble." What appears in my Facebook "news feed" is decided by Facebook's proprietary algorithm which has decided, on the basis of my geographical location, personal profile, and number of "likes," what should count as "news" for me. Aleks Krotoski observes, "We're becoming less interested in different ideas, foreign news, and opinions that clash with our own. The vast ocean of information online is increasingly navigated by packs of like-minded people who really only see a little slice of what is available on the web."[6]

Borders that present a challenge to human identity are not only geographical. As the software algorithms that drive our computers and other digital gadgets become more sophisticated and capable of doing more efficiently tasks that humans have hitherto done, humanity faces the threat of being the architect of its own obsolescence. Is our addiction to our gadgets making us interchangeable gadgets ourselves—and is this interchangeability something we fear and yet seem unable to resist? And once robots start being designed and repaired by robots themselves, will not even robotics engineers become superfluous?

We live in awe of our machines and rescript ourselves to align with their functions. We tend to mechanize humans even as we humanize our machines. Astute observers lament this tendency. The computer scientist Jaron Lanier, one of the pioneers of virtual reality, comments,

> People degrade themselves in order to make machines seem smart all the time. . . . We ask teachers to teach to standardized tests so a student will look good to an algorithm. We have repeatedly demonstrated our species' bottomless ability to lower our standards to make information technology look good. . . . Treating computers as intelligent, autonomous entities ends up standing the process of engineering on its head. We can't afford to respect our own designs so much.[7]

Similarly, Sherry Turkel, a well-known sociologist of the internet, points out, "Even before we make the robots, we remake ourselves as people ready to be their

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6. Aleks Krotoski, *Untangling the Web: What the Internet Is Doing to You* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 61.

7. Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (London: Allen Lane, 2010), 32, 36.

companions. . . . Almost universally, people project human attributes onto programs that present as humanlike. . . . Then people feel in the presence of a knowing other that cares about them."[8]

Simulating the behaviour of a thinking, conscious human being is not the same as *being* a thinking, conscious being, and simulating emotions is not the same as having emotions. However, by using a common terminology (e.g., "information," "intelligence," "neural networks," "emotions") when discussing minds, brains, and computers, the human-machine barrier is easily straddled. The mind is both naturalized and computerized. And the brain can now be described as an incredibly powerful microprocessor, the mother of all motherboards. As Ludwig Wittgenstein put it, when looking back on the naïve philosophy of science ("logical positivism") that had once seduced him in the 1920s, "A *picture* held us captive, and we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably."[9]

The blurring of the boundaries between the human and the machine is taken further in the utopian vision labelled *transhumanism*. Here, our biological embodiment is seen as a hindrance to our intellectual development as a species. The so-called transhuman person is a being like a cyborg, an amalgam of machine and biological body parts. Our relatively slow neuronal connections will be augmented by emergent technologies in the same way that cochlear implants help improve the hearing of those with auditory impairments. We will think faster and more deeply, remember more, have access to all knowledge, and be able to share our thoughts instantly with others. Ultimately, technology will enable us to dispense with our brains altogether and transfer their informational content to more durable media.

For those AI researchers who fantasize in this vein, human biology is a distraction or even a prison from which to escape. In this, they are the 21st-century devotees of the ancient religious philosophy of Gnosticism, which was the first heresy that the early church had to confront. Thus, vestiges of Christian belief survive, in corrupted and heretical forms, in the secular eschatologies of the late modern West. Belief in a salvific God has been recast as faith in the redemptive power of technological progress. The expectation of the *parousia* and the messianic kingdom has been reshaped into the imminent arrival of the singularity: that pivotal point when, according to transhumanists, we shall merge with our own super-smart machines and become new beings entirely, "born again" into a transhuman state. Books about the coming singularity are as common on science

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8. Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 338, 341.

9. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), Sect. 115.

shelves in bookstores as talks about the Rapture are in fundamentalist Christian churches.

"Transhumanism" and "post-humanism" are used interchangeably in some of the philosophical literature on emerging technologies. But in recent years, the latter term has assumed a more radical meaning in the hands of those alert to the Anthropocene (that age in the earth's long history when the principal driver of planetary change is human behaviour). Post-humanism rejects the secular humanist project of Enlightenment thought and the Christianity from which it derives as anthropocentric. Humanity does not need to be transformed technologically; it needs to be transcended in a cosmic "pro-life" vision. In this, the school of posthuman philosophers merges with "deep ecology" and other religious systems that lay claim to so-called Zoe-centric visions, in which borders or boundaries between humans and other life forms are trivialized or obliterated altogether.

I find such post-humanism incoherent. One does not need to invoke theology to point out that humans are the only animals we know who laugh at their own animality, make jokes about but also protest death, and use tools and language in ways that no other earthly creature comes remotely close to using. Humans, as we have seen, are not only animals but also *persons*, each with a unique take on the world. We are distinguished from our evolutionary neighbours by an interpersonal intentionality, and concepts such as freedom, guilt, and accountability have no place in the description of animal behaviour.

Thus, the post-humanist critique of ecological destruction is ironically framed in moral categories that are uniquely human. If humans are simply one life form among myriad others and evolved purely contingently and without any prior purposive agent, then if all current life forms were to disappear as a result of global warming or some cataclysmic event, the earth will throw up new life forms that can survive in the new conditions of the post-human age. So, why care? It seems to me that the deeply ingrained moral sense of responsibility for life on the planet earth is one that makes much more sense within a Judaeo-Christian understanding of human stewardship under God than that of post-humanism or "Zoe-centrism."

Borders: Global Mammon versus Living the Eschaton

The desire to own or control drives the dominant narrative of a technocratic consumer culture that is often labelled *globalism*. Globalism has come to mean the celebration of a uniform, global consumerist identity—it has become a new master narrative. The story flings together people from all over the world in the same space and time. The logic of global capitalism is blind to the significance of place,

history, culture, or religious identity to people's work and well being. Human beings are regarded as interchangeable individuals. Differences are not important, and so serious engagement with the genuinely *other* is sidestepped.

Thus, the master narrative of globalism represents a false universalism, what William Cavanaugh has called "a simulacrum of the catholicity of the Christian Church."[10] Unlike the latter, it sets diverse peoples in vigorous competition with one another. Nations may exploit and advertise their local distinctives (such as weak labour unions, good infrastructure, or a lax tax regime) to attract foreign capital and to find niche markets, but these all serve the tyranny of the global economic system. Local culture and place are commodified; and their commodification is modelled on those localities that have been successful in drawing capital for development. The local and particular are prized only because of their novelty. But novelty soon wears off.

Christianity has a particular theological reason for valuing the local and the material: God has acted and spoken directly in the material of a human life, in the language of ordinary vulnerability. Simone Weil, that remarkable Christian mystic and philosopher who enjoyed trading in paradoxes, once noted that "to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul" and that the most terrible of crimes is to collaborate in the uprooting of others in an already alienated world, but the greatest of virtues is to uproot oneself for the sake of one's neighbours and of God. "It is necessary to uproot oneself. Cut down the tree and make a cross and carry it forever after."[11]

In contrast with globalizing consumerism, the church as the body of Christ manifests a true universality that is not only empirical but also organic. The gospel that creates the church has a universal scope and intent, simply because its content is universal: it announces the dawn of God's future for humanity and the whole created order. But this message is articulated and enacted through particular, local events. "The Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). Through the incarnation (a unique, local embodiment of the global presence of God) and the atoning death of Christ, we are united both to God as the centre and also to one another. The dividing walls of gender, ethnicity, age, economic class, and social status are all broken down (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14–22). Christian conversion involves a new *belonging*—this new global family takes precedence over our biological, ethnic, and national loyalties.

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10. See William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002).

11. Quoted in Leslie Fiedler, "Introduction," in *Waiting for God*, by Simone Weil (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), x.

Thus, the church is defined by the future. The church is an anticipation of the eschatological humanity, where we are not simply juxtaposed as competing individuals and groups but are *identified* with one another. It gathers people together from all nations and cultures who profess ultimate allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord. In such a society, as the apostle Paul says, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). This entails showing greater honour and care for the weakest member, who is identified with oneself. At the same time, the other is still other, for while Christ himself identifies with the suffering members (Col. 1:24), he nevertheless remains other to the church. Also, we engage with each other *through* our ethnic and cultural heritages, not abandoning them for some mythical global culture. It is the *whole* Christ, not some part of him, that is given to us in every local gathering that meets in his name (Matt. 18:20).

Tragically, the church has often betrayed this prophetic counter-vision throughout its history. It has been seduced by offerings of power by empires and nation-states into serving as their chaplains and handmaids rather than as their critics. Interestingly, it was the European Christian missionary movement that heralded the funeral of Western Christendom, as mission took abroad the successful separation of church and state, of religion and territoriality. Outside of Western Christendom, becoming a Christian was a matter of personal persuasion and choice.

But Christians still allow the secular liturgies of their nation-state (such as the singing of national anthems, learning narrowly nationalist histories, or joining in national parades) to form them into citizens of nations to which they give their fundamental allegiance, even surrendering their bodies uncritically in their defence. There are numerous examples of Christians conflating the borders of their nations with those of the church.

Much of the credibility of Christianity in the present millennium will depend on whether we as Christians (wherever we happen to live) can resist the deforming identities imposed on us by our nation-state or our ethnic communities and grasp that our primary identity and allegiance is to Jesus Christ and his universal reign. This is a special challenge today when fragmentation and ideological polarization have come to characterize so much of global politics and have also infiltrated Christian churches and organizations and so damaged their witness to Christ.

Most Christians, North and South, appear to have lost the conviction—so central to the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, and recovered in the early days of the ecumenical movement—that the unity (inclusive of diversity) of the church is at the heart of the gospel itself. Galatians 3:28 was, many scholars believe, an early baptismal formula. Baptism inaugurates a new counter-formation into a

reconciled and reconciling community. The church is a foretaste of the new mutuality that God intends for all humanity when God's kingdom is finally manifest. Yet, our divisions and rivalries proclaim "another gospel" and our schools, Sunday schools, and church worship services have been utterly ineffective in countering the powerful socializing pressures of nationalism and mammon.

The church, while being a distinctive people in the world, is called to show its distinctiveness not by protecting its borders and separating itself from the world, but by speaking and acting only and always *on behalf of the world*. The church can defend itself only by defending others. Any understanding of mission that does not arise from that universal solidarity is simply a denial of the *missio Dei*. This is a genuine "standing alongside" the "other" in our broken and hurting world, and it is very different from what is called communitarianism, which only links me to people who are like me and thus tends to encourage ethnocentric, racist, and even xenophobic tendencies.

What would the world look like if European Christians were to think and act *primarily* as members of the global body of Christ, promoting a global common good and showing solidarity with the most vulnerable and weakest of humanity, wherever they may be found? And the same for US Christians, Indians, Nigerians, Chinese, and every other nationality? We should lament not over our failure to reach a distant ideal of unity or solidarity but rather over our betrayal of the unity/solidarity that has already been given to us in the death and resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of his Spirit.

Intangible and Embodied Desires:
Healing Memories in Church and Society

Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué

By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.
—Psalm 137:1

I hoped the sense of things being both under control and out of control would be persuasive throughout; that the order and quietude of everyday life would be violently disrupted by the chaos of the needy dead; that the herculean effort to forget would be threatened by memory desperate to stay alive.
—Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Introduction

"It's a kind of literary archaeology. . . . You journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply," suggests Toni Morrison in her fine essay on the site of memory, about her creative inspirations as a novelist drawing from her own and others' memories.[1] Perhaps

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1. Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 92.

theologians, too, will have to become engaged in a kind of archaeologic enterprise, searching, unveiling, and joining pieces together so that a living community can emerge that holds intangible and embodied desires together.

Memories are a central part of human existence and experience. Without memory, there would be no participation in communal life, and the development of collective and individual identities would be precluded. Memories are both intangible and embodied. Memories can be given, rendered in oral and written forms, exchanged, and passed on. Yet, at the same time, memories are also completely withdrawn from this cycle of reciprocity. They are things we do not give, that sometimes we are not even able to articulate but are endeavouring to protect, keep, and preserve. Ultimately, they are things that live in us in a kind of muted, but all the more pervasive and powerful way.

While this double bind may seem at first to offer a descriptive clarity, in reality, memories entail profound complexities. This is so because we cannot neatly differentiate between memories that we can articulate and exchange, and those we cannot or do not want to disclose. The process of remembering is selective, subjective, and yet imperceptibly structured. This, in turn, is tied to biological anchors of human neurological functions, from the most elementary to the most complex activities: from the re-actualized memory of how to move and identify voices, names, numbers, and our orientation in space, to the taxonomy of location and the classification, connection, and selection of pieces of knowledge used to write texts, speak, translate, compose music, and create fine art. The capacity to memorize is corporal, an embodied desire, a necessity for survival, and yet it escapes our bodily mastery.

When we speak of creating memories, we habitually refer to positive, valuable memories, which constitute a legacy worthwhile to be handed down over generations. They are intangible, pertaining to experiencing life in its "givenness"—given without an expected or calculated return. However, we are also aware of *heavy memories,* when we remember traumatic events. It is particularly with regard to the latter that the theme of healing memories becomes relevant. Can such memories be healed, and if so, what contributes to this healing? Or do we also have to ask how memories themselves can play a central role in healing, in becoming whole, in experiencing life in its fulness?

The theological argument presented here is that the reading and interpretation of Jesus' death and resurrection—as the radical disruption of the habitual reciprocal cycles of what is given and needs to be returned—offers valuable contours on how the healing of memories can qualify as a remembrance that re-centres life around Christ's life-giving message.

Before expanding on the particular implications of (Christ's) love in this context, I will first describe how churches and societies are concerned with healing

memories. In the following section, I will present vignettes to illustrate the empirical validity of this theme. In a third section, the focus will be on the meaning of eucharistic remembering. Finally, I will elaborate on how this theological interpretation of remembering relates to healing through the creation of anamnestic spaces.

Locating Memory: How Churches and Societies are Concerned with the Healing of Memories

The "givenness" of the world may lead us to perceive the theme as primarily related to history in general: assembled and archived collective memories giving an account of the past. In particular, our attention may be on the traumatic wounds with which humans and creation are confronted. All too apparent are the situations and events that create heavy memories with deep-seated impacts on individual and collective lives. As Kai Erikson describes in his early theoretical work differentiating individual from collective trauma: "By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defences so suddenly and with such brutal forces that one cannot react to it effectively. . . . By collective trauma . . . I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality."[2] Empirical research offers us ample societal examples of this: how disturbing and destructive events of the past forge memories, and how they in turn impact relationships in the present. The contextual pieces of evidence in different historical phases and in many regions of the world are vast: global and local violent conflicts, such as the world wars, as well as the many clashes between nations, ethnic, and even religious groups, are the visible expressions leaving indelible marks on memories. Sometimes the direct impact of past events on memories are insufficiently accounted for. This is so because there is not always a direct link between the past events and the memories they provoke. On the individual level, this occurs when witnesses of traumatic events remain literally mute in face of the experienced trauma, incapable of articulating what they have witnessed, yet still preserving the memory, sometimes over generations.[3] Furthermore, it relates to the way in which the memories are kept, stored, transmitted, and engaged with. On the one hand, this can occur in the form of *living* memories, through mainly

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2. Kai T. Erikson, *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), 153–54. See also Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity,* by Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1–16.

3. See Ilany Kogan, *The Cry of Mute Children: A Psychoanalytical Perspective of the Second Generation of the Holocaust* (London: Free Association Books, 1995).

oral forms of transmission, and on the other hand through historiography—the attempt to archive memories by way of consigning and inscribing a trace of the past in some external space.[4] There seems to be an ambiguity between these two desires, wanting to keep and preserve memories and wanting to suppress, rearrange, or destroy them.

Both churches and societies are perpetually confronted with this struggle. Collective memories are essential for normative consensus-building in societies so that a minimal, shared legacy can coalesce around the vision of how people want to live together, without erasing the particular experiences encapsulated in memories. We discover in this context the importance of the plurality of historical perspective and narrative, and how vital it is to capture these contrasting and intertwined strands. This is also relevant for the history of the church and the history of Christianity, which constitutes not uniformly what we could call with Danièle Hervieu-Léger the "*lignée croyante,*" (chain of memory)[5] but the engagement with the plurality of memories.

Memories cannot be understood as linear historic representations of the past, nor can they be perceived as mere constructions for the legitimization of claims and interests in the present (even though certain motifs can be functionalized as such), but rather as an interactive phenomenon that forms a field in which different actors establish connections between past, present, and future, and negotiate the interpretations of these connections.[6]

Investigating the Empirical Terrain of Memories: Attesting to the Pluriformity of Remembering

Selected empirical vignettes will assist us in elucidating this dimension, and in identifying types of remembering that exemplify the pluriform character of memory that includes embodied, discursive, and imagined realities.

Vignette 1—Memory and rebuilding into the future: The Duomo of Venzone, Italy

This first example illustrates how memory can be significantly contested. The medieval Cathedral of Venzone was destroyed by an earthquake in 1976 and

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4. See Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive: une impression freudienne,* rev. ed. (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2008). For an English translation, see Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

5. See Danièle Hervieu-Léger, "La religion, mode de croire," *Revue du Mauss* 22, no. 3 (2003): 153.

6. See Jeffrey K. Olick's process-relational approach in *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility (*New York: Routledge, 2007).

subsequent reconstructions were undertaken until 1995, when the cathedral was reinaugurated. The visual documentation of this reconstruction process shows a seemingly straightforward reconstruction of the building to its "original" splendour. Stones and materials saved from the destruction of the natural catastrophe have been collected and displayed in meticulous rows—classified and catalogued. Hidden from the external observer is the history of the Duomo, which dates back to the 14th century, and has suffered from more than one earthquake over time. Several restorative interventions and additions modified the original structure. The earthquakes of the 1970s were hence only the most recent in a series of incidents. Most interestingly, after the 1976 earthquakes, the local community and the authority swiftly formed a project group on the reconstruction, which they named the "culture project." Francesco Doglioni, who researched this reconstruction project, writes that the collapse of the church building epitomized the falling apart of the community, who saw the cathedral not only as the centre of the town, but also the heart of their communal, ecclesial, economic, and cultural life.[7] It appeared that with the breakdown of the Duomo, the question of identity came to the fore afresh, articulated through the plans and narratives for the restoration, which for some would veil the memory of the traumatic event. Doglioni refers to an indicative rift among the community on how the church should be rebuilt. Two factions emerged: one that advocated for the reconstruction to closely imitate the pre-earthquake building; the other that favoured the development of a new architectural design, incorporating old and new elements. An argument on historicity or anti-historicity ensued, and led to extended debates on how memory of events can be made visible or even tangible, and whether this criterion would determine the adequacy of the "correct" historical legacy.

Vignette 2—Memory and relational ethics: The restitution of African cultural artefacts

The second example relates to the contemporary discourse on the repatriation o.f cultural artefacts taken from former colonial contexts to European museums. This has seriously diminished the number of cultural artefacts on the African continent. Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr have undertaken a study, commissioned by the French President, on the possibilities and consequences of the return of those pieces of cultural memory they designate as "products of a relational

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7. Francesco Doglioni, "The Reconstruction of the Cathedral of Venzone," Global Case Study Project on Reconstruction, International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), n.d., accessed 30 July 2022, http://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/1889/1/DOGLIONI_Francesco_Venzone _final_20180422.pdf.

history,"[8] between the colonisers and the colonised. It is obvious that this initiative has a political motivation in terms of improving the relationship of France with its former colonies (*France-Afriques*), but it has also a bearing on the understanding of the healing of memory. The poignant question for our theme is if and how the return of the artefacts would assist relationships marked by the rupture of a memory chain among the local populations caused by the loss of those objects—and if so, in what manner. Is there an intercultural and intergenerational responsibility to acknowledge the past and convert it into a common responsibility? Is it possible to speak of a shared memory, when the past is recollected differently because the people involved in those events have experienced it differently? Furthermore, is it possible for people who remember the past differently to build a future together? In the context of cultural artefacts, Savoy and Sarr propose relational ethics as a framework for rethinking relationships affected by the loss of essential repositories of memory.

There is debate concerning three different models of restitution of robbed cultural objects: permanent restitution, temporary restitution, and circulation. Savoy and Sarr argue that permanent restitution is important to clarify the question of ownership and to avoid the perpetuation of dispossession experienced by the people deprived of their cultural heritage. More importantly, they address how the "amnesia has already done its work and the erasure of memory has been so successful that communities have even begun to lose any remaining knowledge of this cultural heritage or recognize the depth of the loss that has been suffered."[9] This example shows how memory cannot be captured in a material sense, and prompts the question of how memory and memorialization are enabled beyond the object-related transfer. The perpetuation of rituals without the cultural objects can recreate a cultural sense of belonging through embodied performance, such as dance. The imagination and redefinition of new territorialities through the mobilization of communities around items symbolizing their unity and their fluid identity across borders constitute examples for an engagement with memory that is not object-bound. Hence, the restitution of cultural objects touches upon the sensitive terrain of memories that require healing as these cultural objects are not only valuable in their material and artistic quality but constitute repositories of memories binding present and future generations.

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8. Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr, *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics* (Paris: Phillippe Rey/Seuil, 2018), 40.

9. Savoy and Sarr, *Restitution*, 31.

Vignette 3—Remembering and Forgiving? The Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue

The third example is one of the more prominent illustrations of how remembering concerns the church, the history of the church, and the relationships that can be built between ecclesial communities. The dialogue between the Lutherans and Mennonites takes us into the complex web of memory and reconciliation: How can churches of different confessional traditions—on the one side with heavy memories about past relationships and experiences of persecution, on the other with guilt—find a rapprochement?[10] Is it possible to collectively forgive *a posteriori*, and what implications does this have for the future and the building of new relationships?

Two reports published by the Lutheran World Federation engage these questions.[11] They mark an historic trajectory that is not completed, as memory flows continuously over into the present and challenges the communities on both sides to engage in historic, ecclesiological, and theological reflections. What makes this example significant is not only the legacy of the ecclesial divisions since the 16th century, but the traumatic memory of persecution and the justification of this violence.

The rapprochement of the Lutherans and Mennonites brings to the fore how memory has to be understood as a process, marked by the following aspects: a) the direct acknowledgment and confrontation with the violent legacy; b) the discovery that there was no shared narrative about the history of violence; c) the repentance; d) a symbolic action of apology; and e) the theological framing of the dialogues, encounters, and the continuation of the journey of reconciliation. These dimensions constitute a healing process initiated by God, sustained by the Holy Spirit, and received and continued in freedom and responsibility for new relations by all involved.

The communities are cognizant of the fact that there is no straight avenue from multiple memories and narrations of memory of the traumatic events to healing. Rather, according to my reading, it emerges that the "site of memory" culminates in these and other inter-confessional dialogues not in the symbolic

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10. Lutheran World Federation (LWF), *Healing Memories: Implications of the Reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites* (Leipzig: Lutheran World Federation, 2016), https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/dtpw-studies-201602-healing_memories-en-full.pdf.

11. Lutheran World Federation and Mennonite World Conference, *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ. Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2010), https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/OEA-Lutheran-Mennonites-EN-full.pdf; *Bearing Fruit: Implications of the 2010 Reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites/Anabaptists. Report of the Lutheran World Federation Task Force to Follow Up the "Mennonite Action" at the LWF Eleventh Assembly in 2010* (Geneva: LWF, 2016), https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/dtpw-lutheran-mennonites_2016.pdf.

action of the apology and the asking for forgiveness as such, but rather in allowing the "risk of the embrace" to unfold, as Miroslav Volf phrases it in his chapter on the embrace.[12] This risk is tied to the impossibility of understanding the healing of memories as effacing the legacy of the violent experience in the present. It is when the interlocutors open themselves to a two-directional critical introspection that a space of "expectation" for something new, such as restored relationships lived without the erasure of the past, can emerge.[13]

Vignette 4—Memory as rhizomatic remembering: How trees can bear healing scars

William Ellis sheds light on the South African Khoisan history and the legacy of their enslavement and violent persecution, which he studies through "field" research, in the literal sense. The milkwood trees constitute for him "curated memorials" that hold inside, in their roots and in the bark, "the essences of the dead, the unnamed colonial dead, [who] are still with us in the flesh of a tree that is a witness to their deaths and a site for their remains.[14] In establishing these unconventional links between human history and plants, he draws upon the works of Bruno Latour and especially Deleuze and Guattari when he describes the "vast rhizomatic, vegeto-neural network that discursively, symbolically, and epigenetically retains events and evidence."[15] He unveils the ambiguity of the history, the trees that witness the legacy of the Khoisan who played, worked, and shared their lives under these trees while simultaneously their settler-persecutors worshiped in church buildings under beams made of milkwood trees. These trees, Ellis writes, become genuine memorial sites "outside," in nature.[16] They give a powerful witness as they collapse and grow from the trunk of the same tree, constituting an instructive new perspective on remembering, spanning centuries and creatures.

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12. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), (III: Embrace, 99–166).

13. See Larry Miller, quoted in the preface to LWF, *Healing Memories*, 13: "How can you distance yourself from the condemnations and their consequences while still honouring your history and strengthening your identity? How can we distance ourselves from the use of the martyr tradition which perpetuates a sense of victimization and marginalization?"

14. William Ellis, "A Tree Walks through the Forest: Milkwoods and Other Botanical Witnesses," *Catalyst* 5, no. 2 (2019), 1–4, https://catalystjournal.org/index.php/catalyst/article/view/32837/25425.

15. Ellis, "Tree Walks," 3. For more on this topic, see Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine*, trans. Brian Massumi (n.c.: Semiotexte/Foreign Agents, 1986).

16. Ellis, "Tree Walks," 3.

These selected vignettes offer insights into the healing of memories as a relevant theme for churches and societies. This is not only with regard to the external, empirical pieces of evidence that prompt questions about *what* we remember in an historical, mainly past-oriented perspective, but is also relevant in terms of *how* we remember and how we deal with memories. This, in turn, is tied to how the biblical narrative spans a meaning-making sense around a particular way of witnessing—constituting memory as a specific "call into remembrance."

Eucharistic Remembering: A Liberating Call into Free and Responsible Caring

It appears that there is also an internal significance to taking the healing of memories seriously, inasmuch as memories are so intimately connected with individual and collective traumas—with what makes people's lives liveable or unliveable. It is against this background that the biblical narrative itself and the comments Christians worldwide offer on the texts constitute a meaning-giving context that assists in qualifying the healing of memories from a decidedly theological perspective. This exercise may open avenues for a broader public, intercultural, ecumenical, and interreligious dialogue.

In the Hebrew Bible, the semantic spectrum of *zkr* (thinking of, commemorating, recollecting) or *zekaer* (remembrance, memory, the sign of remembrance) indicates already a broadened perspective. Memory is not only related to the past and is not purely an intellectual process, but includes interpersonal engagement, relationship-building, and care-taking. Thinking of one another or of something shared is indicative of a reciprocal relationship. Remembering in the sense of thinking of one another also marks the relationship between God and God's people. This relates in particular to the remembrance of the exodus as the founding myth, as well as the divine election. The texts of the Hebrew Bible emphasize how the identity of ancient Israel is formed through ritual remembering that finds its culminating focus in the liberation from slavery. The past is re-actualized, called into the present, with the expectation of leading a life in continuity with this defining and liberating moment.

In the New Testament, this call to remembrance is radicalized in Jesus' story—through his life in and for God, which he lived out of love; in the practice of forgiveness, for which he was crucified, offering his life; and in his resurrection.

The Gospel of John provides a rich and singular imagery and language for a *relecture* of this story in that it embeds the memory of the dead body of Jesus in between spiritual and physical realities without creating a dualistic opposition: "But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break

his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out" (John 19:33–34).[17]

This type of memory-testimonial breaks not only the conventional understandings of linear temporality, but it exposes us also to the deeper theological question of how memory and the act of remembering the passage from death to new life—here shown through the lens of the witnesses of Jesus' death—should be interpreted.

In the farewell discourse, the terms *menein* (to remain) and *paradidomai* (to hand over) are used to place this particular witnessing in the realm of a persisting divine love, not materially visible and tangible, but present with and in the movements of the witnesses and mediated though the paraclete-spirit. These two verbs, *menein* and *paradidomai* (remaining and handing over), prepare the broader field to situate the farewell discourse. Here, Jesus addresses the disciples as the ones who will remain and live on after his death. They will become the place for God to reside, and they will remain in his love. *Remaining* is connected with the paraclete-spirit who will enable the disciples to remain. Moreover, the paraclete stands for God's continued presence after Jesus' death, and for his memory. This memory is not a static memory, but one that opens the perspective of life in the sight of death. It connects the past and the present and shapes a memorial posture as a witness that persists in holding the endings and beginnings, the painful suffering and the hopeful expectation, in a dynamic tension.

John 15 further accentuates this perspective of an anticipated memory that is linked to witness. Here *menein* is used in a series of commandments. Remaining is not a status, but a relational and non-optional practice that leads to life: "Remain in me as I remain in you. . . . Those who remain in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4–5 NIV). There is an active and engaging qualification of this particular act of remembering that is accentuated by the experience of a new relationship with the world, facilitated by the paraclete: "When the paraclete comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the spirit of truth that comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf" (John 15:26 NIV). Furthermore, this witness is qualified by the commandment of love, a love that remains, survives, and calls—in all its fragility between death and life—into a new existence. Love becomes the starting point of witnessing and remembering beyond death—"Remain in my love" (John 15:9b NIV).

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17. Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 81ff. See also Brother John of Taizé, *Life on the Edge: Holy Saturday and the Recovery of the End Time* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), esp. chap. 5, "Life in the Borderlands," 87–117.

In the eucharist, *anamnesis,* which can be perceived as a unique act of remembering,[18] this qualification of witnessing through the lens of a remaining love in the sight of death can be further demonstrated. In the eucharistic context, the memory of the death transitions into the presence, inviting a discursive communion: "Do this in remembrance of me," which alludes to the Jewish Passover ritual and the remembering of the Exodus and liberation from slavery. In the eucharistic ritual, the remembrance of Jesus' death is placed in an eschatological horizon, as Jesus' self-offering is narrated as a story of the radical disruption of retributive cycles of violence. In giving his life for all, a lasting invitation is offered to all to believe in the possibility of another reality, which keeps the memory of the violence while holding on to the remaining love and presence of God in and with the creation. The ritual setting of the communal meal allows participants to practice and experience this memory in a non-invasive manner by returning to the site of violence and confronting what cognitively escapes human capacities—what cannot be remembered, at least not in a linear manner.

The eucharistic liturgy also disrupts and challenges because it concretizes through the physical act of eating and drinking—"Take and eat; this is my body" (Matt. 26:26 NIV)—what a life in God can look like, through practising forgiveness and the overcoming, or at least the limitation of violence. It is the space in which we partake as those who betray God's loving presence and at the same time receive the gift of God's *remaining love*, which transcends the logic of retribution and constitutes the forgiveness experienced with all senses, given for all and accessible to all.

Creating Anamnestic Spaces: Remaining Love, Remembering, and Healing

How, then, does a remembering that calls us to receive and give in a *remaining* love impinge on the practice of our lives in churches and societies? How are we able to translate this liberating memory into the realities of our communities?

The assumption that memories cannot be healed in the sense of erasing a wound, but only through the perspective of a love that carries the experience of this wounded experience, demonstrates how theological engagement can be made fruitful in situations where people are burdened by heavy memories. These include transitional societal situations, amidst communal and interpersonal situations of

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18. See Cilliers Breytenbach, "MNHMONEYEIN: Das 'Sich-Erinnern' in der urchristlichen Überlieferung. Die Bethanien-Episode (Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–9) als Beispiel," in *John and the Synoptics* (BETL 101), ed. Adelbert Denaux (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 548–57.

violence but also times in which churches themselves become the untrustworthy witnesses of the trustworthy Word that has become flesh. In the latter cases, all too often, the glance is directed outwardly first: the rupture, the evil theologically spoken, is extrapolated into the structures or associated with evil spiritual influences, depending on the worldview and theological tradition. The challenge for the churches, as communions that are meant to embody Christ and as institutions in the world, is to nurture a culture of memory that is imbued with the remembrance of Christ's radical disruption of the cycles of retribution and violence. This is relevant at all times and deserves renewed attention in all spheres of life, and it concerns all, not only Christians.

I will, therefore, pursue my reflection about the validity of remembering qualified by a remaining love from within the Christian tradition by exploring practical ecclesial and secular fields in which this conceptualization can be probed.

Practical field 1—Pastoral care

As the vignettes have shown, memory can only be conceptualized as a pluriform relational process. The significance of the attention that churches offer to those who endure the legacies of traumatic events should not be downplayed. Pastoral care, understood as the creation of an anamnestic space in which the stories of loss can be narrated and worked through individually, provides the opportunity to build sites for collective memories and mobilization for transforming lives. Examples that come to mind would be missionary initiatives that combine the proclamation of the good news with social engagement in urban settings, or migrant-led churches with attention to spiritualities developed from within the experience of living at the border.[19] For the ecumenical discussion, I imagine that the endeavours to deepen intercultural pastoral care can also be made fruitful, in the sense of "circulating memories," as Brigittine M. French suggests.[20] This entails a broader exchange on how collective memories impinge on the individual and vice versa.

Practical field 2—Education

Memories have also been brought to the fore as an educational topic. Especially in transitional societal contexts and in historic gross human rights violations, there is a call to consider memories as the guardians against a repetition of extreme violence. The truth and reconciliation processes rest largely on the assumption that

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19. See Daniel G. Groody: *Border of Death, Valley of Life: An Immigrant Journey of Heart and Spirit* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

20. See Brigittine M. French, "The Semiotics of Collective Memories," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41, no. 1 (2012): 337–53. See also Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

there is not only a collective need to face the heavy memories and work through relational fallacies and asymmetries, but also a necessity to determine how the future can be shaped and what learning potential the memories bear. This is a concern of political ethics and civic education that seeks to describe the contours of relevant educational remembering. Perhaps, here too, it will be helpful to pursue avenues that focus less on the reproduction of specific memory contents and more on cultivating and modelling *styles* of narrating memories, acknowledging their pluralities and permeability as non-invasive methodologies for remembering and learning.

Practical field 3—Social media and meaning-making

In times of rising antagonism and populism, processes of remembering are all too often preoccupied by attempts to influence communication and ascertain positions through the interpretation of contested memories. This takes place inside and outside the churches and is exacerbated by the presence of social media and new practices of remembering that deserve to be further studied.[21] This involves questions on the way visual and textual forms of remembering appear and the engagement with them, both at any given singular time and over a duration of time. Is there a change in those memories shared orally, or in written form in comparison to social media content? The societal task to which churches and religious communities can contribute in this context is to keep alive the healing tension between a world that is "remembered" selectively, according to certain patterns, and a memory that invites us to critically reveal the mechanisms of selectivity and normativity.

Conclusion

My goal with this reflection was to situate the topic of the healing of memories within the perspective of remembering as a multidimensional relational process. It is a relevant topic for churches and societies confronted with heavy memories in the aftermath of violent experiences. I have developed a biblical-theological rationale for understanding remembering as a liberating call into free acts of caring as remembering rests on the interpretation of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus as a radical disruption of reciprocal, retributive cycles of violence. Instead, the Johannine texts offer narrative anchors for perceiving memory from the perspective of a *remaining love*. This is a love that acknowledges persisting

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21. See Roberta Bartoletti "Memory and Social Media: New Forms of Remembering and Forgetting," in *Learning from Memory: Body, Memory and Technology in a Globalizing World*, ed. Bianca Maria Pirani (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 82–111.

woundedness and allows the creation of anamnestic spaces supported by a ritual embodiment from there and not from the encapsulation of memories in the temporality of the past. Examples of pastoral care, pedagogy, and social engagement have shown how this approach can be made fruitful in contemporary fields of practice.

Perhaps the healing of memories constitutes one of the central themes for an intercultural, ecumenical, and interreligious conversation on what it means to be human as those who remember freely, because they understand their lives as given out of a remaining love. Through the memory of this love, they are empowered to turn to one another in gentle acts of caring.

Chapter 3

"The Past Cannot Be Changed, but We Can Change the Way the Past Is Remembered":
The Lutheran-Mennonite Dialogue as an Example of Healing Memories

Jennifer Wasmuth

Introduction

Ecumenism is not a static entity; rather, it is in a permanent process of change. On the one hand, this has to do with the fact that complete reconciliation and unity of the churches has not yet been reached, which is why a constant call for further efforts is necessary. Therefore, the former general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Olav Fyske Tveit, rightly exhorts the churches not to slacken their efforts and to continue moving toward each other. The central slogan here is that of "mutual accountability."[1]

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1. Olav Fykse Tveit, "Walking Together, Serving Justice and Peace," *The Ecumenical Review* 70, no. 1 (January 2018): 9–10, https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12328. (9–10). In this article, Tveit pointed to the WCC 8th Assembly in Harare in 1998 and the central committee statement "Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches" (1997) as a "significant milestone in an ongoing journey of self-reflection on the nature and purpose of the ecumenical movement in general, and the WCC in particular." He stressed that this "included the affirmation that member churches, by their mutual engagement in the WCC, open themselves to be challenged by

On the other hand, the processual character of ecumenism is due to the constantly, sometimes dramatically changing contemporary conditions to which ecumenism has to respond. This includes, for example, the exponential growth in the number of denominations, which, among other factors, encourages talk of a "new ecumenical landscape."[2] But this also includes shifts in the ecclesial sphere caused by political changes, as can be observed at present in Ukraine in the wake of the Russian war of aggression.[3]

The strongly processual character of ecumenism is often interpreted negatively as a "crisis of ecumenism" and makes the call for renewal loud.[4] Sometimes, this overlooks the successes that are owed to the ecumenical movement, such as the rapprochement of large parts of global Christianity as it took institutional shape in the founding of the World Council of Churches in 1948, which could hardly have been imagined at the beginning of the 20th century; the rapprochement of the Eastern and Western churches that took place in the wake of the historic meetings between the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople (1948–72) and Pope Paul VI (1963–78), finding expression in the annulment of the condemnations of 1054 at the Second Vatican Council in 1965; and the results of countless ecumenical dialogues, as presented in the comprehensive volumes entitled *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung*, published since 1983.[5]

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one another to deeper, more costly ecumenical commitment, something the statement described as mutual accountability taking many forms: recognizing their solidarity with each other, assisting each other in cases of need, refraining from actions incompatible with brotherly and sisterly relations, entering into spiritual relationships to learn from each other, and consulting with each other 'to learn of the Lord Jesus Christ what witness he would have them to bear to the world in his name.'"

2. See Stefan Dienstbeck, Oliver Schuegraf, and Jennifer Wasmuth, "Die neue ökumenische Unübersichtlichkeit," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 70, no. 2 (2021): 126–35.

3. For the current developments, see Max Hunder, "Communities Torn as Ukraine Turns Its Back on Moscow-Linked Church," *Reuters*, 12 May 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/communities-torn-ukraine-turns-its-back-moscow-linked-church-2023-05-12/. Against this background, the visit of a high-level WCC leadership delegation to Ukraine in May 2023 should be noted: "WCC Leadership Delegation Meets with Churches in Ukraine," World Council of Churches, 11 May 2023, https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-leadership-delegation-meets-with-churches-in-ukraine.

4. See Michael Kinnamon, *Can a Renewal Movement Be Renewed? Question for the Future of Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

5. "History," World Council of Churches, n.d., accessed 19 May 2023, https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc/history; "Joint Catholic-Orthodox Declaration of His Holiness Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras," 7 December 1965, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651207_common-declaration.html; Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung [Documents of Growing Agreement], Bd.1–3, hg. v. Meyer, Harding u.a. (Frankfurt a.M.: Otto Lembeck, 1983–2003); Bd. 4, hg. v. Oeldemann, Johannes u.a. (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2012); Bd. 5, hg. v. Oeldemann, Johannes u.a. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2021).

The examples mentioned here are only a few of those that show that the ecumenical movement in its history is not limited to declarations of intent. On the contrary, real changes have taken place: processes of ecclesial transformation toward better understanding and even reconciliation. Insofar as these processes have to do with guilt and forgiveness, a term borrowed from the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa has come into use: healing of memories.

This term means two things: on the one hand, healing *of* memories, through a better understanding of the causes of division and persecution, and through forgiveness and reconciliation; and on the other hand, healing *through* memories by listening to each other, telling one's own stories, and admitting guilt.

In the recent history of ecumenism, there are various examples that show how dialogical encounters can lead to healing memories. One example that is certainly still remembered by many is the elaborately prepared Reformation anniversary in 2017. Aware that it would be the first Reformation anniversary in the ecumenical age, set against the background of a public controversy as to whether it should be a joint celebration or a joint commemoration, the German Bishops' Conference and the Protestant Church in Germany decided on a process of healing memories, which culminated in a joint service in St. Michael's Church in Hildesheim in March 2017. Here, guilt was publicly confessed before God for misconduct that led to and resulted from the Reformation. Forgiveness was asked of God and each other, and a commitment was made to deepen the fellowship.[6] In a *Joint Statement on the Year 2017*, the Reformation anniversary was reflected in the light of "healing of memories" and, among other things, reasons were given why the Reformation anniversary 2017 should in the end be understood neither as a celebration nor as a commemoration of the Reformation, but as a festival of Christ. It was, accordingly, said in prayer:

> Jesus Christ, Son of the living God,
> Our saviour, our hope, our redeemer:
> We stand before you bringing the burden of our divisiveness and severance:
> We stand before you with the clouds that shadow our past.
> We stand before you humiliated and desolate on the sufferings which were
>   caused by our conflicts.
> Before you we confess our guilt; before you we plead in misery.
> Your endless mercy is our only shelter.
> Forgive us what divides us from you and one another.
> In the light of your truth we perceive our failure:

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6. Ecumenical penance and reconciliation service, St Michael's Church in Hildesheim, 11 March 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJJKv1FOP5M.

> our lack of cautiousness and our lack of brotherly and sisterly terms,
> our lack of attention and respect to one another.
> Grant us the spirit of reconciliation,
> that takes away what separates us,
> that makes us take reliable steps towards church unity.
> Jesus Christ, our saviour, our hope, our redeemer:
> Be our daily bread we live from.
> Be our light that makes us see.
> Be our path to proceed on.
> Amen.[7]

The example of another ecumenical encounter, which can be understood as a process of healing memories, lies farther back in time. I would like to recall this example here because, in my view, it can offer a starting point for other ecumenical encounters. This example is the process of reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites. It is relevant in thematic, methodological, and systematic respects; these will be developed in the following sections. These different aspects can be addressed by means of the following questions.

How does the healing of memories become an ecumenical issue?

There are ecumenical encounters where healing memories do not play a role, or at least not an important one. This is true, for example, of the dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Orthodox Church of the Byzantine tradition, which officially began in 1981 and has continued ever since.[8] Historically, there have been few points of contact between the two denominations, so that concrete experiences of exclusion and persecution are of marginal importance, and none have been raised in the course of the dialogue. At most, the question of guilt plays a role on an abstract level—as an insight into the guilt as denominations for not standing together in church communion and thus bearing responsibility for the

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7. Deutsche Bischofskonferenz and Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), *Healing of Memories—Witnessing to Jesus Christ: A Joint Statement on the Year 2017,* Joint Texts 24 (Hannover: Evangelical Church in Germany, 2019), https://www.dbk-shop.de/de/publikationen/gemeinsame-texte/healing-of-memories-witnessing-to-jesus-christ-a-joint-statement-on-the-year-2017.html#files, 62.

8. Cosmin Daniel Pricop, *From Espoo to Paphos: The Theological Dialogue of the Orthodox Churches with the Lutheran World Federation, 1981–2008* (Bukarest: Basilica Publishing House [Romanian Patriarchate], 2013). For a summary of this dialogue, see Risto Saarinen, "Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue," blog post, June 2018, https://blogs.helsinki.fi/ristosaarinen/lutheran-orthodox-dialogue-2/.

division of the one church confessed in the Nicene Creed. But this insight does not awaken the need to enter into a healing of memories process.

The situation is quite different with the Lutheran-Mennonite encounter. Here, the question of guilt has been present from the very beginning and has influenced the dialogue process continuously. The encounter started with the celebrations of the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 1980. Representatives of Mennonite churches were invited to participate in the ecumenical festivities. The Mennonites, however, aware that the Augsburg Confession explicitly condemned Anabaptists in Articles IX and XVI, were very hesitant. They asked whether it would make any sense to take part in celebrations centred on a document condemning their antecedents.[9]

Thus, the invitation became the starting point of the dialogue process—interestingly, at a celebration that itself had memory as its central theme. Through the reaction of the Mennonites to the invitation of the Lutherans, something about the nature of memory emerged: memory, constituting our humanity, as one could formulate with St. Augustine, is more than something individual.[10] It is, rather, something like collective memory, which, as in the case of the history of Lutherans and Mennonites, also needs to be healed.

All in all, the comparison of the Lutheran-Orthodox and Lutheran-Mennonite dialogues shows that the issue of healing memories arises in ecumenical dialogues of its own accord, when one or both dialogue partners are affected by painful experiences of the other side in such a way that the issue becomes pressing and needs to be addressed.

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9. "Of Baptism they teach that it is necessary to salvation, and that through Baptism is offered the grace of God, and that children are to be baptized who, being offered to God through Baptism are received into God's grace. *They condemn the Anabaptists,* who reject the baptism of children, and say that children are saved without Baptism." Augsburg Confession, Article IX. Of Baptism; emphasis added.

 "Of Civil Affairs they teach that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God, and that it is right for Christians to bear civil office, to sit as judges, to judge matters by the Imperial and other existing laws, to award just punishments, to engage in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to make oath when required by the magistrates, to marry a wife, to be given in marriage. They condemn the Anabaptists who forbid these civil offices to Christians. They condemn also those who do not place evangelical perfection in the fear of God and in faith, but in forsaking civil offices, for the Gospel teaches an eternal righteousness of the heart. Meanwhile, it does not destroy the State or the family, but very much requires that they be preserved as ordinances of God, and that charity be practiced in such ordinances. Therefore, Christians are necessarily bound to obey their own magistrates and laws save only when commanded to sin; for then they ought to obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29." Augsburg Confession, Article XVI. Of Civil Affairs; emphasis added.

10. Paige E. Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine's Theological Anthropology, Oxford Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/978019964 3028.001.0001.

How can memories be healed?

In any kind of healing of memories process, it is assumed that memories can be healed. This is a thesis that is disputed by some, because memories as such refer to events in the past that cannot be undone. In therapeutic work with traumatized people, however, it has been shown that there are ways to overcome traumatic experiences by establishing a different relationship to them—in other words, by transforming memories so that new perspectives for the present open up.[11] Remarkably, such processes can also be initiated in an ecumenical context, and the Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue is an example of this in methodological terms as well.

A basic prerequisite for such a process is, first of all, an acknowledgment of the harm that one group has caused another. This acknowledgment was not initially given on the Lutheran side. It took the Mennonites' response to the invitation to make Lutherans aware of their own guilty past and show willingness to acknowledge failures in the Reformation period. This is particularly evident in a "Statement on the Confessio Augustana," which the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation adopted at its meeting in Augsburg on 11 July 1980. It included these words: "It is with sorrow that we recognize the fact that the specific condemnations of the Confession against certain opinions that were held at the time of the Reformation have caused pain and suffering for some. We realize that some of these opinions are no longer held in the same way in those churches, and we express our hope that the remaining differences may be overcome. We worship Jesus Christ who liberates and call on our member churches to celebrate our common Lutheran heritage with a spirit both of gratitude and penitence."[12]

The acknowledgment of their own failures was a strong motivation on the Lutheran side to enter into official dialogues with the Mennonites. Thus, dialogues started at the national level in France (1981–84), Germany (1989–92), and the United States (2001–04), which then finally led to a dialogue at the international level between the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Mennonite World Conference. For this purpose, a study commission was established, which met from 2005 to 2008.

It is interesting that this study commission first dealt with Articles IX and XVI of the Augsburg Confession but found this approach increasingly problematic and unsatisfactory. As stated in the report issued by the study commission: "In the course

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11. Maike Schult, *Ein Hauch von Ordnung: Traumaarbeit als Aufgabe der Seelsorge,* Arbeiten zur Praktischen Theologie 64 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2023).

12. Quoted in The Lutheran World Federation and The Mennonite World Conference, *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ. Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation and The Mennonite World Conference, 2010), 11.

of the common work, it turned out that the history of persecution and marginalization of Anabaptists consistently intervened in theological analysis and discussion of these controversial themes. Thus, the commission decided to write a joint history of Anabaptist and Lutheran relations in the 16th century, paying particular attention to issues about which Lutherans and Anabaptists have disagreed in the past."[13]

This joint history is included in the *Healing Memories* study document. Part Two, "Telling the Sixteenth-Century Story Together," first describes the early history of the Mennonites, then discusses the relationship between the Lutheran world in the Reformation period and the Anabaptists. More precisely: "The jointly written historical overview offers a brief account of the origins of the Anabaptist movement in the early sixteenth century, its relationship to early Lutheranism, and a description of its central theological motifs, followed by an analysis of the Lutheran reactions to the Anabaptist movement prior to and following the presentation of the Augsburg Confession in 1530, with particular emphasis on the role of the condemnations."[14]

This development of the dialogue seems very revealing in that it was apparently not enough to find consensus on contentious dogmatic issues. Rather, in view of the desire for a better and deeper ecumenical understanding, it was felt necessary on both sides to go back to the past together and to remember jointly, face to face. For the transformation of memory, for a healing process, a reconsideration of history is required.

This points to another aspect: Sometimes the thesis is put forward that it might be more useful for societal coherence *not* to remember, but to find a more or less pragmatic way of dealing with the past. Against such a thesis, the process of the Lutheran-Mennonite reconciliation shows that this can only work if the victims agree to such an approach. The Lutherans might have been content to simply pass over the history. But they were not the ones who were affected in the first place. Therefore, the decision about how to remember cannot happen without the participation of the victims; on the contrary, the victims must be given the opportunity to express their memory. This is essential for communion building.

Could there be a framework that facilitates healing memories?

The Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue found neither its end nor its climax in the joint writing of the history of both denominations during the 16th century. The writing

13. *Healing Memories*, 16.

14. *Healing Memories*, 16.

had an important and, in some respects, a healing function: the telling changed perspectives and the trust placed in each other was strengthened. But this process still left some questions unanswered; it remained, in the words of Mennonite theologian John D. Roth, in a "right remembering."[15] A final act of reconciliation was still missing. Thus, the study commission at some point concluded that Lutherans were required to do more than simply regret what Anabaptists had had to suffer: Lutherans needed to find ways to ask Mennonites for forgiveness.

However, there were serious objections to this undertaking. Key questions included, in the words of the report: "Can Lutherans today ask for forgiveness for the harm that their confessional forebears did to the Anabaptists? Can Mennonites today grant forgiveness for something that their spiritual forebears had to suffer hundreds of years ago?"[16]

Finally, however, it was decided to take this step and to ask for forgiveness. Two factors were decisive for this conclusion. First, the participants in the dialogue realized that they were closely connected to their antecedents and, therefore, felt able and responsible to speak on their behalf—with regard to both the theological insights they had imparted and their own false judgments. Second, there were theological arguments that convinced the participants to move forward and talk not only about forgiveness, but ask for forgiveness for all the harm that Lutherans have done to Mennonites and other Anabaptists since the time of the Reformation. The report notes:

> Lutherans dare to ask for forgiveness because they are aware that finally God alone forgives sins. The Word of God proclaims: "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (Romans 5:10). "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Corinthians 5:19). May it also become true of Lutherans and Mennonites what the letter to the Ephesians states about the Gentiles and Israel: "Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (Ephesians 2:14). Reconciliation with God and among Mennonites and Lutherans is, from the beginning to the end, only possible and real in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Lutherans and Mennonites are continually reminded of this reconciliation of humankind with

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15. John D. Roth, "Forgiveness and the Healing of Memories: An Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspective," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42, no. 4 (2007): 573–88. For the current developments, see Max Hunder, "Communities Torn."

16. *Healing Memories*, 102.

God in the prayer that they pray every day: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."[17]

Hence, it was the shared faith in the triune God and the reconciliation given in Christ that finally led the study commission to recommend that the Council of the Lutheran World Federation "issue a statement asking for forgiveness for the Lutheran persecution of the Anabaptists," while the Mennonite World Council should "initiate a process to acknowledge that request, with the goal of a mutual granting of forgiveness in a spirit of reconciliation and humility."[18]

This recommendation was taken up by both church bodies and, thus, on the occasion of the 11th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, in Stuttgart, Germany, on 22 July 2010, Lutherans and Mennonites engaged in a formal act of reconciliation, praying *"Veni, Creator Spiritus*! Come, Holy Spirit!" Those present at that moment could not doubt that the Spirit of God was at work in their midst.[19] Here, in a ritual act, forgiveness was publicly requested and positively received. It was connected to the commitment that this action will bear fruit in the future life and teaching of the churches.[20]

Conclusion

This article began with the observation that ecumenism is not a static entity, but is in a permanent process of change, and that this, in turn, is not necessarily to be understood as an expression of a crisis. Rather, there are within this process also examples of real change in the sense of acts of reconciliation. Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue has been treated here as an outstanding example, showing ways in which a process of healing memories (listening to victims) can occur, what methodological steps have proven useful (storytelling transformed into joint storytelling), and what framework makes an act of reconciliation possible (the celebration of a worship service).

In doing so, the entire process reveals what may seem oppressive from the church's perspective but is part of church reality. Churches are not only challenged as actors in social and political conflict situations, but they themselves can also be

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17. *Healing Memories*, 102–3.

18. *Healing Memories*, 108.

19. See GA Lutheran World Federation Historical Act of Forgiveness Penitential Worship, Stuttgart, Germany, 22 July 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPl4z9kB4m8&t=17s.

20. For a first evaluation of the consequences of the reconciliation process from the Lutheran side, see The Lutheran World Federation, *Healing Memories: Implications of the Reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites*, LWF Studies 2016/2 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016).

guilty: guilty of harming one another, so that they are called upon to reconcile. At the same time, the Lutheran-Mennonite reconciliation process makes clear that churches are capable of reconciliation; that such a process is not only directed to the past but leads into the future and can set an example for the world. To quote the study document: "The past cannot be changed, but we can change the way the past is remembered in the present. . . . Reconciliation does not only look back into the past; rather it looks into a common future. We are grateful that in many places where Mennonites and Lutherans live together, cooperation as brothers and sisters in Christ has already been occurring for many years."[21]

Thus, the Lutheran-Mennonite reconciliation process is very encouraging and stimulating. It shows that our ecumenical efforts can lead to a good conclusion. They can bear fruit and let other churches and the world know that bridges can be built; that based on Christ's abundant love, borders really can be moved.

21. *Healing Memories*, 108–9.

Chapter 4

Kairos for Creation:

Theological Perspectives in the Context of a Global Climate and Biodiversity Emergency, or What Does It Mean to Do Theology in the Anthropocene?

Dietrich Werner

This chapter is based on my lecture opening the eco-theological track of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) at the 2022 World Council of Churches (WCC) Assembly in Karlsruhe. I address here the following key question: What does it mean to do theology in the Anthropocene? Three steps are offered with reflections ordered in three sections: 1) Kairos for Creation: Reading the Signs of the Planetary Emergency as Imperative for Eco-theological Reflection Today; 2) "Ecological Reformation of Christianity"? Challenges for the Future of Eco-theological Work in World Christianity Today;[1] 3) Common Action for Creation Care: Priorities for Common Witness and Advocacy in Eco-diakonia in the Ecumenical Movement Today.

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1. The language "ecological reformation of Christianity" was first used in an article by James A. Nash, "Toward the Ecological Reformation of Christianity," *Interpretation* 50, no. 1, 5–15, January 1996, https://doi.org/10.1177/002096439605000102. It was taken up in the Volos Manifesto for the Ecological Reformation of Christianity from 2016 by Ernst M. Conradie; Ekaterini Tsalampouni and Dietrich Werner, in: https://repository.globethics.net/handle/20.500.12424/156799.

Kairos for Creation: Reading the Signs of The Planetary Emergency as Imperative for Eco-theological Reflection Today

We ought to begin by pointing to some unmistakeable signs of a planetary emergency in the Anthropocene—namely, the interrelated threats to climate, biodiversity, nutrition, and health. For some decades there has been a growing conviction in the ecumenical movement that we live in a moment of kairos for creation, understood as an unprecedented, unique, and special moment of crisis within the 4.54-billion-year history of this planet, in which the whole of creation—life on this earth and its future—is at stake. This was particularly articulated at the WCC assembly in Canberra in 1991, the first assembly in which I took part as a delegate. This assembly, under the theme "Come, Holy Spirit: Renew the Whole Creation," for the first time dealt with ecological challenges for the earth as a whole. However, it expressed also the belief that God's Spirit and the redeeming work of Christ are still present in creation.

Eco-theological reflections came up strongly in the ecumenical consultation of church representatives in Wuppertal in June 2019 on "Kairos for Creation—Confessing Hope for the Earth." We should not forget, however, that language of an ecological kairos is not completely new; rather, the occasion of GETI in 2022 marked the 50th anniversary of two landmark events pointing to the urgent need to change gears in the understanding of what is called "modern development": namely, the 1972 Club of Rome report "The Limits to Growth" and the UN Stockholm conference on the environment in the same year. The latter was the first world conference to make the environment a major global issue, indicating the beginning of a dialogue between industrialized and developing countries on the link between economic growth, the pollution of the air, water, and oceans, and the well-being of all. All the key issues were already on the agenda some 50 years ago.

Seen in this historical perspective, however, what becomes clear is the distinguishing factor between our current period over against the circumstances a half-century ago. The shared sense of a true and irrefutable global ecological responsibility, which was new and innovative and brought nations together five decades ago, seems to be falling apart due to the rising geopolitical polarizations between Russia, China, and Western countries today. The weakening of multilateralism is a serious blow against reaching key goals of the Paris climate agreement and the SDG goals from 2015. The culture of joint political multilateral responsibility and of concepts of joint ecological security partnership seems to be waning and disappearing in this decade. In the context of the world falling apart again, the ecumenical movement has to raise its voice distinctly and sharply. A sense of global responsibility and

multilateral engagement for the common life interests of all of humanity as well as all living creation is urgently needed and irreplaceable.[2] We desperately need again global commitments for binding treaties and principles to curb global climate change and to change the course of fossil-based and waste-addicted civilization.

There have been strong signs of a planetary emergency, related to global warming and destruction of biodiversity, which nobody can overlook at present. Whether we take the devastating bush fires in Australia or in southern Europe in 2019 and later, the melting glaciers of Antarctica, prolonged droughts in southern Africa in past years, horrible floods in Germany and many Asian countries last year; whether we refer to completely unusual freezing degrees and snowstorms in Mediterranean countries and North Africa, or Taiga forests burning and permafrost soils melting in Siberia—the earth and its ecological systems of interaction seem to be getting out of balance and control almost everywhere. Catastrophies are increasing. I have never had to prepare a lecture like this during summer months in Germany under temperature conditions in the upper 30s, nearing 40 degrees Celsius.

The key term used to describe our current era is *Anthropocene*—the most recent period in the geological history of this planet, beginning approximately with industrialization—in which human activity started to have a significant, lasting, heavy, and potentially destructive impact on the planet's climate and ecosystems. This period is marked by at least three major phenomena.

The Great Acceleration

A dramatic, continuous, and roughly simultaneous surge in growth rates across a large range of parameters of human impact affects the earth systems.[3] Probably the most significant and powerful symbol of the new destructive power of the human species over against the planet earth in the Anthropocene is the atomic mushroom cloud with its incredible sense of contempt, violence, and destruction over against the beauty and integrity of this earth (we can refer to the atomic bomb test at Bikini Atoll in 1946).

The Great Inequality

The effects of climate change are disproportionately dispersed. While in principle they affect all regions of the world, the countries of the global South are significantly

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2. See "The Living Planet: Seeking a Just and Sustainable Global Community," statement by the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, 8 September 2022, www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-living-planet-seeking-a-just-and-sustainable-global-community.

3. See Will Steffen et al., "The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration," *The Anthropocene Review* 2, no. 1 (2015): 81–98, https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019614564785.

more heavily burdened. Those who contribute the least to greenhouse gas emissions (both in lower income groups in the North as well as in the South) are most impacted by the consequences of climate change.[4]

The Great Colonization, or the Great Dying

Some scientists are arguing that the Anthropocene started with the colonization of the Americas in the 15th and 16th centuries.[5] This left 90 percent of the Indigenous populations dead due to diseases and germs imported and resulted in 12 million enslaved persons being transported from Africa. The same attitudes that marked the beginning of a systemic subjugation of native people were applied to the exploitation of nature, leaving behind a tangible geological impact of human civilizations on the social and biological formations of this planet. Deconstructing the roots of modern racism over against Indigenous Peoples and deconstructing the violent and subjugating attitudes over against natural resources are, therefore, practices that must go together.

What does it mean, then, to do theology in the era of the Anthropocene? What does it imply to reflect on the presence and work of God as the creator of the universe in the context of a technological era in which the actions of homo sapiens, or homo economicus, seem to have become the sole determining factor for the future of this planet? How can we determine the relationship between God and the human being, between theology and anthropology, in an era when homo sapiens tends to be becoming homo *Deus*, as Yuval Noah Harari has argued?[6]

Doing theology in the Anthropocene thus brings new questions and challenges:

- Has humanity with its technological and digital instruments become the ultimate superpower, replacing God, the creator of the universe?

- Is a correction of a misleading and distorted conceptualization of the *dominium terrae* still possible or is Christian theology coming too late? Can the earth be protected from the destructive impact of human technological civilization and the impact of the aggressive "subduing of

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4. On research on inequality and climate change, see "Inequality, Human Well-Being and Development," n.d., Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, www.pik-potsdam.de/en/institute/futurelabs/inequality-human-well-being-and-development.

5. See Mark Meslin and Simon Lewis, "Why the Anthropocene Began with European Colonisation, Mass Slavery and the 'Great Dying' of the 16th Century," n.d., The Conversation, www.theconversation.com/why-the-anthropocene-began-with-european-colonisation-mass-slavery-and-the-great-dying-of-the-16th-century-140661.

6. See Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017).

the earth" by humanity that has taken place? How can Christian theology be decolonized; that is, liberated from inherent or implicit attitudes and ways of thinking that tend to subjugate the other, the earth, or Indigenous People?

- How do we reflect on the complete reversal and ecological turn of the fundamental soteriological, the fundamental religious question, How can humanity be saved? How can *homo peccator* be justified by God? The key question now seems to be instead, Can the earth be saved from the destructive hands of *homo consumens*?

I am convinced that the churches in the ecumenical movement are already involved in a remarkable learning process in terms of what it means to preach the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15).[7] The theme of the WCC assembly in Karlsruhe, "Christ's love moves the world [not just individual human beings!] to reconciliation and unity," therefore, has a meaningful significance for the context of doing theology in the Anthropocene.

Many churches in the global North as well as in the South are involved in articulating a new eco-theological narrative. They are rejecting the reductionist scientific-optimistic, quasi-religious narrative, according to which scientists are regarded as the new shepherds and priests of humankind and of the Earth, and in which churches should just advocate for more science and green technologies and then the problems will be solved. It is very important to listen to natural scientists and to work together with scientific organizations like IPCC or the Earth Commission, but it not enough to rely on technological solutions without changing our value systems and lifestyles.

Other churches at the same time are also rejecting an eco-catastrophic narrative, according to which tipping points have been crossed already and the transgressing of planetary boundaries is irrevocable. In this scenario only a few, the ecological holy remnant, will survive and, therefore, they focus on their spiritual resilience alone.

Many churches are also sceptical about a simplistic eco-Marxist narrative, according to which only the complete destruction of the capitalist system will bring liberation from environmental destruction.

The majority of churches are probably opting for an eco-spiritual-transformative narrative, a theology of ecological hope, based on the conviction that God will never

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7. For a relevant study of the African continent and African Christianity, see Dietrich Werner, "The Challenge of Environment and Climate Justice: Imperatives of an Eco-Theological Reformation of Christianity in African Contexts," *Religion and Development* 1 (2019): 2–35, www.rcsd.hu-berlin .de/de/publikationen/pdf-dateien/rd_2019-01_environment_climate_justice.pdf.

give up this earth and its creatures: "For in hope we were saved" (Rom. 8:24); "a covenant . . . for all future generations" (Gen. 9:12). However, this narrative of gradual but radical eco-spiritual transformation, which also is the focus of this paper, needs to be spelled out in more detail. It can be enriched by the papal encyclical *Laudato si'*, which opted for a new coalition of global ecological responsibility between science and faith to overcome a consumerist throw-away society.[8] A Copernican revolution is presupposed by Pope Francis in *Laudato si'*, which revises an anti-modernist attitude of traditional Roman Catholic theology and argues in favour of a dialogical approach between faith and science and premodern wisdom traditions: "If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it."[9] Therefore, faith literacy and science literacy can and should complement and enrich each other in eco-theological reflections! This is also the conviction of the Faith for Earth Movement, which has been established as an interfaith initiative in the UN Environment Programme.[10]

In each of the churches represented in the WCC, it will be interesting to explore how old is explicit eco-theological reflection between faith and science and traditional wisdom in church tradition as well as in the ecumenical movement as a whole. Theologians have argued that we have had some 2000 years of Christian creation theology, as creation is part of the tradition of the Christian creed since ancient times. But we have had only some 50 or 70 years of organized and reflected eco-theology that explicitly answers the questions coming up in dialogue with science and the modern environmental crisis today. In my own Protestant church tradition, the theologian Jürgen Moltmann, born in 1926, was very influential with his theology of creation, first published in 1985.[11]

While we cannot provide a comprehensive survey on the beginnings of eco-theology in the ecumenical movement, it is important to realize that it was the influence of Orthodox theology, the debates on nature and grace in the WCC Faith and Order Commission, and the results of modern biblical exegetical research that paved the way to a broadened concept of eco-theology. The late 1960s, the years before and after the 1968 WCC assembly in Uppsala, formed a revolutionary

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8. Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, an encyclical letter on care for our common home, 24 May 2015, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524 _enciclica-laudato-si.html.

9. *Laudato si'*, chap. 2, I.63.

10. Faith for Earth Initiative, UN Environment Programme, https://www.unep.org/about-un -environment/faith-earth-initiative.

11. Jürgen Moltmann, *Go in Creation: A Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).

period in which a new stream of reflection on God's presence and work within the whole creation was articulated. It also applied critical thinking concerning the ambivalent role of Christianity with regard to the environmental crisis.

Here we need to remind ourselves of Lynn White Jr, who, in his famous 1967 publication "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," argued that Christianity itself is one of the major roots of the contemporary environmental crisis.[12] Two arguments were essential for him at that stage:

- The Bible asserts humankind's dominion over nature and establishes a trend of anthropocentrism;
- Christianity makes a distinction between humankind (formed in God's image) and the rest of creation, which has no soul or reason, and is thus inferior.

A certain delay in broader-based ecological alphabetization processes in churches certainly has to do with the fact that Christianity still is struggling to find an appropriate and common ecumenical response to the criticism of Lynn White, which, while one-sided and historically simplified, at the same time contained valid points and challenges for reconsidering the genuine ecological role and relevance of Christian faith.

Four answers, however, can be identified in the extended ecumenical discourse, which have partly answered the challenges that Lynn White articulated.

First, reacting to the challenges of the Limits to Growth Report and the emerging ecological awareness of the 1970s, and being in close dialogue with new insights of biology (such as those of Charles Birch[13]) and modern earth system sciences, ecumenical social ethics produced a first raw version of the concept of sustainability in the second half of the '70s. This was particularly articulated during the WCC Conference on Science Technology for Human Development, held in Bucharest in 1974. Sustainable development at this conference was defined as "a pattern of development in which environmental pollution is kept well under the capacities of the eco-system to absorb pollution."[14] This concept was born and articulated within the ecumenical movement, 20 years before the 1993 UN Summit in Rio on Sustainable Development!

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12. Lynn Townsend White Jr, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (March 1967): 1203–7.

13. See Australian Academy of Science, "Professor Charles Birch (1918–2009), Ecologist," interviewed by Professor Rick Shine, 2008, https://www.science.org.au/learning/general-audience/history/interviews-australian-scientists/professor-charles-birch-1918-2009.

14. Quotation in Wolfram Stierle, Dietrich Werner, Martin Haider (eds.), *Ethik für das Leben. 100 Jahre ökumenische Sozialethik. Eine Quellenedition*, page 550f. (Translatedfrom German by the author).

Second, efforts for articulating a more profound eco-theology were also developed in this period of ecumenical discourse by the German Roman Catholic theologian Carl Amery.[15] He was a figure bearing both similarities to and differences from Lynn White. He argued strongly that Christianity needed to propose a theology of hope for the earth instead of just a spirit of fatalism. Another major point of reference was the concept of "integrity of creation," which was coined in Vancouver in 1983, when the conciliar process for justice, peace, and integrity of creation was started. A few years later, in Granvollen, Sweden, in 1988, a remarkable conference defined the concept of integrity of creation and outlined dangers of spiritual or ethical reductionism in dealing with creation that still merit reflection.[16]

It should, third, be seen as a response to Lynn White's criticism that in 2019 a major global consultation was called together in Wuppertal under the title "Kairos for Creation." Here, a major call for ecological repentance, for liberation from toxic narratives and theologies was formulated, and the call to spell out a genuine theology of hope for creation was added.[17] A decade of ecological learning, confessing, and comprehensive action of all churches committed to an ecological reformation of Christianity was recommended to begin following this conference in Wuppertal.[18] According to a proposal of Ernst Conradie, eco-theological reflection should always follow a twofold critique and process, namely both a deeper Christian critique of the root causes of ecological destruction and an ecological critique of forms of Christianity that have not embraced the ecological dimensions of the gospel.[19]

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15. Carl Amery, *Das Ende der Vorsehung: Die gnadenlosen Folgen des Christentums* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1972).

16. Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, "Toward a Missiology that Begins with Creation," *International Review of Mission, Special Issue: A Century of Ecumenical Missiology* 100, no. 2 (November 2011), 310–21, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.2011.00075.x.

17. *Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth: The "Wuppertal Call"—Contributions and Recommendations from an International Conference on Eco-theology and Ethics of Sustainability*, Wuppertal, Germany, 16–19 June 2019, ed. Louk Andrianos et al., www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de /fileadmin/mediapool/2_Downloads/en/20_About_Us/Wuppertal_Kairos_for_Creation _Publication_01.pdf.

18. Wuppertal Conference on Eco-theology and the Ethics of Sustainability, Resource Library, The Wuppertal Call—Kairos for Creation—Confessing Hope for the Earth, 2019, https://jliflc.com /resources/kairos-for-creation-confessing-hope-for-the-earth-the-wuppertal-call. See also *Eco-Theology, Climate Justice, and Food Security: Theological Education and Christian Leadership Development*, ed. Dietrich Werner and Elisabeth Jeglitzka (Geneva: Globethics.net, 2016), https://repository .globethics.net/bitstream/handle/20.500.12424/156652/n1_Introduction.pdf.

19. Ernst Conradie made a reference to this twofold critique of ecological theology in his essay and lecture to the Wuppertal conference 2019 which is published under the title "What is God really up to in a time like this? Discerning the Spirit's movements as core task of Christian eco-theology." In

Fourth, a concluding conviction in ecumenical theological discourses was that there is no contradiction between listening to the cries of the poor and listening to the cries of suffering earth, and we should avoid building up false dichotomies.[20] Keeping together the social, ecological, and spiritual dimensions of a life-centred eco-liberation theology, and to define the church as in the forefront of ecological and social transformation remains the core vocation for all.

Ecological Reformation of Christianity? Challenges for the Future of Eco-theological Work in World Christianity Today

But what are now core elements for this "ecological reformation of Christianity,"[21] which the ecumenical movement should be keen to promote? In identifying four dimensions of this ecological reformation, we are spelling out at the same time key challenges for the future of eco-theological reflection in world Christianity today.

This reformation of Christianity will first entail spelling out what it means to allow the Earth a period of rest. The biblical motifs of Sabbath and Jubilee provide a unique source of hope and inspiration here as they speak of an interruption in the cycle of exploitation and violence, expressed in the vision that there shall be "a year of complete rest for the land" (Lev. 25:5).[22] The key liturgical model here is the Jewish tradition of celebrating the Sabbath as a period of rest, a remembrance of the narratives of liberation and of enjoying the gifts of God's creation in a mood of celebration and togetherness. It will be important in our constant mood of being busy, activist, and always productive that we learn anew the spirit of

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this paper he argues: "throughout the last five decades Christian eco-theology retained both a critical and a constructive task. As I have often suggested, eco-theology offers a dual critique, namely both an ecological critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of ecological destruction." In: *Kairos for Creation. Confessing Hope for the Earth. Report of the Wuppertal Conference 2019*, Foedus Verlag Solingen, 2019, page 32 (digital version: https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/fileadmin/mediapool /2_Downloads/en/20_About_Us/Wuppertal_Kairos_for_Creation_Publication_01.pdf). See also Conradie, "A Green Reformation of Christianity? Anthropological, Ethical and Pedagogical Reflections on Ecology as Ecumenical Theme," *Scriptura* 120, no. 1 (2021), www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php ?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2305-445X2021000100013.

20. Pope Francis, "It Is a Journey that We Must Continue Together, Listening to the Cry of the Earth and of the Poor," LiCAS.news, 24 May 2021, https://www.licas.news/2021/05/24/keep-listening -to-the-cry-of-the-earth-and-of-the-poor.

21. See "Conference Calls for Ecological Reformation of Christianity," WCC website, https://www .oikoumene.org/news/conference-calls-for-ecological-reformation-of-christianity.

22. See Jonathan Schorsch, "Green Sabbaths: Adapting Tradition for the Anthropocene," *Kontrapunkte,* 30 June 2022, https://kontrapunkte.hypotheses.org/4494.

providing rest for ourselves, for our own bodies as well as for the creation and the animals and plants around us.

An ecological reformation of Christianity, secondly, entails redefining the traditional understanding of the *dominium terrae* described in Genesis 1:28. The language of subduing the earth that is used there, in its original Hebrew terms, seems to suggest quite a violent behaviour (*kawash* and *radah*). However, a plethora of exegetical literature in the meantime has shown that to subdue the earth does not necessarily mean that God gives human beings free rein to do anything they want to the planet, to its animals and plants—bending it to their uses and abuses, raping it of all its beauty and diversity for their own benefit.[23] Genesis 1:28, on the contrary, needs to be interpreted from within an ancient agrarian context (not the context of modern industrialization), where the supremacy of nature is experienced, and human beings are entrusted to use the products of nature properly. The ancient imagery behind is the role of the king (*malak*) who always has an obligation to care for and sustain those who are subdued under him.[24] The redefinition of the attitude of humankind to nature moving towards an attitude of stewardship and the mending of creation must take place by also reflecting about the serious consequences of the sixth mass extinction of animal species, which currently is observed, with almost 99 percent of all living species endangered by extinction due to human activities.[25]

This immediately leads to the third major dimension in an ecological reformation of Christianity, which relates to the ending of the furious war between humankind and animals.[26] We need to overcome the exclusion of animals from the Noachian Covenant—this is as important and paramount to reducing the future risks for zoonosis.[27] Until now we have treated animals (except pets) as if they are not part of the Noachian Covenant. Some disturbing statistics need to be highlighted, such as the following: In the last 50 years the number of people on

23. See, for example, Richard T. Ritenbaugh, "What the Bible Says about Stewardship," *Forerunner*, 1999, Bibletools, www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/2166/Stewardship.htm.

24. Chilkuri Vasantha Rao, "First Commission for Creation Care: Interpreting, "to Have Dominion," Biblical Reflections from an Indian Context," in *International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Theological Perspectives of Churches from the Global South*, ed. Daniel Beros et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2022), 73–78. Also available at www.ocms.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Handbook-of-Creation-Care-and-Eco-Diakonia-PDF-for-distribution-A.pdf.

25. Damian Carrington, "Sixth Mass Extinction of Wildlife Accelerating, Scientists Warn," *The Guardian*, 1 June 2020, www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/01/sixth-mass-extinction-of-wildlife-accelerating-scientists-warn.

26. Dinesh Wadiwel, *The War against Animals, Critical Animal Studies*, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

27. Bernd Kappes, *Mitgeschöpfe: Vom Umgang mit Tieren aus christlicher S*icht (Ostfildern: Patmos, 2023).

the planet has doubled—but the amount of meat humans eat has tripled. The German Protestant churches have published a very important study on animal and nutrition ethics.[28] The spread of multiple zoonotic disease outbreaks in humans, which the world has experienced drastically during the COVID-19 pandemic, can only be halted by comprehensive actions aimed at safeguarding biodiversity and ecosystems within a holistic One Health approach currently favoured by both the WHO and the WCC.[29]

The ecological reformation of Christianity finally must go hand in hand with a re-evaluation of the significance of Indigenous cultural and interfaith wisdom traditions in nurturing a new culture of reverence for life. A new ecological appreciation of Indigenous wisdom traditions can be observed in interfaith initiatives like the International Rainforest Initiative,[30] the Faith for Earth Initiative,[31] the Earth Overshoot Day tradition,[32] and several other interfaith initiatives. The decolonizing of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim theologies—i.e. overcoming colonizing attitudes not only over against other peoples and countries, but of humanity over against nature and earth as such!—has to go hand in hand with identifying—in both biblical and other religious traditions—traces of wisdom traditions that can help us to spell out reconciliation between human civilization and natural environments.

Common Action for Creation Care: Priorities for Common Witness and Advocacy in Eco-diakonia in the Ecumenical Movement Today

Last, but not least, in the years to come, churches should become more engaged in international and common ecumenical action in at least four areas of creation care.

Water

A first major area of ecumenical action is global water injustice. Did you know that . . .

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28. Advisory Commission of the EKD on Sustainable Development, *Livestock and Fellow Creatures! Animal Welfare, Sustainability and the Ethics of Nutrition from a Protestant Perspective*, EKD-Texte 133 (Hannover: EKD, 2019), https://usercontent.one/wp/www.gronkirke.dk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Livestock-and-Fellow-Creatures-ekd_texte_133_en_2020.pdf.

29. "One Health," 3 October 2022, World Health Organization, www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/one-health.

30. Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, n.d., www.interfaithrainforest.org.

31. Faith for Earth Initiative, UN Environment Programme, n.d., www.unep.org/about-un-environment/faith-earth-initiative.

32. Global Footprint Network, Earth Overshoot Day, 2023, www.overshootday.org.

- Although water covers most of the planet's surface, the amount of fresh water is surprisingly limited? Accessible fresh water represents less than 1 percent of the Earth's water.
- Half of the world's population lives without safely managed sanitation?
- Over two billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water?
- Waterborne disease causes nearly two million preventable deaths worldwide annually?
- Roughly 80 percent of waste water is discharged into the environment untreated, contaminating surface water, groundwater, soil, and the oceans?
- Global water use is six times higher than it was 100 years ago and continues to increase by 1 percent per year, twice as fast as the human population grows?

There are several reasons why it has become urgent for churches to enhance the preservation, responsible management, and equitable distribution of water for all. The framework of the Ecumenical Water Network presents ample opportunities to get connected and motivated in this regard.[33]

Soil

A second major area is soil degradation. Did you know that . . .

- Human-induced soil degradation affects 34 percent (around 1660 million hectares) of agricultural land globally?
- Even though more than 95 percent of all food is produced on land, there is little room for expanding the area that can become more productive?
- Urban areas occupy less than 0.5 percent of the Earth's land surface, but the rapid growth of cities has significantly reduced resources, polluting and encroaching on prime agricultural land?
- Water scarcity now threatens 3.2 billion people living in agricultural areas?

Churches need to push for an internationally agreed-upon policy against soil degradation and proper land use in order to avoid worsening the global food crisis by a global soil utilization crisis.[34]

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33. Read about this on the website of the Ecumenical Water Network, www.oikoumene.org/what -we-do/ecumenical-water-network.

34. For detailed discourses on soil ethics, see Maren Heinecke and Dietrich Werner, "Lebensgrund-lageBoden: Sieben Ökumenische Impulse zu einem nachhaltigen Umgang mit der Ressource Boden," *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 66, Heft 3 (Juli bis September 2022): 181–97.

Air

A third major area of ecumenical action and a new ecological discipline is related to the role of global air traffic. Global aviation heavily affects the ways in which a major part of the ecumenical movement operates and links with each other. Did you know that . . .

- Global aviation is responsible for 12 percent of CO_2 emissions from all transport sources, compared to 74 percent from road transport?
- Aviation contributed approximately 4 percent to observed human-induced global warming to date, despite being responsible for only 2.4 percent of global annual emissions of CO_2?
- Aviation is projected to cause a total of about 0.1°C of warming by 2050, half of it to date and the other half over the next three decades, should aviation's pre-COVID growth resume?
- Aviation's contribution to further warming would be immediately halted by either a sustained annual 2.5 percent decrease in air traffic under the existing fuel mix, or a transition to a 90 percent carbon-neutral fuel mix by 2050?[35]

The ecumenical movement has relied heavily on global aviation for its internal communication and real human encounters. Emphatic participation in contextual situations of suffering and joy cannot be replaced completely by internet technologies. However, it remains a priority not only to develop ecumenical disciplines on global travel and climate compensation, but also to influence the growing international air traffic industries to develop responsible and sustainable standards for the future.

Food

A fourth major area is the range of issues around healthy and sustainable food and global food security.

Transforming the global nutrition imbalance and introducing new styles of agro-ecology and a planetary diet across all human cultures is a priority for all churches, regardless of their location.[36] Health-related as well as climate-related

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35. See M. Klöwer et al., "Quantifying Aviation's Contribution to Global Warming," *Environmental Research Letters* 16, no. 10 (2021), https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ac286e.

36. On the scientific discussion of sustainable nutrition, see Jessica Fanzo et al., "Sustainable Food Systems and Nutrition in the 21st Century: A Report from the 22nd Annual Harvard Nutrition Obesity Symposium," *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 115, no. 1 (January 2022): 18–33, https://academic.oup.com/ajcn/article/115/1/18/6370594.

parameters lead scientists to conclude that we urgently need a global nutrition transition and what is now termed a planetary health diet.[37] Imbalanced nutrition, both undernourishment and malnutrition, has led to a globally rising burden of disease. In western countries particularly, obesity has become a growing challenge.[38]

We need to encourage eco-theological interpretations of the shared meal of the eucharist, which can also be interpreted as a joyful thanksgiving and sharing of healthy and blessed food. The publication of the *International Handbook of Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia,*[39] which was presented to GETI students, is an intentional invitation to deepen the ecological learning process cross-culturally and intercontinentally in the global ecumenical fellowship of churches, in order to share more intentionally and with all partners meaningful examples of eco-diakonia and creation care.

Conclusion

An ecological conversion of theology, an ecological transformation of all churches, or a fundamental change of all our individual styles of life is not a single, isolated act or a matter of a one-day conversation. It is a monumental task involving several generations for giving birth to a new civilization. It affects all areas of life: human nutrition, our relation to animals, human mobility, our energy supply systems, use of soil, water and air, our waste management systems. Ecological conversation goes together with decolonizing theology, which is more than becoming aware that the historical patterns of colonialism between western and non-western nations still have their shadow repercussions in structural injustices all around the world. Decolonizing theology with regard to its arrogance and ignorance and its subjugating and extractivist attitudes over against nature, animals, and plants goes deeper and is a matter of spiritual transformation. The WCC's introduction into the assembly theme of Christ's love, which is God's foremost attitude towards all of creation on this earth, reminds us of the indispensable spiritual roots of such an ecological wisdom and eco-theological transformation of the church today. Only if we become aware again of all aspects and gifts of our daily created life and cultivate the sense of their utmost preciousness will we be able to invest all our energies

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37. See The EAT-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet, Health, "The Planetary Health Diet," EAT, n.d., https://eatforum.org/eat-lancet-commission/the-planetary-health-diet-and-you.

38. Meera Shekar and Barry Popkin, eds., "Obesity: Health and Economic Consequences of an Impending Global Challenge," World Bank, 27 January 2020, www.worldbank.org/en/topic/nutrition/publication/obesity-health-and-economic-consequences-of-an-impending-global-challenge.

39. See for free download: https://www.ocms.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Handbook-of-Creation-Care-and-Eco-Diakonia-PDF-for-distribution-A.pdf.

in reshaping political, economic, and cultural patterns of modern life in order to stay protected and to be upheld, saved, and renewed in view of the consequences of global climate change. The attitude of care, ecological respect, and gratitude that is needed for this monumental transformation is described in this recent publication on the theme of the WCC assembly in Karlsruhe:

> But in times like these, as those who are in Christ, we are never without hope, even as we are faced with such great challenges. Indeed, we have such gifts and blessings from God that we know we do not struggle alone and that we do not have only our own resources to rely on. God is working in the world and within God's people in the church. The WCC Faith and Order text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*" in its final chapter, reminds us that "The first and foremost attitude of God towards the world is love, for every child, woman and man who has ever become part of human history, and, indeed, for the whole of creation."
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> This "foremost attitude of God" is made flesh in Jesus Christ: in the compassion he lived in his earthly ministry; in the mystery of his incarnation; in his suffering, dying, and being raised again to new life; and in the promise of the future renewal of all creation. And this love, the love with which he loved and the love he makes possible in us, is the gift of God to the church and to the world. It is this love which inspires, moves, and creates all that is possible in the life of the church as it becomes a sign of God's love for the world.[40]

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40. "Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity: A Reflection on the Theme of the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Karlsruhe 2022" (WCC Publications, 2022), 15, www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/ENG_WCC_2022Assembly_Booklet_PAGESH .pdf.

Witness from the Margins

Carlos E. Ham

From a theological perspective the language of marginalized people may be conceived as a way of labelling or of reducing people to victims of systems and structures. Diakonia, however, must acknowledge the destructive and dehumanizing power of such structures, not only in order to point to the tragic effects of their reality, but also to the demands, legitimate rights, and power of marginalized people to transform the world.

—WCC, "Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in 21st Century," in *Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders: An Ecumenical Reader*

Introduction

The churches in Cuba, the Matanzas Ecumenical Theological Seminary, and I were enormously grateful for the great opportunity and privilege to be part of the 2022 Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI), and to be able to share some insights on "Witness from the Margins" in the practical-diaconal track.

Here I begin by stressing the whole notion and practice of God's mission as witness—applied more intentionally to the margins of society—by analyzing its different periods of development in the ecumenical movement. I address *diakonia* as one of its manifestations. A special emphasis in this chapter is the World Council of Churches' (WCC) report "Theological Perspectives on *Diakonia* in 21st

Century."[1] I include as well some reflections on the relevance of *spirituality of transformation*, including some examples from our Latin American region.

God's Mission as Witness

This paper deals more intentionally and explicitly with the notion and practices of the *missio Dei* (God's mission). The WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) mentions in its 2000 study document "Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today" that "'Mission' carries a holistic understanding: the proclamation and sharing of the good news of the gospel by word *(kerygma)*, deed *(diakonia)*, prayer and worship *(leiturgia)*, and the everyday witness of the Christian life *(martyria)*; teaching as building up and strengthening people in their relationship with God and each other; and healing as wholeness and reconciliation into *koinonia*—communion with God, communion with people, and communion with creation as a whole." It goes on to say that "'Evangelism,' while not excluding the different dimensions of mission, focuses on explicit and intentional voicing of the gospel, including the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ and to discipleship."[2] Some of these Greek terms were cited by Dietrich Werner and Matthew Ross in the ecumenical reader that was prepared for this GETI.[3]

As far as we understand it, this means that all starts with God's mission, entrusted to us, to share the good news of the gospel amid the bad news that we encounter in today's world. So the *missio Dei* is a multivalent activity that includes joyful witness in word and deed to the person of Jesus Christ and his reign, among other emphases that we are dealing with during these days, both at the GETI and at the WCC assembly.

Again, the Greek origin of the term witness is *martyria*, which means costly sacrifice and martyrdom, through suffering and even death, for this cause. I am sure that we all can share our experiences regarding this witnessing. In our case in

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1. "Theological Perspectives on *Diakonia* in 21st Century," statement of the conference jointly organized by the Justice and *Diakonia*, Just and Inclusive Communities, and Mission and Evangelism programmes of the World Council of Churches, held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2–6 June 2012, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/theological-perspectives-on-diakonia-in-21st-century.

2. "Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today," study document adopted by the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism in preparation for the next world mission conference (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000), 2.

3. Dietrich Werner and Matthew Ross, "Terminologies, Learning Processes and Recent Developments in Ecumenical Diakonia in The Ecumenical Movement," in *Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders: An Ecumenical Reader*, ed. Kuzipa Nalwamba and Marietta Ruhland (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2022), 162.

Cuba, in the last 60 years, we can highlight two main periods and tendencies. After the triumph of the revolution in 1959, which was declared socialist two years later, the Marxist-Leninist state imposed during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s a fierce atheism on the population that created double standards, since the people were very religious. In other words, we Christians had to deny our faith to succeed in our careers and life. We shared the good news in that period by acting as living witnesses, trying to set a good example of dedication and proficiency. It is, indeed, a great responsibility that others may know Jesus Christ through the testimony of our lives, particularly in an atheistic environment.

Everything changed 180 degrees in Cuba after the Berlin Wall collapsed in 1989, since the churches and religions in general were allowed not only to live their faith publicly, but also to serve openly the people in need. Then we began to share the good news through *diakonia*, as a kind of "witnessing service" for which we must continuously build capacity. For example, at our theological seminary in Matanzas, we introduced the subject "mission and *diakonia*," previously called "mission and evangelism," as well as a School for *Diakonia*. We also held hospital and prison chaplaincy seminars.

Witnessing Service in the Ecumenical Movement

The ecumenical movement generally and the WCC—particularly through its member churches—have had a very strong involvement in diaconal work throughout the 20th century and up to the present day, both in reflection and in practice. As we study this development, we can observe three phases or models of ecumenical diakonia, where we find paradigm shifts. These phases can be defined as models of charity, reciprocity, and transformation.

The charity model

This is the interchurch aid period, prominently characterized by the transfer of funds in a vertical, top-down way to support diaconal projects and persons in need. Here people were seen as objects of aid from the most powerful churches and church-related organizations, primarily from the global North. *Diakonia* was defined in this period as the "responsible service of the gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people."[4] This model has been the one most practised from the early 20th century up to the beginning of the 1980s.

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4. Teresa Joan White, "Diakonia," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed., ed. Nicholas Lossky et al. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 305.

The reciprocity model

This phase is represented by the process of ecumenical sharing of resources, developed in the 1980s primarily by the 1986 World Consultation on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service, held in Larnaca (Cyprus), and the 1987 World Consultation on *Koinonia*, held in El Escorial (Spain).[5] During this period, we start to observe a paradigm shift, mostly because of the presence and influence of voices and ministries from the churches in the global South. In this model, there is an assessment of the needs, challenges, and problems in a more intentional, collective way, and on a more horizontal level.

The transformative model

The process leading to the 2012 "Conference on Theological Perspectives on *Diakonia* in the 21st Century," held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, marks the beginning of the period that I call *transformative*. There is a stronger turn to the notion of diaconal practice from the different WCC-related mission networks, not least from persons quite often excluded by society and even by the churches. This resulted in increased inclusivity and integration of the different diaconal efforts, with those on the margins (such as people with disabilities, women, Indigenous people, descendants of African peoples, impoverished people, and persons with different sexual orientations) empowered to change society from the bottom up, in an inductive manner.

Diakonia from the Margins

To a great extent, the ecumenical movement in general and the churches in particular, continue to serve through these three models—charity, mutuality or reciprocity and transformative. We will focus now on the last of these.

As mentioned above, the WCC conference held in 2012 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, produced the document *Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in 21st Century*. Among the participants was a group of brothers and sisters living on the margins, which, of course, made a big difference. As the Spanish literary critic Luis Antonio de Villena stated in a 2004 interview: "One of the things that encourages me is being against order, feeling that true life is on the margins, rather than in the

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5. See *Diakonia 2000: Called to Be Neighbours*, official report, WCC World Consultation, Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service, Larnaca, 1986, ed. Klaus Poser (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987); also *Sharing Life in a World Community*, official report, WCC World Consultation on Koinonia, held in El Escorial, Spain, 24–31 October 1987, ed. Huibert van Beek (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987).

centre. The one who is content with the order becomes fossilized."[6] I wonder if this was this the reason why Jesus of Nazareth carried out his ministry among the marginalized people of his time. Referring to Matthew 13:54–57, where Jesus is rejected in Nazareth, David Rhodes points out, "It's no wonder the villagers wanted Jesus to get out of town. In a land of widespread poverty and political oppression, the rebellious Jesus was far too close for comfort. For them he represented danger. Just as he does for today's Church."[7]

Historically the WCC has understood these marginalized communities as comprised of people who are discriminated against and excluded—racial and ethnic minorities, refugees and migrants, Indigenous Peoples, Dalits, people with disabilities. But they also refer to people rejected and forced to live on the margins of society, or excluded because of unjust systems or other reasons. Quite often the churches have been complacent and more part of the problem than part of the solution.

In our rapidly changing world, we ought to be vigilant, addressing new forms of marginalization, like that caused by climate change. The islands in the Pacific are the most notorious, but we have other examples, like in Panama, where this enormous challenge is forcing Indigenous Islanders to relocate. According to BBC News, "some 2000 islanders in Guna Yala will become one of the first indigenous communities in Latin America to relocate because of climate change," mainly to the margins of a new location. The Panama government estimates all the islands of the Guna people could be underwater by 2050. This estimate is based on forecasts by an independent group of scientists, although others think all the islands may not be submerged until the end of the century.[8]

In Colombo, there was recognition of what I would call "unconventional" forms of *diakonia*, like those practised by the people living in the margins. The statement underlines: "Even if they do not have the material and financial resources to do *diakonia* in the way many churches are accustomed to, marginalized people, through their lives and everyday resistance, practice *diakonia*."[9]

As the report from the Colombo conference stated, "*Diakonia* of the marginalized, then, is crucial for church's engagement in realizing God's *oikoumene,* the

6. Interview with Luis Antonio de Villena, "True Life Is on the Margins," *El Pais*, 28 May 2004, https://elpais.com/diario/2004/05/29/babelia/1085788227_850215.html.

7. David Rhodes, *Untold Stories, Scripture from the Margins: Bible Studies on the Gospel of Matthew* (Salford, UK: Church Action on Poverty, n.d.), 11.

8. "Climate Change Forces Indigenous Islanders in Panama to Relocate," BBC News, 20 August 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-latin-america-62497711.

9. "Theological Perspectives on *Diakonia,*" para. 10.

alternative vision of the world."[10] "*Diakonia* must . . . point to . . . the demands, legitimate rights, and power of marginalized people to transform the world. In a world where people are treated as objects and commodities and are also mistreated on account of their identities such as gender, ethnicity, color, caste, age, disability, sexual orientation, and economic and cultural locations, *diakonia* must build persons and communities, affirm the dignity of all people, and transform cultures and practices that discriminate and abuse some people."[11]

It might sound contradictory, but it is important to stress here the "power of the marginalized to transform the world." Since it is based on dignity, it is "built on persons and communities" and not necessarily on the value of money or the market. Of course, money is important, but a vision built on money as an end in itself may be effective, but not necessarily just and fair. A vision shaped by the human values of those in the margins and their communities, however, can be liberating and sustainable. Hence, the emphasis of this topic on *diakonia* "from" the margins, rather than *diakonia* "to" the margins, as noted in the charity and reciprocity models mentioned above.

In July 2018, WCC deputy general secretary Isabel Apawo Phiri offered a keynote speech on ecumenical *diakonia* during the Africa *Diaconia* and Development Conference that was held under the theme "*Diaconia*, Community and Development: Exploring New Theories for Social Justice and Inclusion." Phiri's address hinged on a joint document, "Called to Transformative Action: Ecumenical *Diakonia*," developed by the WCC, ACT Alliance, and the Lutheran World Federation.

> We attend to the direct needs of people in a way that empowers them to be agents of change. Our *diakonia* of direct service must be transformative and dignifying to those with whom we serve . . . Our actions must form part of a cycle of empowerment which places the affected people and communities at the centre stage, acting as their own advocates and acting as agents of their own development and service.[12]

Hence, people are self-empowered for diaconal action. As a previous WCC document puts it, "Empowerment is at the heart of diaconal and justice-seeking activities and can be seen as an overarching characteristic or goal of much of the work of the churches and church-related organizations. Empowerment activities

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10. "Theological Perspectives on *Diakonia*," para. 13.

11. "Theological Perspectives on *Diakonia*," para. 14.

12. WCC Leader Speaks at Africa *Diaconia* and Development Conference," WCC News, 5 July 2018, https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-leader-speaks-at-africa-diaconia-and-development -conference.

in a Christian framework address the dignity of humanity and reveal to each person and group their inherent gifts and abilities so that they may actively work towards transformation."[13]

We find a suitable expression of this among the Indigenous people in Latin America. For example, according to journalist Oliver Balch:

> Ecuador is building on its indigenous past by incorporating the concept of *sumak kawsay* into its approach to development. Rooted in the cosmovisión (or worldview) of the Quechua peoples of the Andes, *sumak kawsay*—or *buen vivir*, to give it its Spanish name—describes a way of doing things that is community-centric, ecologically-balanced, and culturally-sensitive. In English, *buen vivir* loosely translates [as] "good living" or "well living," although neither term sits well with Eduardo Gudynas, a leading scholar on the subject. Both sit too close to western notions of wellbeing or welfare, he says: "These are not equivalents at all. With *buen vivir*, the subject of wellbeing is not [about the] individual, but the individual in the social context of their community and in a unique environmental situation."
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> Similar thinking is inspiring other social movements across South America, says Gudynas. The link to other indigenous belief systems, such as those of the Aymara peoples of Bolivia, the Quichua of Ecuador and the Mapuche of Chile and Argentina, is explicit. . . .
>
> How does this play out in practice? Take property, for example. According to *buen vivir*, humans are never owners of the earth and its resources, only stewards."[14]

Indeed, it is paramount for these ancestral traditions to observe and respect the spiritual components of this "good living"—for example, in a close relationship with the *Pachamama*, the earth. The *Abya Yala* is the oldest name we that know of the American territory in the Pre-Columbian era. Balch continues: "A defining characteristic of *buen vivir* is harmony, [Gudynas] says, harmony between human beings, and between human beings and nature. A related theme is a sense of the collective. Capitalism is a great promoter of individual rights: the right to own, to sell, to keep, to have. But this alternative paradigm from South America subjugates the rights of the individual to those of peoples, communities and nature."[15]

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13. Diakonia: *Creating Harmony, Seeking Justice and Practising Compassion* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 7.

14. Oliver Balch, "Buen vivir: The Social Philosophy Inspiring Movements in South America," *The Guardian*, 4 February 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/buen-vivir -philosophy-south-america-eduardo-gudynas.

15. Balch, "Buen vivir."

These Indigenous spiritualities and practices, even when they have been condemned by various "historical churches" throughout the centuries, have a deep theological meaning and lesson for us today. What the world and various churches traditionally consider the margins of society, and therefore the object of the church's diaconal action, is the centre of God's interest and, thus, one of the main focuses of God's reign to come. Consequently, the participants at the Colombo conference reaffirmed their allegiance to the God of life who empowers to defeat the powers of Empire and transform the world toward the values of God's reign. This transformation takes expression in partnership and solidarity with the marginalized as subjects, whose liberating power transforms the world, following the ultimate example of Jesus of Nazareth. The Son of God served the marginalized of his time as he began his ministry of announcing the coming reign of God.

This is, indeed, a crucial contribution of the churches in the quest to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They try to provide a faithful and consistent response to scripture and God's call, first trying to be inclusive diaconal communities themselves, in order to fulfill the church's witnessing service. Working in partnership with other actors and disciplines, church members are empowered by the Holy Spirit with life-affirming values to exercise the power of service over the power of domination. This is a *spirituality of transformation*, a power of service that enables and nurtures possibilities for life, and witnesses to God's transforming grace through Jesus Christ, who thought and realized acts of service that held forth the promise of God's reign, as part of God's mission.

Spirituality of Transformation

We bear witness in word and deed to the person of Jesus Christ and his reign, on either side of the margins that we create, often artificially, and in a situation of uncertainty like the one in which we are living today, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the financial recession, the war in Ukraine, and the effects of climate change, among other factors. It is crucially important to acknowledge the fact that even when we don't know what the future holds, we know Who holds the future. Therefore, it is critical to cultivate a *spirituality of transformation*, to connect with the divine providence for liberating action.

Etymologically, the term *spirituality* comes from *spirit*, a 13th-century loan from the Latin *spiritus*, from the verb *spirare* (to blow). Therefore, *spiritus* means breath and the air we breathe, as well as the act of breathing. An example of this vital breath is found in Genesis 2:7, where we read, "Then the Lord God formed

man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." This was the action of the *ruah*.

Thus, spirituality empowers us to develop our endogenous potential, producing and unveiling the strength and potential that is formed or engendered within us by the power of the Holy Spirit. It makes us more participating or participatory subjects, rather than objects or recipients of aid. This power, which is not meant to dominate or subjugate but rather to produce and distribute goods for the community, is generated as a *dynamo*, from the Greek *dynamis,* which means strength, power, and capacity for transformation. For example, the resilience of the vulnerable people and their capacity and experience of resisting and overcoming injustice and oppression are important assets that unveil the presence and power of God in their lives. This points to the need of working not *for*, but *with* them in solidarity and in partnership for the transformation toward justice of the society that also includes the churches.

In the article mentioned above, Dietrich Werner and Matthew Ross underline that "there is no spirituality without social responsibility," but we can also argue the contrary: namely, that from the point of view of *diakonia*, there is no social responsibility without spirituality. A particular example of this is the liturgy, a term that comes from the mid-16th century, via French or late Latin, from the Greek *leitourgia* (public service, worship of the gods), from *leitourgos* (minister), from *lēitos* (public) plus *-ergos* (working). We cannot carry out *diakonia* in the absence of liturgy, or in the sense defined by our Orthodox brothers and sisters when they highlight "the liturgy after the liturgy." A way to read the liturgy is to understand that by breaking and sharing the eucharist bread, the Spirit empowers us to go out to the world to work for a more just society where the whole humanity can receive "our daily bread."

Hence, this spirituality is not escapist "opium"; rather, it demands radical commitment, even more so in these turbulent times. It inspires and guides us to see—judge—act as a transforming method of participation, driven by Latin American liberation theology, that churches can follow, globally and locally, as concrete steps to hold space for those at the border. This method is based on an analysis that must, as a first step, attend to the experiences and testimonies of the context. The second step is reflection—what we would call "discernment of the spirit," especially in times of fake news. This step introduces concerns and impulses from our respective identities and from our faith in all its riches when reflecting about praxis. And the third step is to act and bring the understanding of the first two steps to the field of transformation toward greater justice and equity in each one of our contexts.

Conclusions

As we "witness from the margins," considering the relevance of the *diakonia*/empowerment interconnectedness, we propose the notion of *empowering diakonia*, which emerges with a dual function. *Diakonia* is *empowering* for those serving and being served, for those surviving in the margins of society to be transforming subjects rather than objects of charity. At the same time, this concept points to the forces or actions that help to *empower diakonia*—for example, through the Holy Spirit, acting in capacity building, or through the eucharist. Consequently, *diakonia* both empowers and is being empowered in an ongoing process of cross-fertilization and mutual enhancement, seeking transformation toward the values of God's reign (Rom. 14:17) to overcome exclusion and marginalization.

In a video shared during the GETI 2022 online phase that focused on the theme, "Christ's Love (Re)Moves Borders," we highlighted the four steps or verbs that Matthew 4:23 mentions. I repeat these by saying, "Jesus *went* throughout Galilee, *teaching* in their synagogues and *proclaiming* the good news of the kingdom and *curing* every disease and every sickness among the people." Our role as his witnessing disciples is to make this happen here and now, by building *koinonia* beyond the narrow boundaries of the church. This ought to be the ultimate goal and result of God's mission, marking the presence of the church in the world. *Witnessing service*, therefore, is not an end in itself but rather an instrument used by God, together with others, to build an inclusive and just community, an *oikos*, a household in which the entire creation is included, enjoying the fulness of life intended for all.[16]

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16. This thought is based on the report of the WCC general secretary, Philip A. Potter, to the 6th Assembly of the WCC, held in Vancouver, Canada, in 1983. He said: "The ecumenical movement is, therefore, the means by which the churches which form the house, the oikos of God, are seeking so to live and witness before all peoples that the whole oikoumene may become the oikos of God through the crucified and risen Christ in the power of the life-giving Spirit." *Gathered for Life: Official Report 6th Assembly of the WCC, Vancouver, Canada, 1983*, ed. David Gill (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1983), 197. Philip Alford Potter (1921–2015) was a Methodist pastor and the third general secretary of the WCC, serving from 1972–84.

Chapter 6

The Margins as the Centre of Epistemology, *Diakonia*, and Life!

Fundiswa A. Kobo

The Positionality

I express immense gratitude for a memorable opportunity that I was given to make a few points about my thoughts and the inspiration I derived from the lecture presented at the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI 2022) plenary by the Rev. Dr Carlos Emilio Ham entitled "Witness from the Margins."[1] This was a lecture which stressed the notion and practice of God's mission as witness, addressing *diakonia* as one of its manifestations, by analyzing its different periods of development in the ecumenical movement, applied more intentionally to the margins of society.

In order to contribute with humility and responsibility in my response, I employ one of the lessons of the school of Black theology of liberation, as posited by Vuyani Vellem, by disclosing my positionality and assumption up front.[2] I am

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1. Carlos E. Ham, "Witness from the Margins," plenary address, Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI), Karlsruhe, Germany, 30 August 2022.

2. See Vuyani Vellem, "Un-thinking the West: The Spirit of Doing Black Theology of Liberation in Decolonial Times," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (22 November 2017), https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4737. Also see Fundiswa A. Kobo, "Walking Together to the Promised Land: Womanism and Black Theology of Liberation," *The Ecumenical Review* 74, no. 4 (November 2022): 645–57, https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12731.

mindful of the intersections and multiple layers that exist in epistemology, anthropology, and theology. The decoloniality scholars argue that all knowledge is contextual and thus debunk the myth of universalism in understanding knowledge.[3] It is from an embodiment and analysis of a particular context and epistemological mandate that I theologize as a womanist who is Black and African.[4] Being Black and African is more than the pigmentocracy and geographical location but a confession and an expression of my multiple convictions.[5] First, I write as a theologian whose starting point is within my African culture, which was pushed to the margins.[6] Secondly, my conviction is inspired by experiences of the oppressed Blacks, those on the margins as articulated in the Black theology of liberation (BTL) discourses. Lastly, my conviction is inspired especially by Black women, the interlocutors of womanist theology, whose lived experiences are at the heart of a womanist theology that uses social analysis as its methodology. Womanism is a praxiological theology whose starting point is the oppressed women, those on the margins. Womanism says there are margins and then there are multiple layers in the margins—because in the global power structure, some are more oppressed than others. Some scholars speak of double, triple, or multiple jeopardies or oppressions.[7] The use of the notions of double, triple, or multiple

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3. See the following: Linda Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Thinking from the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); Enrique D. Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 1995); Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003); Ramón Grosfoguel, "The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century," *Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 11, no. 1 (September 2013): 72–90; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "AAR Centennial Roundtable: Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 3 (September 2014): 636–65.

4. One of the mothers of womanist theology, Katie Geneva Cannon, a Black ethicist, makes this point about womanism, in "Must I be Womanist?," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22, no. 1 (2006), 96–98. See also Kobo, "Walking Together" 646.

5. Steve Biko wrote, "Being black is not a matter of pigmentation—being black is a reflection of a mental attitude. . . . Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being." See Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like*, ed. Aelred Stubbes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 49.

6. See Kobo, "Walking Together," 646.

7. See "The Cry for Life: The Spirituality of the Third World," statement from the Third General Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, held 5–16 January 1992, Nairobi, Kenya, *in Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 7, no. 1 (1993) 45–71; Madipoane J. Masenya, "African Womanist Hermeneutics: A Suppressed Voice from South Africa Speaks," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 11, no. 1 (1995): 149–55; Sarojini Nadar, "Power, Ideology and Interpretation/s: Womanist and Literary Perspectives on the Book of Esther as Resources for Gender-Social Transformation" (PhD thesis, University of Natal, 2003); Fundiswa A. Kobo, "A Womanist

jeopardy in Black and womanist discourses that generally critique dualisms are not an abstraction of the struggles of women from the comprehensive liberation struggles of Black people, but an unavoidable fact about the harshness of the lived experiences of Black African women in the quest for the comprehensive liberation of Black humanity.[8]

So, womanism is a discourse that grapples with the intersectionality of class, race, gender, Western hegemonies, and all forms of imperialism. As the epistemological agency of Black women and those on the margins, the praxis of womanism is to decentre Western and Eurocentric forms of knowledge, life, and spirituality and to thus centre epistemologies, *diakonia*, and life from the margins. Womanism intentionally begins from the margins to query the systems and structures that animate forms of marginalization. It is through those lenses that I make reflections on the lecture on the point of *diakonia* from the margins, well-articulated in the lecture. In this paper, I thus attempt to look at *diakonia* from the margins by problematizing "the margins" as an epistemological disturbance, the margins as the decentring of *diakonia*, and the margins as the centre of epistemology, *diakonia*, and life! And I offer some un-concluding thoughts.

Margins as an Epistemological Disturbance

As stated in Dr Ham's lecture: "Historically the WCC has understood these 'marginalized communities' as comprised by discriminated against and excluded people—racial and ethnic minorities, refugees and migrants, Indigenous Peoples, Dalits, people with disabilities. But they also refer to people rejected and forced to live on the margins of society, or excluded because of unjust systems, or other reasons. Quite often the churches have been complacent, more part of the problem than part of the solution."[9]

The *margins*, as a term used in this paper, refers those who are rejected and forced to live on the margins of society and excluded because of unjust systems as articulated by the WCC. This paper is concerned about the knowledge systems, and systems that undergird the lived experiences of the Indigenous Peoples, the unrepresented, whose lives are "so complex and unsystematic that they cannot be known or represented in any straightforward way by vocabularies of western critical

Exposition of Pseudospirituality and the Cry of an Oppressed African Woman," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (30 April 2018): 1–7, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4896.

8. See Kobo, "Womanist Exposition."

9. Ham. "Witness from the Margins." Chapter 5 in this volume.

theory," as argued by Gayatri Spivak.[10] She further observes that experiences of people in the global South, who are the marginalized communities, are a disturbance to Eurocentric masculinist thought: "They present a crisis in the knowledge and understanding of western critical theory."[11] This crisis in knowledge, Spivak contends, highlights the ethical risks when privileged intellectuals make political claims on behalf of oppressed groups. These risks include the danger that the voices, lives, and struggles of "Third World" women and peoples will be silenced and contained within the technical vocabulary of Western critical theory.[12]

Ramon Grosfoguel exposes the links between epistemic privilege and epistemic inferiority.[13] He observes how epistemologies of white males from five countries became the canon of knowledge, and how that resulted in the relegation of alternate epistemologies and lived experiences to the margins. This is what Walter Mignolo observes as the problem, namely the inability of the West to accept that there exist other localities that are non-West and that universalizing Western localities erases other localities.[14]

In one of my works, I attempted to problematize the West as the centre in juxtaposition to the margins and I developed the following rendition:

West as the Centre of knowledge

West as the Centre of life

West as the Centre of faith and diakonia

West as the Centre of defining who the human is

West as the Centre of defining who the woman is[15]

According to Enrique Dussel, Linda Alcoff, and Eduardo Mendieta, Eurocentric modernity has dominated humanity and the world for 500 years.[16] That led to the rest of Europe placing itself as the centre of the world system with a capitalist

10. Stephen Morton, ed., *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London: Routledge, 2003), 7.

11. Peter Hitchcock, *Oscillate Wildly: Space, Body, and Spirit of Millennial Materialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 65.

12. Morton, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, 7.

13. Grosfoguel, "Structure of Knowledge."

14. Walter D. Mignolo, "Re:Emerging, Decentring and Delinking: Shifting the Geographies of Sensing, Believing and Knowing," *Ibraaz: Contemporary Visual Culture in North Africa and the Middle East* 005 (8 May 2013), https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/59.

15. Kobo, "Womanist Exposition."

16. See Dussel, *Invention of the Americas;* Enrique Dussel, "A New Age in the History of Philosophy: The World Dialogue between Philosophical Traditions," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 35, no. 5 (2009): 499–516, https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453709103424; Alcoff and Mendieta, *Thinking from the Underside.*

economy.[17] Thus, philosophy, ethics, religion, culture, and the humanities have all been understood through Eurocentric lenses. Ramon Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Walter Mignolo are among those scholars who, in conversation with Enrique Dussel, have exposed the myth of the universalism of knowledge and life centred on the West.[18] Cormie Lee also debunks the myth of universalism by arguing that "all knowledge is contextual" and further exposes the notions of coloniality of power, epistemic violence, cultural genocide, amongst other things, as closely linked to Eurocentric modernity.[19] The point here is that the location of the West at the centre creates the margins. In the section that follows, I show that, by contrast, taking the margins as the starting point decentres the West.

Margins as the Decentring of *Diakonia*

From a womanist perspective, to start from the margins is a decentring of the West from the centre of knowledge. The margins decentre the West from the centre of life, from what it means to be human. Thus, *diakonia* from the margins is a decentring of the West from the centre of faith, spirituality, and *diakonia*.

For Dussel, Alcoff, and Mendieta, starting from the margins is an epistemology that decentres the West because it unravels the whole existence of Eurocentric systems that have put others at the margins for more than 500 years.[20] It challenges systems of knowledge and canons of knowledge that continue to elevate some people over others. Walter Mignolo exposes the instabilities in the West that impact its self-proclaimed role as the centre of the universe. He observes: "Things are shifting: centres are moveable; sensibilities are shifting the illusion of the end of history after 500 years of localized western history, consolidation and domination is ending. Older—much older—histories of civilisations are re-emerging. Globalism (the neoliberal vision of homogenizing the planet) is spinning out of control and every western universal is under siege."[21]

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17. See Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

18. See Grosfoguel, "Structure of Knowledge"; Maldonado-Torres, "Religion, Conquest, and Race"; Mignolo, "Re:emerging, Decentring."

19. Lee Cormie, "Expanding Decolonial Horizons: Implications for the Renewal of Theology," in *Decoloniality and Justice: Theological Perspectives,* ed. Jean-François Roussel (San Leopoldo, Brazil: Oikos, 2018): 51–64.

20. See Dussel, *Invention of the Americas; Dussel, New Age in History*; Alcoff and Mendieta, *Thinking from the Underside*.

21. Mignolo, "Re:emerging, Decentring," 2.

Mignolo points to the shifts and the moving of centres and dispelling of illusions that dominated the universe, assuming that the world could only be seen through the eyes of the West. He asserts that the universalizing tendencies and the whole domination of the West are crumbling, and he points to a re-emergence of old histories of civilizations. While he acknowledges the West's role in civilization, he posits that it has reached its limitations. If the margins are a concern for us today, then, according to Vellum, the universalizing of Western experience can no longer assist us.[22] To reiterate an earlier point, what Mignolo sees as the problem of the West is its inability to accept that there exist other localities that are not-West, and that universalizing Western localities erases other localities. Now people [the margins] have become aware and are realizing that it is not necessary to start from the West. This is what I see in Ham's lecture. For Mignolo, this points to a "radical shift in the geopolitics of knowing, sensing and believing."[23] Living a change of epoch suggests a departure from the critique of Eurocentrism and a Western centrism of knowledge in order to build something different, a radical decentring.[24]

So, the point is that the very existence and representation of the margins subverts the whole colonial, Eurocentric structure and system of knowledge because it is not knowledge if it does not know the margins. Eurocentric knowledge categories, as encapsulated by Elmina castle in Ghana of the transatlantic slave trade,[25] signify the genesis of the fragmentation of Black humanity and "dungeoning" of Black African bodies and are thus a symbol of the commodification of Black bodies justified by faith. At Elmina, Black women were kept hostage below a Dutch Reformed chapel, where psalms were sung on top of dungeons of enslaved women—which represents to this day a church sitting on top of women's bodies and, according to Ham, a church that is complacent and part of the problem. Elmina and many sites where the margins are located make clear the agenda of decentring the West. If one turns upside down the Elmina complex of the colonial wound, putting the dungeons on top and all the merchants, galleries, governors'

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22. See Vellem, "Un-thinking the West."

23. Mignolo, "Re:emerging, Decentring," 8.

24. Mignolo, 5.

25. See works on Elmina Castle and the dungeons, such as Sarojini Nadar, "Searching the Dungeons beneath Our Religious Discourses: The Case of Violence against Women and the 'Unholy Trinity,'" *Agenda* 19 (January 2005: 16–22, Doi: 10.1080/10130950.2005.9674641; Vuyani Vellem, "Iimanyano Singing Siyakudumisa: Ambivalent Worship and the Reformed Tradition in South Africa," St Augustine Papers 19. no. 1/2 (2019), 75–95; Vuyani Vellem, "The Spiritual Dimension of Embracing the Cross," *International Review of Mission* 107, no. 2 (December 2018): 515–29; Fundiswa A. Kobo, "A Womanist Excavation of Black Spirituality Trapped in the Dungeons: In Memory of Katie Geneva Cannon," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 170 (2021): 19–33.

quarters, and the Dutch Reformed chapel below, it is a radical decentring.[26] Such knowledge, such faith, such spirituality cannot be knowledge, faith, spirituality, anthropology, and theology unless the dungeons are brought on top of the colonial matrix of power and knowledge systems.

Against this background, we will look at the margins as the centre for *diakonia*.

Margins as the Centre

I find very inspirational the words by the Spanish literary critic Luis Antonio de Villena that Ham cited in his lecture: "One of the things that encourages me is being against order, feeling that true life is on the margins, rather than in the centre. The one who is content with the order becomes fossilized."[27] To start from the margins is against the Western code of Eurocentric modernity that we have presented in this paper. It is a disorder and a disturbance as argued earlier. But indeed, if the margins are troubling us today, they are an inspiration for us to start there. The lecture by Ham poses a pertinent question: "Was this the reason why Jesus of Nazareth carried out his ministry among the marginalized of his time?"[28]

Then WCC acting general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca said in his address at GETI 2022, "When the salvation came to the people, i.e., crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus had to carry his cross from the centre to the margins! And he was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem, and Resurrection took place outside the city! Good News does not come from the centre to the margins but from the margins to the centre!"[29] And indeed, Jesus' ministry starts from the margins and moves to the centre. Jesus meets his disciples in Galilee. The city of the riff-raff, where he himself comes from. People there are those who ultimately became victims of the political and economic systems of the day. Jesus is resurrected only to return first to this community, Galilee. I have asserted:

> To deny oneself and follow Christ surely means to follow a Christ who turns tables upside down. Tables of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, patriarchy, abuse of power, exploitation of the poor, corruption. . . . It is to confront death without fear as a response to conflict that is needed and facing up consequences as suggested by Francis and ap Siôn (2016)! One comes to such a conclusion inspired by an approach that according to Francis and ap Siôn (2016:7),

26. See Mignolo, "Re-emerging, Decentring."

27. Luis Antonio de Villena, quoted in Ham, "Witness from the Margins." Chapter 2 in this volume.

28. Ham, "Witness from the Margins," Chapter 5 in this volume.

29. Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, (address, GETI, Karlsruhe, Germany, 29 August 2022).

"focusing on the present-day readers of the Gospel narratives and on the theoretical understanding of biblical hermeneutics shaped by psychological type theory."[30]

Ham argues that "A vision shaped by the human values of those in the margins and their communities can be liberating and sustainable."[31] Vellem posits, "The subaltern of the world continues unabated with their quest for liberation, no matter how much this quest can be resisted . . . even if they continue to be the riff-raff of society."[32] Paulo Freire is one of the scholars who have long highlighted the importance of social analysis and the animation that arises from the experiences of the oppressed.[33]

The WCC statement cited in Ham's lecture underlines this truth: "Even if they do not have the material and financial resources to do diakonia in the way many churches are accustomed to, marginalized people, through their lives and everyday resistance, practice *diakonia*."[34] Therefore, "*Diakonia* of the marginalized, then, is crucial for church's engagement in realizing God's *oikoumene,* the alternative vision of the world."[35]

Gayatri Spivak makes an important observation about how those on the margins can speak: the subaltern, they can speak! She writes that "oppressed subjects speak, act and know."[36] For Mamadou Diouf, to speak with one's own voice is the first commitment against the assignment of people to a subaltern position, the margins.[37]

In Ham's lecture, he cited Isabel Phiri's address at the Africa Diaconia and Development Conference, where she stated that "our actions must form part of a

30. Fundiswa A. Kobo, "Womanism, Land and the Cross: In Memory of Vuyani Vellem," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 3 (25 January 2022), a6997: 5, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i3.6997.

31. Ham, "Witness from the Margins," Chapter 5 in this volume.

32. Vuyani, V. Vellem, "The Symbol of Liberation in South African Public Life: A Black Theological Perspective" (PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, 2007), 31.

33. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970).

34. "Theological Perspectives on *Diakoni*a in 21st Century," statement of the conference jointly organized by the Justice and *Diakonia*, Just and Inclusive Communities, and Mission and Evangelism programmes of the World Council of Churches, held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2–6 June 2012, para. 10, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/theological-perspectives-on-diakonia-in-21st-century.

35. "Theological Perspectives on Diakonia," para. 13.

36. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Cul*ture, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan,1988), 271–313.

37. Mamadou Diouf, "Explorations in 'Reclaiming Africa's Futures': The Sources of African Humanities," Unisa Founders Lecture, 7 December 2021, University of South Africa, Pretoria.

cycle of empowerment which places the affected people and communities at the centre stage, acting as their own advocates and acting as agents of their own development and service."[38]

So, the point that is clarified in this section and paper is that there is agency at the margins. Margins have agency! Theologies and spiritualities of liberation excavate their epistemologies, anthropologies, theologies, and *diakonia*. The lived experiences of the oppressed offer us alternative theologies and spiritualities. This is a spirituality that does not embody faith that is otherworldly, but rather a faith and spirituality that seek to respond to the cry for life, a spirituality for liberation, which can inspire various ministries and programmes of our faith communities.

Ham argues that "This transformation takes expression in partnership and solidarity with the marginalized, as subjects, whose liberating power transforms the world, following the ultimate example of Jesus of Nazareth."[39] The partnerships and solidarity with the marginalized can be seen in several theological programmes in Africa. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians is one of the spaces where this agency is realized. It started in 1989 in Ghana but now has chapters in various African universities. The Circle is a critical and contested space in the academy that grapples with questions of race and gender. It looks at the venom of patriarchy through the lenses of liberation, taking into consideration the experiences of its interlocutors, oppressed women. The values of the Circle are best articulated by the founder, Mercy Oduyoye, in this way: "The story of the Circle is that of an 'I' who becomes a 'we.'[40] Some of the focus areas include the empowerment of African women to tell their stories and write their stories.

Contextual Bible Studies (CBS) is another programme. It was developed by Gerald West of the Ujamaa Centre, which is housed at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.[41] Studying the Bible in this way fosters the following values: An emphasis on reading *with* rather than reading *for* or *to;* Allowing the readers (literate and illiterate) to read and interpret the text within their own context, cultural background, and life experience; Aiming to achieve personal and societal transformation.

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38. Isabel Phiri, quoted by Ham in "Witness from the Margins," Chapter 5 in this volume. The report of Phiri's address is found at WCC News, 5 July 2018, https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-leader-speaks-at-africa-diaconia-and-development-conference.

39. Ham, "Witness from the Margins." Chapter 5 in this volume.

40. Mercy A. Oduyoye, "The Story of a Circle," *The Ecumenical Review* 53, no. 1 (January 2001): 97–100, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6623.2001.tb00080.x.

41. See Gerald O. West, "Locating 'Contextual Bible Study' within Biblical Liberation Hermeneutics and Intercultural Biblical Hermeneutics," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 70, no. 1 (16 October 2014), https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2641.

Un-concluding Thoughts

This paper has looked at *diakonia* from the margins by problematizing the margins as an epistemological disturbance to the Western order and Eurocentric modernity. To start from the margins to the centre decentres *diakonia* as a Western phenomenon but allows other expressions of *diakonia*—epistemology, theology, and anthropology from the margins—to emerge and shift to the centre.

For me, Ham's lecture enhances the restoration of our mutilated being, consciousness, and memory. It digs deep to what Vellem referred to as the marks of the transatlantic slave trade, the festering wounds of the colonized on the underside of modernity, memory mediated through the colonization of the mind, apartheid South Africa, a climax of the killing civilization based on the colouring of bodies.[42] It is indeed an affirmation that there is hope in the throttled spaces of empire, zones of non-being according to Frantz Fanon.

As Ham noted, at the 2012 conference on theological perspectives on *diakonia* in the 21st century, held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, "the participants . . . reaffirmed their allegiance to the God of life who empowers to defeat the powers of Empire and to transform the world towards the values of God's Kingdom."[43] Likewise, the Indigenous witness in South America, Latin America . . . and North America, the communities of Indigenous people will continue to inspire us to examine the meaning of life and witness to the alternative existence of life imagined in the 21st century.[44]

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42. Vuyani Vellem, panel discussion, Discernment and Radical Engagement (DARE) Global Forum, Council on World Mission and Evangelism, Taipei, Taiwan, 19–22 June 2019.

43. "Theological Perspectives on *Diakonia*," quoted by Ham, in "Witness from the Margins," Chapter 5

44. Vellem, panel discussion, DARE.

Chapter 7

"I Refuse to Speak During this Session":
Interreligious Dialogue and the
World Council of Churches 11th Assembly

Dyron B. Daughrity

Introduction

Over the last few decades, Christians have come to see that they need to practice dialogue with members of other religions. They realize that there are often many members of other faiths in their countries, and the best way to interact with them is through friendship and mutual respect. For many years, people used the word *tolerance* to describe the relationship Christians should have with other faiths, but those Christians who work with other faiths have come to see that *tolerance* is not an appropriate term. Members of other religions should go much further than tolerance—a word that conveys a sense of resistance and antipathy. We don't merely tolerate Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Sikhs, Hindus, and others. We respect them. We learn about their hopes and dreams. We listen to them as they describe own religious traditions. We might even celebrate a religious festival with them, such as Eid al-Fitr, Diwali, or Purim. We help them whenever we recognize a need.

What Is Interreligious Dialogue? How Should It Be Practiced?

The Greek word *dialogue* literally means "through" (*dia*) "words" (*logos*). The word dialogue has not changed much from its early etymology in the Greek language. When applied to religion, the expression *interreligious dialogue* can mean several things, and numerous scholars have tried to define it. Martin Forward defines dialogue this way: "Dialogue signified worldviews being argued through to significant and potentially transformative conclusions, for one or more participants." He believes interreligious dialogue is a "consequential encounter" because beliefs are subject to change somewhat throughout the exchange of words.[1]

In 1971, the World Council of Churches promoted guidelines for interreligious dialogue, and these guidelines were adopted by many Christian denominations:

- Dialogue begins when people meet.
- Dialogue depends upon mutual understanding and mutual trust.
- Dialogue makes it possible to share in service.
- Dialogue becomes the medium of authentic witness.[2]

Interreligious dialogue is often misunderstood. Some see it as a religious debate. Others see it as a stealthy way to evangelize. Some see it as a way to try to convert another person to one's faith. Still others see it as a conversation: an enterprise that has little personal impact.

There is no established definition of dialogue; therefore, when two people of different faiths come together to reason and discuss, the outcomes depend wholly upon the context and the motives of the people involved. One thing is clear: dialogue is a reciprocal activity. It is different from a monologue—where one person expresses their will and intentions through words. Dialogue implies that two people exchange ideas, and those two people stand on equal footing. They are peers. They are equals.

The two people or parties involved both agree to the intellectual exchange, and both have equal opportunity to express their worldview. Interfaith dialogue requires listening and learning, as well as explaining one's own faith. Sometimes these dialogues take place in a formal setting. But the vast majority of interreligious dialogical

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1. Martin Forward, *Interreligious Dialogue: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 12. Note that in this paper, I use interreligious dialogue and interfaith dialogue interchangeably.

2. Forward, *Interreligious Dialogue,* 11.

encounters occur in informal settings: on the street, in chat rooms and other places online, at work, in college and university dorm rooms. Both parties are given their due respect in the conversation. Interreligious dialogue is not supposed to be a strong debate of apologetics, where each side "proves" the other side is wrong. That is different. Interreligious dialogue is an encounter of understanding, of listening with the heart as well as with the ears. There is profound empathy involved as one listens not only to the facts of a particular religion, but also to the individual's personal experience of that religion—how it has impacted them throughout their life. Interreligious dialogue is an intensely personal activity.

Scholars have proposed different kinds of interreligious dialogue:[3]

- Dialogue of Life: When people spontaneously encounter members of other religions in their own, personal, day-to-day lives. These can be good or bad experiences.

- Dialogue of Action: When faith organizations partner together for the common good in the name of religion and shared values. Examples here would be the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement working together to bring relief.

- Dialogue of Discourse: The academic/intellectual type, when scholars of different faiths discuss and clarify their religious practices and beliefs.

- Dialogue of Religious Experience: This happens when one individual or group decides to actively participate in one or more aspects of another faith. This involves a crossing of religious boundaries into the world of the others, for example, when a Christian participates in a Shabbat. Or when a Muslim joins in the celebration of Diwali with Hindus. Or when a Jew practices meditation with Buddhists. Countless examples can be imagined here.

These four different forms of interreligious dialogue are practiced every day across the United States as the nation becomes more diverse. This is due mainly to immigration from abroad, where religions other than Christianity are practiced.

Increasingly, Christians are participating in interreligious dialogue, largely because they are encountering members of other religions. They are gaining exposure to other religions through courses in world religions that now permeate high schools and colleges across the nation. Christians are becoming more religiously literate than ever before. As a result, we are witnessing greater cultural awareness in the United States. Peacebuilding is happening, but often in informal ways, as

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3. Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, "Principles and Methodology for Dialogue," chap. 3 in *World Christianity Encounters World Religions: A Summa of Interfaith Dialogue* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2018).

Hindu boys and girls play with Jewish and Christian children. This religious inter-mixing brings a shared consciousness about what it means to be human, to share life together, and to learn to accept one another regardless of cultural background or religious practice.

Why Should We Practice Interreligious Dialogue?

Hans Küng famously argued that there will be:

- No peace among the nations without peace among the religions.
- No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions.
- No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundation of the religions.[4]

It is obvious that mutual understanding among nations provides a path forward for achieving peace. And, as Küng ceaselessly argued, religions are at the core of human societies; therefore, religious literacy is essential if peace is ever to be achieved in the political realm.

Interreligious dialogue achieves mutual understanding when it is done well. It can humanize others, easing suspicion among the various parties. It can even engender empathy and compassion for members of other religions.

There exists a Roman Catholic lay movement headquartered in Rome called Sant'Egidio.[5] This group has achieved some major successes in international peacemaking in violent contexts. They have mediated negotiations that helped to end a civil war in Mozambique. They worked to achieve greater peace in Algeria by hosting talks between Muslim and secular parties. They have been active in many nations, including Kosovo, Burundi, and Guatemala. Sant'Egidio's policies for peacemaking are fourfold:

- Exhibit an intimate knowledge of the language and culture of the peoples in conflict.
- Have access to firsthand information about the conflict as it evolves.

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4. Hans Küng, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* (1995), quoted by Azza Karam in "Keeping Faith in Interfaith Dialogue: Hans Küng and Global Religious Collaboration for Positive Peace," Berkley Forum, 29 April 2021, https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/keeping-faith-in -interfaith-dialogue-hans-kung-and-global-religious-collaboration-for-positive-peace.

5. See Andrea Bartoli, "Christianity and Peacebuilding," in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, ed. Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 147–68. See also the discussion of Sant'Egidio in David Little and Scott Appleby, "A Moment of Opportunity? The Promise of Religious Peacebuilding in an Era of Religious and Ethnic Conflict," in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, ed. Coward and Smith, 11. Also see the Sant'Egidio website, www.santegidio.org.

- Possess or draw upon political expertise.
- Help to develop and embrace a long-term vision of peace for the con-flicted society.

It is clear from these policies that understanding world religions and cultures is vital and must take place if progress is to be made in a context of intense religious conflict.

Half of the world's more than 2.5 billion Christians are Roman Catholics, and their numbers are widely scattered across the world, from the Americas to Europe to Asia to Africa. Catholic peacemaking groups must play a critical role in the future of religious peacemaking because of the trust that is already present among people of shared Catholic faith. Without the support of Catholic leaders—both lay and ordained—it is unlikely that political peace will take root on the ground level.

While addressing interreligious dialogue, Pope John Paul II once said the following:

> True dialogue is the search for what is good by peaceful means. It is the persistent determination to have recourse to all the possible formulas of negotiation, medi-ation, and arbitration, to act in such a way that the factors which bring people together will be victorious over the factors of division and hate. It is a recognition of the inalienable dignity of human beings. It rests upon respect for human life . . . to make the world a place for everybody to live in and worthy of everybody. The political virtue of such a dialogue could not fail to bear fruit for peace.[6]

In 1990, under Pope John Paul II, the Vatican published a document called *Dialogue and Proclamation*, which identified four "modes of dialogue":

- Life: We share with each other our own joys and sorrows, problems. and preoccupations.
- Action: We collaborate in order to bring liberation to people.
- Theological exchange: Specialists share their beliefs with one another so that they can better understand their own faith as well as the faiths of others.
- Religious experience: We share our spiritual riches with one another—for example, in communal prayer.[7]

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6. Byron Sherwin and Harold Kasimow, eds., *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 33.

7. For the modes of dialogue, see Clinton Bennett, "The State of Official Church-Related Christian-Muslim Dialogue," chap. 5 in his book *In Search of Understanding: Reflections on Christian Engagement with Muslims after Four Decades of Encounter* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019).

One question that commonly occurs in conversations about interreligious dialogue is whether evangelism or a sense of mission is implicit in the conversation. Scholars vary on this topic. Some are open to evangelism and witnessing for their own faith during dialogical encounters, while others attempt to avoid proselytizing. Martin Forward argues that, for the committed Christian, there can be no separation of mission from dialogue. Christians are called by Christ to witness and to testify to their faith; thus, committed Christians will always maintain hope that their interlocutor might hear and believe the gospel message.[8] Edmund Chia, another Christian specialist on dialogue, writes,

> What can also be hoped for in interfaith dialogue is that the encounters result in the "conversion" of the parties involved. This does not refer to institutional conversion, where one person switches over to another religion, but to intellectual, moral, and spiritual conversion. . . . One could also call this *metanoia* or personal transformation where there is a total change in one's attitude and way of life. We would then develop empathy for what our dialogue partner shares with us, a more encompassing moral and social awareness, as well as an inclusive and dialogical worldview.[9]

According to Chia, interreligious dialogue may lead to *metanoia*, or significant change in a person's spiritual outlook, or possibly even in one's religious practice.

Approaches to Interreligious Dialogue

Historically, the three standard approaches to interreligious dialogue are exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. These are the three locations by which Christians and members of other religions typically conduct interreligious dialogue.

Exclusivism is an approach rooted in a Christian's deep commitment to the truth of their own faith. This normally includes a fundamental conviction that Christianity holds the exclusive key to human salvation. When exclusivists conduct interreligious dialogue, they do so with a confidence that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through the Son. Exclusivists are not so concerned with allowing the teachings of other religions to change them. Their foremost concern is that their interlocutors may come to Christ and to recognize him as the Lord. For the exclusivist, a successful dialogue is one that leads the non-Christian to become baptized and to follow Jesus Christ. The exclusivist is interested in other religions, but only insofar as it might be

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8. Forward, *Interreligious Dialogue*, 10.

9. Chia, "Principles and Methodology," 52.

helpful to lead that person to Christian conversion. The exclusivist is, essentially, a missionary and an apologist for the Christian faith.

Exclusivists may even develop friendships with members of other religions. But these friendships rarely result in mutual transformation. The exclusivist is firmly committed to the truth of his or her own faith; therefore, there remains a feeling of sadness toward the one who refuses to submit to Jesus Christ as Lord. The person who refuses to come to Christ is in danger of eternal suffering in the mind of the exclusivist. This perspective can be potentially offensive to the interlocutor. It could also be emotionally stirring for the non-Christian to witness the true concern on the part of the exclusivist to save a soul from eternal damnation.

Inclusivism is the second common stance for conducting interreligious dialogue. This is a stance wherein a Christian remains open to learning about God from the person of another faith. There is a fundamental conviction that Christianity is probably not in sole possession of all truth; however, Christianity is the *truest* of all the world religions. Inclusivists remain convinced that Jesus is the answer. However, they believe God probably saves people in other religions who are righteous and noble. Inclusivists are also open to learning about what God might be communicating through other religions. There is a genuine openness to the religious texts, rituals, and doctrines of other faiths. However, Jesus is truly the Son of God, and inclusivists usually intend to make that conviction clear to their interlocutors.

Typically, inclusivists believe that "Christianity is the *fulfillment* of what God wants from religion, but not the exclusive possessor of religious truth."[10] Jesus remains central for inclusivist Christians; however, they believe that God's grace extends to members of other religions through Jesus—particularly his death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus Christ was for all people, not just for those who happen to have been born into a Christian milieu. Salvation is indeed available to members of other religions. They are included in God's plan, through Jesus Christ. People from other religions do not have to profess Jesus in order to experience salvation. Rather, God reserves the choice to bring them into the kingdom of God through Christ, but outside of their own awareness.

Some inclusivists believe that non-Christians who live righteous lives are "anonymous" Christians. They may practice another religion, but that is the only religion they've ever been taught. Surely God would not condemn them through no fault of their own. God probably includes them in God's plan of salvation regardless of their conscious thoughts. They strive to do good, they have righteous

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10. Lewis Winkler, *Contemporary Muslim and Christian Responses to Religious Plurality: Wolfhart Pannenberg in Dialogue with Abdulaziz Sachedina* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2011), 19.

hearts, and their intentions are pure. These people are effectively baptized by desire—because they desire the good, the blood of Christ covers them.

Inclusivists are open to discovering God's activity in other religions. Dialogue is an opportunity to understand God's complexity and mysterious beauty working in the lives of people who do not accurately understand God. Inclusivist Christians are religiously open-minded people, but they are anchored by the belief that Christianity is true. It is not *exclusively* true. But it is certainly true.

Pluralism is the third approach that Christians take when conducting interfaith dialogue. One of the foremost voices for Christian pluralism is John Hick (1922–2012). Hick believed that "all religions are more or less equally valid paths to salvation or liberation."[11] He had a nuanced approach to truth. His belief was that truth is available only in fragmentary forms. We can never grasp the full truth. Humans simply do not have the capacity to understand the fulness of divine truth. We can only know in part on this side of salvation. We are limited by our birth, our culture, our geographical position, our place in time, and our mental capacity. Must a person born in the Americas before the time of Jesus (or even the time of Moses, for that matter) be automatically assigned to condemnation simply because they did not know Jesus? Of course not, the pluralist would argue. God is just and good. God would never create people only to condemn them to hell. This contradicts the God of the Bible who has mercy, who is just, and who loves humans—God's most special creation.

Paul Knitter, a Roman Catholic pluralist, has argued that all humans are essentially "hybrids." We are not purebreds: "We're constantly changing and we're changing through the hybridizing process of interacting with others who often are very different from us." As we learn from other religions, we accommodate that information into our own worldview, and it inevitably shapes us. Knitter reached this conclusion while studying and practicing various aspects of Buddhism. While Knitter holds Jesus Christ in a primary position in his life, he also considers himself a follower of the Buddha. His religious identity is explicitly hybrid.[12]

Pluralists are constantly aware of the unity that exists behind all religions. Religions are certainly quite different from one another, but there does exist a kind of hidden unity. Many pluralists have tried to define this unity. In 1957, the World Congress of Faiths held an important conference in Bremen, Germany, wherein participants created a list of seven points held in common by most religions:

- The reality of the transcendent
- The immanence of the transcendent in human hearts

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11. Forward, *Interreligious Dialogue*, 41.

12. Paul Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not be a Christian* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 214–15.

- The highest truth is that there is a transcendent force that is present in humans.
- There is divine love and mercy in the hearts of human beings.
- The divine reality can be reached through sacrifice, prayer, and meditation.
- Humans of all religions understand the importance of loving God and loving one's neighbour.
- The last aim of humans is to perfect the soul into the infinity of God.[13]

The World Congress of Faiths is one of the most influential interfaith groups in the world, and its activities have made an indelible impact on the religious tapestry of global Christianity. Its work toward pluralism has been influential. However, there are many other approaches to Christian pluralism that continue to be created and developed within the field of interreligious dialogue.

Lamin Sanneh, Vincent Donovan, and Dialogical Challenges

Yale historian Lamin Sanneh argued that people from other faiths respect Christians who know who they are, and are not afraid to express themselves in the historic Christian way, by offering the good news to whomever they encounter. This is especially true in the Muslim-Christian dialogue. With Christianity claiming the allegiance of 32 percent of the human race, and Islam claiming the allegiance of 24 percent, well over half the world's population has a vested interest in this ongoing interreligious dialogue.[14] That's not to say other religious conversations aren't important. But there is something highly significant about the Muslim-Christian dialogue. The world cannot afford for these two religions to have a relationship of hostility. There is entirely too much at stake.

Thankfully, there are trailblazers in this area who have lived dialogical lives and can point the way. In the Muslim-Christian encounter, there are few more capable commentators than Professor Sanneh. Lamin Sanneh was an eminent professor of history, African studies, and world Christianity at Yale University. His autobiography is a captivating story, recounted in the book *Summoned from the Margin: Homecoming of an African*.[15]

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13. Marcus Braybrooke, *A Wider Vision: A History of the World Congress of Faiths* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 99–100.

14. Todd Johnson and Gina Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia,* 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 6.

15. See Lamin Sanneh, *Summoned from the Margin: Homecoming of an African* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012).

In his childhood, Sanneh was a devout Muslim boy from a poor, polygamous family in the British colony of Gambia. Over time, this brilliant and promising kid got an education and ended up becoming a renowned professor at Aberdeen, Harvard, and finally at Yale. Sanneh was trained as a scholar of Islam, but he steered his expertise towards critically comparing these two titanic faiths, as he realized their crucial importance for the world, in both the present and in the future.

Due to his Muslim upbringing and training in Islamic studies, Sanneh made penetrating insights into the nature of the Muslim-Christian dialogue. For example, he argued that Muslims want nothing less than a "vigorous debate" with Christians. In his experiences with Islamic-Christian encounters, he noticed Muslims were annoyed by the extreme conciliatoriness of Christians who, in his words, went "tiptoeing around the differences between the two faiths."[16]

Sanneh knew that Muslims are eager to flesh out actual issues during interreligious encounters. They don't want airy politeness when discussing something as important as religious truth. Sanneh observed that Christians seemed "out of their element" when forced to dialogue with Muslims. Christians would often shrink back, unable to defend the notion of a triune God in the face of Islam's uncompromising monotheism. Often, he remarked, Christians end up "leaving sincere Muslim queries unaddressed."[17]

According to Sanneh, Christians often think of interreligious engagement as "action programs and community projects" which sidestep the authentic dialogue about what faith in God means and how it should be rationally explained. His advice was that Christians should honour Muslims with respect and openness. But they should not recoil from the tenets of their faith. He argued that Muslims see a weakness in Christian witness here. While Christians are happy to converse and even to work together toward social improvement, they are often caught without a properly informed understanding of what they believe.

He argued that while religious pluralism might reign supreme in the Western Christian cultural zeitgeist, it has the potential to breed mistrust amongst Muslims, especially when it is perceived that Christians are saying "all paths" are equally valid without qualification. This type of thinking does not make sense to Muslims. They believe in the truth of one God. Claiming all faiths are somehow true seems disingenuous to them.

And this touches on Sanneh's central point. Interreligious dialogue requires courage. Dialogue is not always enjoyable, nor is it always innocuous. It requires candour and the courage to articulate the fundamental doctrines of one's faith so

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16. Sanneh, *Summoned from the Margin*, 191–92.

17. Sanneh, 192.

that they may be examined carefully by others. This back-and-forth process—articulating one's own faith while listening to the ideas of others—is how people can voice their disagreements and make claims of their own.

Clearly, there is some bad blood existing in the history of these two leviathan faiths—faiths that Lamin Sanneh personally had history with. There were countless jihads, crusades, clashing civilizations, land grabs, and a mutual distrust that continues to the present. At some level, the Abrahamic faiths are siblings. They all claim to come from the same patriarch. But sibling rivalry can be the worst kind of rivalry, and reconciliation within families often requires unpacking the issues in uncomfortable ways. Unfortunately, many people walk away from dialogue the moment such challenges arise. But perseverance and seeing the dialogue through is the better path to mutual understanding.

Father Vincent Donovan—whom Lamin Sanneh greatly respected—is another who had penetrating insights on interreligious dialogue. In his book *Christianity Rediscovered*, Father Donovan provided a riveting account of his years in East Africa, 1955 to 1973, spent evangelizing the Maasai people.[18] As a Roman Catholic priest, he was trained in method and theory, but found nearly everything he had learned to be completely inadequate for evangelizing these people.

During his years of service, Father Donovan realized that the good news, the gospel, would have to shed its Western packaging if it was to make any sense to the Maasai. There were implications in doing this, however. He would have to "rediscover" this faith he was so comfortable with.[19] The old missionary model was to bring enlightenment, material advancement, schools, hospitals, and so on.[20] Father Donovan, however, wanted nothing less than for the Maasai to discover the God of the Bible in their own culture, in their own methods, and in their own history. And they did—eventually.

Father Donovan convinced the Maasai that God—the Creator of all—had been present with their tribe all throughout history. He explained to them, however, that they needed to understand God in the light of Jesus Christ. And when he finally had success making his arguments, the conversion of a culture began. Once they began to accept the gospel message, Father Donovan backed out and allowed the Maasai to be their own missionaries.

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18. Vincent Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978). I have used the 25th Anniversary Edition (2003), which includes the African Creed and insights on the book by Lamin Sanneh, Eugene Hillman, and Nora Koren, Donovan's sister. I am particularly indebted to Lamin Sanneh's insightful comments on Donovan's book at the end of the book, 151–59.

19. Lamin Sanneh, in *Christianity Rediscovered*, 156.

20. Sanneh, in *Christianity Rediscovered*, 156.

Eventually the Maasai came to recognize Jesus as Lord, even penning their own Maasai Tanzania Creed, which I have included here.

> We believe in the one High God, who out of love created the beautiful world and everything good in it. He created man and wanted man to be happy in the world. God loves the world and every nation and tribe on the earth. We have known this High God in the darkness, and now we know him in the light. God promised in the book of his word, the Bible, that he would save the world and all the nations and tribes.
>
> We believe that God made good his promise by sending his son, Jesus Christ, a man in the flesh, a Jew by tribe, born poor in a little village, who left his home and was always on safari doing good, curing people by the power of God, teaching about God and man, showing that the meaning of religion is love. He was rejected by his people, tortured, and nailed hands and feet to a cross, and died. He lay buried in the grave, but the hyenas did not touch him, and on the third day, he rose from the grave. He ascended to the skies. He is the Lord.
>
> We believe that all our sins are forgiven through him. All who have faith in him must be sorry for their sins, be baptized in the Holy Spirit of God, live the rules of love and share the bread together in love, to announce the good news to others until Jesus comes again. We are waiting for him. He is alive. He lives. This we believe. Amen.[21]

By the end of his work in Maasai, Father Donovan came to believe that he had rediscovered Christianity. And when he returned to the United States, he said he had become something of a foreigner to US understandings of Christianity. His own sister—who nursed him to his death in 2000—wrote the following: "He worked in Africa from 1955 to 1973, and the experience changed him forever. His struggle to honestly present the Christian gospel to people of a different culture caused him to wrestle with his own faith and everything that he had taken for granted about creation, the incarnation, Jesus Christ, the church, priesthood, the sacraments, the Holy Spirit. That struggle never ended."[22] It is unnerving to think of having to rediscover Christianity. However, that is part of the risk. That is why true interreligious dialogue requires courage.

In interreligious dialogue, we not only disrupt the other, but we have the potential to disrupt our own thoughts and our most sacred and treasured

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21. For the creed, see Sanneh, in *Christianity Rediscovered*, 148. Sanneh refers to the creed as "majestic" on page 158.

22. Nora Koren, in Sanneh, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 167.

convictions. This happened, both to Lamin Sanneh and to Father Donovan. Sanneh actually converted from Islam to Protestantism, and finally to Roman Catholicism. Donovan's interreligious activities led him to a place of struggling within himself over the orthodoxy of his own beliefs.

Conclusion: The Limits of Dialogue

I want to close this chapter by discussing my experience while lecturing at the World Council of Churches (WCC) 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in August 2022. After my lecture—on the topic of interreligious dialogue—there was time for questions. Students lined up to comment on the lecture.

During that period of questions and answers, I received questions from students from Nigeria, India, Lebanon, Egypt, and Cameroon. Each of them shared stories about their own context, and how they could not conduct interreligious dialogue because the interactions with (mainly) Islam were overly hostile. They explained that the kind of interreligious dialogue that I was advocating was not possible. Rather, they described their own context as one of survival.

Each of them had a story illustrating just how difficult dialogue is in a context where the potential for violence is a present reality.

- In northern Nigeria, there are constant kidnappings. The distrust between Christianity and Islam is very pronounced in that region of Africa. There was also a national election in Nigeria in 2023 that escalated tensions.

- In India, the Hindutva movement is severely curtailing Christian work, and the freedom that Christians have enjoyed in the past has been stifled dramatically.

- A Lebanese student spoke up, saying that Lebanon is a nation in crisis, and the Christian situation is always becoming grimmer, causing many to emigrate to Western countries. A nation that was the pride of the Middle East a few generations ago is now a nation on the brink of failed state status.

- One Christian student from Cameroon said he has three sisters who married into Muslim families due to his family's profound poverty. After the marriages they severed all ties with their Christian families. This caused resentment, but the family was unable to support them financially, leaving them no choice but to have the girls marry into Muslim families.

- An Egyptian student spoke up, explaining that Christians live in fear of terrorism in Egypt. She then became emotional and refused to talk any

more. She said, "I refuse to speak during this session. I am simply too upset. The situation of Islam and Christianity is too difficult for me to talk about."

Listening to these stories and these perspectives left me wondering about the limits of interreligious dialogue, especially in a context where Christianity is a minority, and potentially at risk of violence.

Interreligious dialogue can thrive in a context of openness, mutual respect, and with a high level of trust. But my experience at the WCC gathering in Karlsruhe in 2022 taught me that not everyone lives in a safe socio-political context wherein they can conduct interfaith dialogue without the fear of molestation. Where there is a severe lack of trust, the dialogue takes on a character that is vastly different from the interreligious dialogues that I have been involved with in Western Europe, North America, and various other more pluralistic nations.

When there is the threat of persecution or violence, interreligious dialogue obviously takes on a different character—it becomes, potentially, a context of fear. What if someone says something during dialogue that is interpreted as being provocative or intentionally harmful? Do the laws of the nation allow for interlocutors to openly speak their minds—even if it might contradict the dictates of the local dominant faith?

I sensed high levels of frustration from people in the crowd that day in Karlsruhe. I actually felt naïve, as interreligious dialogue in the Western world is generally a safe activity that takes place in a context of warmth and friendship. Nobody fears for their personal well-being during interreligious dialogue. Typically, when Christians are in the majority, there is no reason to fear. But in contexts where Christianity is either in the minority or where Christians have historically been persecuted, then the dialogue will inevitably play out differently than in the West.

My thoughts went back to Lamin Sanneh—who advocated for robust dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Sanneh himself was essentially "dialogued" into becoming a Christian. I don't know how exactly he would envision the Muslim-Christian dialogue in a context such as Lebanon, Egypt, or Hindutva India. When that Egyptian student became so upset that she couldn't speak anymore, I questioned whether she silenced herself because of a passion that she couldn't contain, or a primal fear that what she might say could potentially reverberate to threaten herself or her family.

Father Donovan's perspectives were drastically changed after spending so many years with the Maasai. He was a lone Christian, who effectively evangelized a group of people from a position of trust and true spiritual searching, both from

his perspective as well as the perspectives of the Maasai—who crafted Christianity afresh, from their own worldview, and with their own agency.

In the cases of Lamin Sanneh and Father Donovan, interreligious dialogue is a conversation that requires mutual respect, an open mind, and a willingness to empathize with the other. However, my experience at the 2022 WCC gathering—listening to young people vent their concerns and frustrations—made me question the practicality of having interreligious dialogue in a context where trust has been destroyed. I now question the potential and viability of interreligious dialogue when violent repercussions are possible. I am left to wonder about the limits of interreligious dialogue, especially in places where Christianity is either a small minority, or where, historically, Christians have been persecuted.

Chapter 8

Body Politics:
Uprooting Systems and Unsettling Practices that Degrade Bodies

HyeRan Kim-Cragg

Preface

What do we miss when we cannot gather together in person? This question points to the heart of the matter of this chapter: body politics.

We have all suffered from not being able to come together physically during the COVID-19 global pandemic for most of two years during 2020–2022. We have not been able to sing and break bread and share wine together during our worship services for many months. Borders have been closed and are still closed in some regions. Our own bodies and our own breath have been under intense scrutiny, regarded suspiciously as potentially putting others in danger. Of course, such caution is well-warranted when dealing with a severe and contagious respiratory virus. It is the responsible thing to wear masks and keep physical distance so not infect others. Theological discourse on body politics today needs to reflect on COVID-19 and the global post-pandemic reality.

A Note on *Body* in Body Politics

Let us begin by probing the very notion of *body*. What do we mean by *body* when we discuss body politics? For one thing, the very physical body is underscored

when we speak of body in this discussion. It is the flesh-ness, the sweat, the blood, the warmth, and the movement that matters in the theological discourse of body politics. The materiality of life for abundance and vitality as much as its aging, its pain and dying is at the heart of body politics.

At the same time, however, when we refer to *body* in body politics, it goes beyond the physicality of body, for it inevitably exposes multiple and intersectional, as well as invisible identities that everybody carries. That is why we need to discern structural mechanisms of discrimination and the systematic exclusion of bodies based on such things as race, gender, ethnicity, ability, age, class, and sexuality. This discernment requires a nuanced articulation.

In this article, we will discuss three issues that are intersectional matters in body politics: gender (female body), disability, and race.

Women and Body Politics

Let us first examine the controversy over the ordination of women as a subject matter of body politics. For this, we employ a case study approach as an empirical method of doing practical theology—despite the power and the danger of using a single case study.[1] I will share some things about my background to contextualize my thoughts. First, The United Church of Canada has been my church home since moving to Canada. The United Church has been inspirational for my own vocational and professional development. This denomination began to ordain women in 1936, many decades earlier than most denominations around the world. The first woman to be ordained was Lydia Gruchy.[2] Currently, there are equal numbers of women and men serving as ordained ministers in the United Church of Canada, though it must be said that the wealthiest and biggest congregations are served by white male ministers. Thus, equity between male and female is not fully lived out, and gender-based discrimination persists.

Second, I grew up in Korea. I am proud to call the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) my home denomination. In the PROK, the first woman was ordained in 1976. It was the first Presbyterian denomination in Korea to ordain women. And it was the second denomination in all of Korea, after the

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1. See Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, "The Power and Danger of a Single Case Study in Practical Theological Research," in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, ed. Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 33–59; Richard Osmer, "Empirical Practical Theology," in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, ed. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon Mikoski (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2014), 61–77.

2. Patricia Wotton, *With Love, Lydia: The Story of Canada's First Woman Ordained Minister* (Winnipeg: Patricia Wotton, 2012).

Methodist Church. The first woman ordained in the PROK was Jeong-Shin Yang. Not only was she a woman, she was also legally blind. God led me to the very church which Rev. Yang had founded in 1977. I was a member there while growing up. Rev. Yang embodied what it means to be an ordained woman minister and a public leader living with a disability.[3]

While I have been enormously blessed to witness amazing leadership by ordained women in both Korea and Canada, I am keenly aware that many denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and many Protestant denominations in the world, have yet to officially ordain women.

Two decades ago, an event in Korea brought the issue of women's ordination in the Korean church into focus. The former moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Korea, Rev. Taeduk Yim, publicly opposed the ordination of women in a sermon delivered in 2003.[4] One of the reasons he gave for why women should not be ordained was menstruation. In a sermon preached that year, he asked, "How dare a woman wearing a diaper stand in the pulpit?"[5] Such a misogynist remark is not simply a sad example of ignorance. It is a case study in misogyny that calls for a critical theological reflection.

Where did such misogyny come from? Rev. Yim is not alone in his fear of women's menstruation, despite the fact a woman's monthly bleeding signals the potential for new life: a reminder that we all came from our mother's womb. There are at least three sources for such an attitude that Christians need to wrestle with. First, there is a biblical tradition behind this menstruation phobia and sexist fear.[6] In Leviticus, any discharges from the body—whether women's blood, male sperm, or pus due to skin disease—are regarded as unclean and must be properly dealt with by actions including segregation. This view was in practice in part because of the potentially contagious nature of such discharges as in the case of leprosy. The regulations were there to protect the community. Yet this biblical reference, taken literally, was often used as a reason to discriminate against and exclude women and people with disabilities or certain physical conditions. The so-called "purity" code in the Bible (Lev. 17–26) states that ritual impurity could

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3. Rev. Yang's autobiography was published in Korean and then translated by Donita Dyer as Jung Shin Yang, *Bright Promise: The Phenomenal Story of the Korean "Helen Keller"* (Seoul: Uhmoonkak, 1983).

4. Soon Yim Lee (Executive Secretary of Korean Association of Women Theologians), "Women Can't Be Pastors?" *Women News,* 12 May 2005, https://www.womennews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=20986.

5. Baek Yonn Huh, "'Women Can't Be Pastors' . . . Struggle against Women in the Church," *Seoul News,* 3 September 2020, https://www.seoul.co.kr/news/newsView.php?id=20200904020005.

6. HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Interdependence: A Postcolonial Feminist Practical Theology* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2018), 34–55.

be incurred through disease, contact with a corpse, bodily discharges (including but not confined to menstruation), and sexual activity.[7]

Second, the source of misogynist and sexist thinking, such as that displayed by Rev. Yim, can be traced back to an ancient and tenacious dualism that makes a stark, prejudiced distinction between women and men, body and mind, profane and sacred, private and public.[8] As long as we follow this dualism and the false dichotomy, women cannot be associated with mind, sacred, and public. They are limited to the categories of body, profane, and private (read *domestic*). This dualistic worldview explicitly teaches and implicitly signals that woman's bodily matters, whether menstruation, pregnancy, giving birth, or breastfeeding, are barriers to public religious leadership.

Finally, the reference about the diapers in Rev. Yim's troubling remark must be interrogated. Who wears diapers and what is wrong with wearing them? This is more than a fear and hatred of women. This condescending remark also suggests that ageism and ableism are at play. Diapers are associated with infants and toddlers, but also with elderly people and those who have physical conditions that result in incontinence.

You may wonder what the reaction was to Rev. Yim's 2003 sermon. There were huge protests and a public outcry in Korea. Thirty-one different Christian women's organizations made counter-statements, demanding his resignation and apologies. Many others, including professors in various seminaries and church leaders from various churches, also held him accountable. The denomination stripped him of his role as moderator.[9] This is an encouraging sign and clear evidence that the divine Spirit works through human collective voices raised against gender-based violence and injustice. God uses our bodies to reveal God's love and to remove barriers.

Disability in Body Politics

The story of the first ordained woman in the PROK alludes to the need for intersectional analysis between gender and disability, as Rev. Yang was both a woman and blind. The misogynist sermon of Rev. Yim also reveals a need to examine disability and health conditions when we discuss the body politic. It is unfortunate that many churches still disallow people with physical disability from ordination. What would

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7. Mary Ann Beavis and HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *What Does the Bible Say? A Critical Conversation with Popular Culture in a Biblically Illiterate World* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017), 132.

8. Kim-Cragg, *Interdependence*, 128–49.

9. "Civil and Women's Groups Filed a Complaint with the Human Rights Commission Regarding Rev. Lim Tae-deuk's Issue," News and Joy, 3 December 2003, https://www.newsnjoy.or.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=6634.

be the theological and biblical basis for that? One such biblical reference is found in Leviticus 21:17–20, where those with particular physical conditions such as the "blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a blemish in his eyes or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles" shall be forbidden from presenting the burnt offering before God. This was often interpreted such that disabled people could not become ordained, as their role would involve collecting and blessing the offering. These physical conditions are still considered by some to be a mark of uncleanliness. It is feared that their presence would profane sanctuaries as it was once feared they would taint the holy temple. This is a theological issue in addition to an ethical one. The question that Rabbi Harold Kushner asked is valid here: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Is it because God cursed them? Or is it because God works through the illness to show God's glory? Many biblical stories imply that people have disabilities because God's mighty works can be revealed in and through them. Other stories indicate that disability or illness is used as a test of faith and an opportunity to overcome their challenges.[10]

Dale Martin argues that in the biblical world, the world of the ancient Mediterranean, the notions of the body and pollution were related to concepts of disease.[11] People who were associated with a contagious disease were viewed as a threat to the community, and rightly so. To take measures to stop a disease from spreading is a responsible thing to do. This responsibility is something that the pandemic brought to the forefront. This is why cleansing and purifying rituals were so important. Cleansing acts depended on publicly recognized authorities, such as the priests in the community.

In that ancient world, most people believed that disease and disability were caused and controlled by God. That was the view of the Greco-Roman world as well. What this meant was that those who were diseased were regarded as cursed by god and stigmatized accordingly. It was the divine power that was imparted to the priest that enabled him to cleanse and perform purifying rituals. It was widely assumed that people with diseases needed spiritual cleansing as well as physical healing. However, Martin cautions that we should not think simplistically that all human bodies with disease are "defiled by a god." He showcases the ambivalent roles of a god who causes the disease and heals it as he argues that the gods can assume benevolent roles in healing disease, citing the Hippocratic author of the book *The Sacred Disease* in his *Corinthian Body*.[12]

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10. Kathy Black, *Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 23–33.

11. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 139.

12. Martin, *Corinthian Body,* 154.

Despite the ambivalent view of God as a being both benevolent and punitive, it is certainly not fair to assume that every disease is a punishment and a curse. However, it is fair to assume that certain bodies have been oppressed, systematically demonized, and culturally scapegoated. And this is the case for women's bodies and racialized bodies due to the fear and the hatred of these bodies.

We may conclude, then, that the fear and the hatred of the racialized and that of the feminized result in social ills. It is the social gaze at them that creates the low self-esteem and causes the internalized racism/sexism. That is why some women who are racialized are lured by ads for skin-whitening and hair-straightening products. That is why some women of heavier than average weight are scrutinized and gazed upon with contempt. That is also why some girls and women who are in their teens refuse to eat because being thin is considered to be more beautiful and more desirable. Some of them end up dying by suicide or self-harm because they are pressured to hate their own bodies. Sarah Nutter, a professor of counselling at the University of Victoria, in Canada, researches weight stigma and eating disorders and how the so-called fatphobia is a health issue: it is, in fact, a life and death matter for many young people, especially young women and racialized people. It leads to low self-esteem, amounting to self-hatred.[13] When one cannot love one's own body, one cannot love God and neighbours well and fully. We have already raised a need to look at body politics in intersectional ways, which means viewing it from different identities and inter-relatable ways, whether these identities are based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, language, ability, or age.[14]

We as the collective body of Christ must ensure that these forms of oppression are removed. And this is hard work. We need some encouragement from near and far, from our current location and from the past. Here we can take encouragement from the Apostle Paul when he addresses this message to the church at Corinth:

> (14) Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. . . . (22) The members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, (23) and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, (24) whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, (25) that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same

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13. Sarah Nutter, Shelly Russell-Mayhew, and Jessica F. Saunders, "Towards a Sociocultural Model of Weight Stigma," *Eating and Weight Disorders—Studies on Anorexia, Bulimia and Obesity* 26 (2021): 999–1005, https://doi.org/10.1007/s40519-020-00931-6.

14. Anne McGuire and Kelly Fritsch, "Fashioning the Normal Body," in *Power and Everyday Practices,* 2nd ed. ed., Deborah Brock et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 79–99.

care for one another. (26) If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.
—1 Corinthians 12:14, 22–26

Verses 22–23 are worthy of special attention. Here Paul encourages us to put those labelled by society and the dominant culture in the place of the weaker, less honourable and less respected body parts. He empowers us to understand them as the ones that deserve honour and respect in God's sight, from the faith rooted in the love and grace of Jesus Christ and through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.[15] Ultimately, honouring our body is a core Christian practice that requires us to look at ourselves, at each other, and at the world through the lens of Jesus' wounded but resurrected body.[16]

Race in Body Politics

Gender, especially with regard to the condition of the female body and women's roles in public leadership, is a vector of oppression that intersects with discrimination against certain bodies due to disability and disease. This interlocking oppression is visible in the context of public and liturgical (ritual of cleansing) leadership. In this section, let us continue to address body politics on race in relation to the ordination with another case study.

Wilbur Howard was the first (and, to date, only) Black person to become the moderator of the United Church of Canada. He was elected to this role in 1974. He graduated from Emmanuel College in 1941. He was the school's first Black graduate. He was 29 years old at the time. Following graduation, Rev. Howard was unable to find a church that would call him to be their minister despite the national shortage of ministers. In fact, he was not called to a congregation until 1965. He was 53 when he received the call. He waited for his call to ministry for 24 years.[17] His Black body became a barrier to public leadership in the church. Here Blackness as a category of race is not an ontological marker but a social and historical construct.[18]

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15. Martin, "The Body, Disease, and Pollution," in *Corinthian Body*, chap. 6, 139–62.

16. Stephanie Paulsell, "Honoring the Body," in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 27.

17. Adam Kilner, "Wilbur Howard: A Ministry of Eloquent Silence," *Touchstone 29*, no. 1 (January 2011): 49–56; Mugoli Samba, "Wilbur Howard and the White Church," Broadview, 2 November 2018, https://broadview.org/the-first-black-moderator-of-the-united-church-faced-racism-that-still-resonates-today/.

18. Phillis Isabella Sheppard, "Raced Bodies: Portraying Bodies, Reifying Racism," in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, ed. Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 220.

However, when we look at the United Church of Canada, the ordination of the first Black woman minister came even later than 1965. It was not until the 1980s that the first Black woman was ordained—and there are still only a handful of Black women who are ordained ministers in the denomination.

These examples call for another intersectional analysis regarding how gender and race impact Black women leaders in church. This is most obvious when we engage with the problem of representation and objectification of Black women's bodies. Shawn Copeland, a Catholic womanist systematic theologian, claims that the colonization of Black women's bodies began in slavery.[19] Slavery as a systemic policy was designed and maintained because of a greedy, capitalist desire of European colonial people in power to accumulate wealth by conquering land and controlling Black and racialized bodies. Trans-Atlantic enslavement began with Portuguese and Spanish colonial imperial regimes and their effort to conquer the so-called New World, the Americas. The British Empire colonized India and brought Indians to the Caribbean colonies as indentured labourers, the ancestors of today's West Indians. Some were also taken to South Africa and other regions.

Here we can see clearly how colonialism and slavery went hand in hand. Not only does this systematic intertwined oppression astutely encapsulate the issues that are so critical to thinking about Black women's bodies in the context of colonialism and chattel enslavement, but it also brilliantly exposes how Black and other colonized bodies within the same ethnic and racialized groups are divided and forced to oppress one over the other. The so-called colonial "divide and conquer" logic is very effective. The cases of the Rwanda genocide and the Kosovo ethnic religious conflicts show that in war situations and acts of ethnic cleansing, a hierarchy of one ethnic group over the other is established and a colonial domination continues in the postcolonial era. We are painfully aware that in the current war between Russia and Ukraine, as well as wars in other places, the most marginalized bodies—innocent children, elderly persons, and women—are the most impacted by these senseless and greedy wars and that some are caught in between in the violence of divide and conquer.

Citing the brilliant and powerful womanist scholars Kelly Brown Douglas, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks, Copeland painfully discloses how Black women's bodies have been targeted for Black male rage; they have become a site for domination and demonization, brutalization and abuse. Here it may be worth noting the work of two womanist theologians, Katie Cannon and Jacquelyn Grant. They successfully show the interlocking triple oppressions of sexism, racism, and classism,

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19. Shawn M. Copeland, "Body, Representation and Black Religious Discourse," in *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse*, ed. Laura Donaldson and Kwok Pui-Lan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 180–98.

where poor Black women are exploited in multilayered ways.[20] We know that this is not unique to Black communities because we have heard that femicide, the killing of women, is rampant in Latin America. There is a serious issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. And violence against women in general and domestic violence against women in particular have increased recently, especially during the pandemic. Stories of sexual assault committed by priests against both male and female children in the Indian residential schools in Canada and in the US are appalling but not surprising. Sexual abuse by Catholic priests is happening all over the world and has been happening for a long time. All these outrageous, sinful wrongdoings and evil crimes are core matters that must be addressed when we do the theology of the flesh and blood, body politics. To confess these sins and stop these crimes at once is a theological imperative. It takes genuine repentance and conversion, a turning to God.

Here we need to make an interlocking connection between colonialism, capitalism, and Christianity, as we discuss and examine body politics with attention to female Black and racialized bodies.

When we talk about body politics, it clearly points to the sweat, the blood, and the painful exploitation of many Black and Brown people whose bodies have been used to obtain free labour for European nations and their colonial expansion. To justify such inhumane and horrific crimes, they had to create a myth, an ideology that these racialized bodies were closer to animals than human, deprived of morality and decency. In many cases, Black female bodies were used to "breed" babies who would grow up enslaved, a lucrative business for white men's economic gain. Black women not only produced children, many of them nursed white babies as well. Yet, these women's bodily acts, giving birth and breastfeeding, are considered insignificant and taken for granted. Their raced bodies are misrepresented, ignored, or exploited.

Not only were these racial myths and hierarchies created and acted upon, but the idea of Christian supremacy was also implemented. When the so-called European merchant ships sailed to conquer the land, they brought along missionaries and theologians to convert the colonized to Christianity. At the same time there were serious debates among the cardinals and popes in the Vatican as to whether they wanted to promote these baptisms—because they were not sure if these people had souls, and without souls, they were not quite human.

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20. Katie Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1988), 2; Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 63, 82.

Body Politics and Preaching

Arguably, as one of the oldest and most embodied Christian practices, preaching involves the preacher's body, voice, gestures, posture, and emotions, as well as intellect.[21] Equally important, preaching involves the body of Christ, the gathered body, the responses of the congregation, the bodily participation of spoken response, clapping hands, swaying bodies, or quiet but attentive postures of listening and watching, witnessing to the preaching act.

     For Copeland, the goal of preaching is clear: it is to heal and to nourish imagination toward the decolonization of bodies. Evans Crawford says that call and response preaching is deeply rooted in African American spirituality.[22] Call and response, an integrative and non-dichotomic homiletical act, is deeply communal and equally decolonial if the logic of divide and conquer is the colonial language. Call and response blurs the line between clergy and laity. The gap between the pulpit and the pew is reduced when the preacher in the pulpit relies on the response of the congregation in the pew. For Teresa Fry Brown and the late Dale Andrews, two respected Black preachers, this dialogical practice points to "the strategic ways in which Black women engage physical spaces, institutional enclaves, homiletic methods, and daily experience in the process of delivering a powerful, necessary expression of sacred truths."[23] The key to preaching, proclaiming the gospel, is to affirm that all bodies, especially suppressed, and excluded bodies are beautiful, sacramental, whole, and holy.[24]

Conclusion

We have examined how body politics is operative in Christian churches today as a barrier against gendered, racialized, and disabled bodies who seek to serve as ordained and/or public ministry leaders. Gender, disability, and race are the sites of body politics. Raised here have been the lived experiences of many whose bodies reveal visible signs of the broken body of Christ. Yet we are called to repent and heal the body of Christ as the model of the community for each other and for the

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21. See Thomas Long and Nora Tisdale, eds., *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

22. Evans Crawford (with Thomas Troeger), T*he Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 55-56.

23. Dale Andrews, "African American Practical Theology," in Cahalan and Mikoski, *Field of Practical Theology*, 17.

24. HyeRan Kim-Cragg, "Probing the Pulpit: Postcolonial Feminist Perspectives," *Liturgy* 34, no. 2 (2019): 22–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2019.1604028.

world, bringing the reign of God on earth here and now. As a way to further advance theological and ecclesial discourse on body politics, it is worth affirming how unique each physical body is. Yet, it is equally critical to note that our bodies, especially non-normative bodies, have been put on display, questioned, challenged, violated, and controlled by others who conform to a certain shape, colour, and size. It is important to recognize that some bodies are battered, raped, dismissed, and exploited.

Furthermore, our horizon of body politics should go beyond the individual body to the denominational and ecclesial level with regard to ordination and public leadership from the perspective of gender and race. Ask yourself, Does your denomination ordain women? If so, do you know who was the first ordained woman? When was that? If your church is not yet ordaining women, ask why that is so. What theological, biblical, and cultural biases prevent your church from doing so? And what are you going to do about this, as God in Christ calls us to address this barrier? If your church is predominantly white, do you know who was the first Black minister? Do you have a story similar to that of Wilbur Howard? If you are from Africa, Asia, Central or South America, or the Pacific regions, it may be helpful to think of the ministers who had to face barriers to ministry due to their different skin colour, race, and ethnicity.

We have underscored the importance of preaching in body politics. Ask yourself, What other Christian practices should we cultivate, in light of the biblical assertions, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14) and made "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27).

Finally, let us remember the precept recorded in the Hebrew scriptures, which Jesus reframed before he told the parable of the good Samaritan, "You shall love Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself" (Deut. 6:5; Luke 10:27). The love of God and neighbour is inseparably connected to the love of oneself. If you do not love who you are, it is hard to know how to love others. Here self-love is neither a cosy romantic feeling nor a self-centred indulgence, but rather the power to affirm one's dignity and one's inherent goodness given to us by the creator God. Love is the oxygen that circulates through the blood of life. It is essential to our own lives and to the life of our community. The scripture text highlights the need for the body politic to celebrate the worth and dignity of all and to recognize the unique gifts that need to be shared for the sake of wholeness. This commitment uproots systems that degrade bodies. No matter how different our bodies are from others, they deserve equal respect. After all, God created all of us, along with our bodies, and said we are very good!

Chapter 9

"Body Politics" from Inhibiting to Inhabiting:
Intersecting Discourses in a Confession of Creatureliness

Matthew Ryan Robinson

Introduction

The following essay is divided into two parts, one exploring an inhibiting and the other witnessing to an inhabiting. In the first part, I reflect, in broad strokes, on the term *body politics* as one of the key profile topics engaged with during the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2022 summer course.[1] More specifically, I wish to consider how our understanding of body politics might be informed by awareness of living in a functionally differentiated global society, thickened by insights from intersectionality theory and challenged by discourse analysis. These lenses can help Christian theologians and Christian faith leaders to cultivate a critical attention to hard, soft, and sinister forms of marginalization and oppression

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1. I would like to express my gratitude to the organizers of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute for this opportunity to reflect on Prof. HyeRan Kim-Cragg's paper. Furthermore, I want to express my gratitude to Prof. HyeRan Kim-Cragg herself for her prophetic diagnosis of the ways various bodies are treated both in society and in Christian communities around the world and for her pastoral prescriptions for treatments and therapies.

that *inhibit* the well-being of individuals and communities in sometimes explicit, sometimes subtle, and in any case profound ways. In the second part, I offer a pastoral "parole" for a body politics of *inhabiting*—of living into—"creatureliness," as an orientation toward cultivating just interdependencies. To this end, I begin by presenting the body of the church as the corporate bearer of the image of God. I then invite us to consider "creatureliness" as a category that witnesses to a different politics conducted in mutual acknowledgment of human belonging to one another and the common pursuit of well-being.

Part One—Inhibiting

Confessing original sins, cultivating original righteousness

As much as I love reading the work of Augustine of Hippo, I cannot agree with him on his understanding of original sin (or at least not with how he has been predominantly read on this point). He writes in his *Confessions*, "Who is there to remind me of the sin of my infancy (for sin there was: no one is free from sin in your sight, not even an infant whose span of earthly life is but a single day)?"[2] In an approach that is rather more fruitful for reflection, social analysis, and practice, I understand the Christian concept of original sin to refer not to a metaphysical mark, inherited from Adam in the garden of paradise and branded onto the soul of every human person, but to the sinful states, the sinful conditions, the sinful structural situations into which we are originally born. Friedrich Schleiermacher's theology of sin is instructive in this regard, when he describes original sin as "in each the work of all and in all the work of each."[3]

In this light, it is important to confess my positionality to the reader, especially—though certainly not only—given the topic of body politics, which this essay engages. To speak of my positionality is to refer to the social identity discourses that overlap and intersect in my body and my person: I am a white, straight, middle-class male, born and raised in the USA. These attributes position me in certain social groupings that, in turn, position me as an individual in relation to society as a whole. I did not do anything at birth to place myself in these conditions, any more than anyone else does. And yet I do participate in societal structures—hard

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2. Saint Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions: With an Introduction and Contemporary Criticism*, ed. David Vincent Maconi S.J., trans. Maria Boulding O.S.B., Ignatius Critical Editions (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 12.

3. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, 1st ed., ed. and trans. Terrence Tice, Catherine Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), Sects. 71, 428.

and soft, formal and informal—ranging from laws to norms and institutions to habits that stoke and sustain those inherited evils. These are my original sins.

As a white, straight, middle-class male born and raised in the USA, I have enjoyed the benefits of being seen by society throughout my life as "normal," "reliable," "serious," "responsible," "hard-working," a "leader," "wealthy," "moral," "law-abiding," "unsuspicious," "meritorious" and so on and so forth. Vast numbers of my black and brown, queer, economically disadvantaged, and differently abled siblings in the human family have had to struggle under the weight of a different set of labels for their whole lives. To a significant extent, the positive forms of social inclusion that I enjoy have come about by means of the very same self-replicating socio-economic and political processes that exclude so many others: colonization, slavery, selective education, and political advancement for elites.

This confession of original sins prompts further reflection: What might an original righteousness have looked like or possibly look like in the kingdom of God? What would it mean for Christians to organize themselves as the people of God in ways that cultivate the pursuit of, or at the very least, give witness to such a body politic? Before these questions can be addressed, a more textured understanding of the meaning and significance of my confession will be helpful.

Insights from intersectionality theory, the analysis of social differentiation, and discourse analysis

What is meant by *politics* in the term *body politics*? There is a politics of everything today: populist politics, the politics of race, departmental politics, the politics of slavery and caste, the politics of gender, and of course—one that those who move in church circles are all too familiar with—church politics. As Timothy Fitzgerald has argued in his critique of the hypostatization of discourses into existing social realities, the current uses of the term *politics* are so ubiquitous as to render the meaning of the term itself deeply political: that is, its meaning depends greatly on who controls the conversation.[4] How can we—how ought we—to give any definitive meaning to the term?

In her contribution to this volume HyeRan Kim-Cragg, helpfully reads the term *politics* in relation to theology and the Christian churches through the lens of intersectionality theory. As a theoretical lens, the term *intersectionality* has its roots in Black feminist theory and action, being first developed by Kimberlé

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4. Timothy Fitzgerald, "Japan, Religion, History, Nation," *Religions* 13, no. 6 (2022): 490, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13060490. See also Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Crenshaw in the early 1990s and used by many others since then.[5] The basic insight is both profound and simple, and in our day and age, we are well-acquainted with the phenomena it serves to describe: Individuals participate in multiple social contexts, which in a way define their experience, their identity or understanding of themselves, the opportunities that are afforded them, and even the courses of action that are believed to be or are in fact possible. It is important to emphasize that the social contexts in which an individual lives and moves do not just define their self-perception: The social webs into which we are woven demarcate our possibilities for being.

There is also an important point to be made here about participation in social functional systems. Sociologists from Émile Durkheim and Georg Simmel to Niklas Luhmann and Rudolf Stichweh have imagined society as being organized into systems like the legal system, educational system, market and labour systems, and so on.[6] These systems serve, among other things, to organize societal operations by means of institutional and bureaucratic but also creative rationalizations and routinization. How individuals participate in those systems directly corresponds to what kind of opportunities they have. In order to participate in markets, money or commodities are needed. In education, school placements and leaving certificates are needed. In a state, one must have a legal status that designates one as an official member. If one does not participate in the systems by which a society functions—if one has no passport or residence papers, no educational degrees, no money—then one does not even exist as far as that system is concerned. When these statuses intersect and overlap, the effects compound. With no passport, no diploma, *and* no money, one is defined as stateless, regarded as ignorant, and left impoverished.

Perhaps the most important point for present purposes is that this intersectionality of participation can place a person in a position of safety and strength or in a position of profound vulnerability. Intersectionality theory draws attention to the ways that participation in social-functional systems intersects the lives of

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5. Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1, art. 8, https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/faculty_scholarship /3007; see also Brittney Cooper, "Intersectionality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10 .1093/oxfordhb/9780199328581.013.20.

6. See Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press, 2014); Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. John Bednarz Jr, with Dirk Baecker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Georg Simmel, *Soziologie: Untersuchungen Über Die Formen Der Vergesellschaftung* (Duncker an Humblot, 2017 [1908]); Rudolf Stichweh, *Inklusion und Exklusion: Studien zur Gesellschaftstheorie* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2005).

individuals and groups. Theories of functional differentiation can, in turn, be helpful for drawing attention to a variety of forms of social inclusion and exclusion.[7]

But this is not all. Bodies do not simply participate in the social systems by which societies functionally operate. Just as importantly, if not more so, bodies also participate in what we might describe as *social identity politics*. I refer here to the large, complicated, extremely powerful webs of associations, meanings, and value judgments that words can carry, that are encoded into social institutions (like those already mentioned of law, education, and markets), and that are then activated when applied to an individual or community. For example, when a person is racialized as white, black, coloured, or brown. When a person is gendered as feminine, manly, diverse, or queer. When a person is en-abled or dis-abled as "special" or accommodated. When a person is categorized as a child, elderly, or mid-life. When a person is classified as wealthy, middle class, or impoverished. When a person is religiously coded as Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, or non-religious. I do not wish to imply that all such descriptions are categorically unjust. The point, rather, is this: The social discourses that create these "identities" form in interaction with functional systems and are often so hegemonic as to be unnoticeable. In this process, norms of inclusion and exclusion are instilled, along with societal attitudes and action toward people in accordance with the ways they are labelled. The outcome is the regulating—policing, even—of participation in the functional social systems. As one's body is politicized in these ways, as the political and the social interact at the site of individual and group identity, one correspondingly experiences inclusion or exclusion in society's systems.

One more point needs to be made, if only for the purpose of setting up the constructive proposal laid out in part two of this essay. Approaching *politics* in the way implied by the term *body politics* is a textbook example of what Michel Foucault described as a practice of analyzing discourses.[8] Foucault drew attention to the ways that social power can be concentrated into dominant social institutions that represent seemingly obvious goods. Hospitals and medicine represent not only health but also science and rationality. Prisons represent not only public

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7. I wonder if there might not be, in fact, significant potential analytic synergy in combining perspectives from intersectionality theory with theories of the functional differentiation of society, not least in terms of the ways it would likely reveal economic factors exacerbating the racist, sexist, and colonial forms of domination. However, this comment can for present purposes serve no more than as a signal of future research interests.

8. For the development of Foucault's thinking on discourse, the canonical works to consult are Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

security but the self-enforcing legitimacy of the law. Sexual heteronormativity represents not only ethical values but the nuclear, child-bearing family unit as the basis of social stability. These examples of "discourses" illustrate a kind of surveillance dynamic by which the society enforces the values and norms of the power-holding dominant groups.

Important here is that in Foucault's account of the agency of the excluded, it is not clear that socially marginalized persons and groups *can* achieve agency by accepting the terms of the powerful. That is, one gains the foothold needed for leveraging resistance only by means of learning, practicing, and disciplining oneself in the social identity discourses that a given society or set of social institutions accepts as legitimate. That's worth worrying about.

Homi Bhabha has analyzed a similar tendency in his critical assessment of what he calls "mimicry," that is, the tendency of colonized groups who wish to unseat the colonizer nevertheless to mimic the colonizer's practices and simply apply them to another group over which they can exercise control. In this way, the structures of colonization and oppression are not overthrown but reproduced.[9] Paulo Freire highlighted this concern in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, critiquing strategies of generosity and benevolence in development for presupposing the ongoing legitimacy of the concentrations of power that make structures of "generosity" possible.[10]

Leaving the finer details of Foucault's analysis to the Foucauldian connoisseur, we can and should still ask: Is there any getting outside the discursive politics of social identity? Is being able to speak and be heard about finding recognition and legitimacy in those discourses? Can marginalized groups engage society only by inhabiting the very discourses that inhibit inclusion and opportunity and well-being?

To return to the language of body politics which set the course for this discussion, I will reformulate these questions in the following way: Are bodies intersections of political discourses all the way down, or might there be something about bodies that, while always social, is more than politics? Do we want to go with Foucault and say everything is power, and thus politics?—that the person and the political are co-terminus? If not, then what kinds of (inter-)subjectivity, what kinds of relationships, might be able to resist unjust outcomes of intersectional experience without slipping into the very grooves that determine the course of those whom they implicate perpetually around the peripheries of political participation and thereby inhibit their flourishing?

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9. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

10. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary edition, with an Introduction by Donald Macedo (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 60.

In part two of this essay, as a first sketch of an answer to these questions, I will exchange my critical-social lens for a more pastoral posture and propose a different politics of the body, one that recognizes and affirms intersections and interdependencies, but that seeks to cultivate these in the just, life-giving mode of what I shall call "creatureliness."

Part Two—Inhabiting

Confessing brokenness, cultivating healing

One significant contribution to theological inquiry offered by intersectionality theory is the reminder that below or behind or inside social discourses—pick your preposition—there *is* a real human subject there. The human is not merely a paper mâché of intersecting labels, but is really the person they are, a creature loved by God. In the church, we are not left, not abandoned with the vilified body, the excluded body, the murdered body, the crucified body. Rather, we give witness to the body that is loved, that is received in embrace in the arms of our Mother, Father, Creator God, the body that rises in new life.

First, I write to you, dear reader, as an individual with a body and as someone who leads an embodied life. While not wanting to deny or undermine the profound impact of socio-discursive intersections on your life, I would encourage you to see yourself—to recognize and to accept yourself—as more than and more precious than these. I appreciate HyeRan Kim-Cragg's comments on self-care, on paying attention not only to those who need you, but also to what *your* body and mind and soul need. Attending to self-care is not to be equated with selfishness. The value of self-examination and humility notwithstanding, the Christian traditions regrettably also contain much that is unhelpful and destructive on this point: self-doubt, obsession with guilt as somehow helpful for repentance, and disregard for one's own mental and physical limits in favour of self-denying service. The latter may be pursued to the point of exhaustion and desperation, followed by consequences such as loss of purpose, substance abuse, the breakdown of relationships, and even suicide. There are so many dearly beloved ones, most probably including some readers of this book, who are on the brink. They are fighting demons of depression; they feel they cannot take on any more duties, cannot ever make their friends or family happy. They may feel that they are a disappointment, a failure, or even worthless. They certainly do not feel they belong in the halls of the state, academy, or church leadership. They may then either resent the "elites" who do seem to be accepted there or hate themselves for not being one of them, or both. They may fear they will be rejected because their bodies do not fit socially accepted

norms or that they will be hated and condemned because of their desire for a relationship with another man or another woman or another queer person.

I address you as a brother and fellow traveller in the valleys of self-condemnation: Siblings, fellow children of God, there is now no condemnation (Romans 8:1). You. Are. Loved. You are a treasure, held in a fragile jar of clay (2 Cor. 4:7–9). Perhaps. But a treasure all the same. You are known by God and loved—not despite who you are, but as the you that you are. And I can promise you that in the whole household of faith, there are many fellow siblings who want to know you more in your struggles and anxieties. They—we!—want to know you better and stand by your side in your struggle, for: We. Are. You. We belong to each other; we are made of each other.

Inhabiting the imago dei *as a community*

This leads me to a second theological observation informed not only by insights from intersectionality theory, but in the conviction that human beings as individuals are inextricably part of one another: the conviction that the self is corporate, a combination of selves. And so now, I address the readership collectively once again, though not as an invisible everyman, but still as a body, the mystically real body of Christ—the church.

Those of us who number ourselves in that body, the church, attend not only to individual embodiment and the ways intersectional participation in social identity discourses impact individual bodies. We also witness to the goodness that lies beyond politics, beyond discourses, and beyond unjust intersectionalities by recognizing ourselves as members of one another and by recognizing Christ as our head: "We must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. . . . Clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:15–16, 24).

Christ is presented here and elsewhere in the New Testament as a new Adam. Those who are in Christ and who collectively form the body of Christ are by the same token presented as corporately being created in and as the divine image bearer in God's work of reconciling all things to one another in God. From the early church parents to the reformers to more recent interpreters, the creation of humanity in the image of God has been often been understood globally *qua* humanity as a class as referring to humanity's essential or ontological *nature* in some way, modelled on or reflecting the divine nature. This is chiefly with respect to two aspects: namely, the moral and rational perfection of the human. Furthermore, the *imago dei* in humanity, since Eden and until the eschaton, has been

regarded as at least imperfect, if not incomplete or even lost due to the damages and restrictions resulting from human sinfulness—even though, when human beings live, for example, with compassion and wisdom, these have been seen like family resemblances, expressing the image of God in human life.

Recent interpretations, building momentum in the 20th century, have begun to explore the significance of a more communal understanding of the divine image. One thinks, for example, of John Zizioulas's *Being as Communion*, Miroslav Volf's *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Stanley Grenz's *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, or the statement of the Roman Curia "Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God," to mention but a handful of representative, recent examples.[11] There is tremendous power in these more intersubjective and less individualistic body politics of the *imago dei*. One thing that these attempts have in common is a way of thinking about the development of human individuality in terms of the relationships (and today we might add the community and social networks) that structure and inform the scopes of possible meaning, imagination, and hope on which individual lives unfold. Further reflection in this direction draws the attention to contingencies and to possible alternatives. This, in turn, triggers not only questions of what I should do and what I can hope, but also what *we* should do and what *we* can hope." To understand *imago dei* as a communally shared likeness is to understand *imago dei* as, more than a stamp guaranteeing human rights and instead as an office and a commissioning to inhabit a creaturely calling to care for the whole of God's creation in the way its Creator would.

Concluding thoughts on creatureliness

Indeed, in Christ's being named the new Adam, and in the church as Christ's body being identified as the likeness of God, our attention is directed to the Christian's fundamental identity as creature. Without wishing to be pedantic or make trivial statements, it bears emphasizing that to be creature means, first and foremost, to have been created. As Psalm 100:3 tells us, we do not belong to ourselves because we have not made ourselves. This declaration refers to a profound experience of interdependency. Everyone is familiar with this in various ways and to various

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11. International Theological Commission of the Roman Curia, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, 2004, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship_en.html; Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

degrees. Did I make myself? No. I came from my parents, and they from their parents, and so on and so forth. Did I produce the food on the table? Even if I did, did I provide the soil and the nutrients with which the soil cultivates the crop? No. And neither did the soil make itself. The soil was produced over millennia by rivers flowing through and eroding away mountain crevices. The soil's baptism by the rains and rivers anoints them to cultivate our food; the mountains' baptism by the rain and floods produces the soil in the first place. Or rather, not in the first place, but in the second or third or fourth place. For the mountains did not make themselves either but are likewise a product of other intersections. The volcano and the clash of subterranean forces forged the mountains. So the mountain is not a mountain but magma; the river is not just a river but also mountain; the dirt is not merely dirt, but also river; and the bread is not bread alone, but soil. And the body: the body is not solely body; nor does it live by bread alone, but also as soil and river and mountain.

This might lead one to ask: If we do not make ourselves, how do we live? We do not live by bread or soil or river or mountain alone, but by the life-giving word of God. We live by and in a Creator's "let there be." We do not belong to ourselves, but to one another; and it is not we who have made ourselves, but it is a Creator who has made us.

The first thing that Christians confess is this: "We have not made ourselves!" And this creaturely cry gives witness to a sacred body politic: All of that intersecting water, dirt, and bread, and all of our being interwoven into and dependent upon one another is about being in relationship with the Creator God. The first thing Christians find revealed about God and about our relationship with God has to do—not with scriptures, sacraments, the church, the Spirit, or even Jesus— but with the experience of interdependence and the acknowledgment of a Creator of all things. In *this* light, we witness the cross of Christ as being about new creation, the coming of the Spirit as being about the renewal of creation, our witness itself as being for the goodness and flourishing of creation. To inhabit creatureliness in the justly ordered way that the Creator created—to live in a holy harmony of righteous interdependence and intersections—is the same thing as to be in an originally righteous relationship with the Creator.

A flourishing body politics within the body of creation is a flourishing relationship with our Creator. And this is why, at least from the perspective of the theological tradition I call home, concern over issues of unjust intersectionality relating to gender, race, ecology, sexuality, ability, and war are situated at the core, not only of Christian discipleship and proclamation, but, indeed, of Christian confession and hope. May we bear forth together the *imago dei* in cultivating love,

truth, peace, and well-being for all creation! And in the spirit of just such a bene-diction, I conclude with words from the New Testament:

> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.
> —Ephesians 1:4–6

Chapter 10

Ecumenical Lessons from the War against Ukraine:
Passionate Protest and Loving Patience

Rudolf von Sinner

Introduction

I come from the country of Switzerland, where I was born into a cold war with hot discussions.* "Go to Russia" was the saying if you were critical of the stout anti-communism and, especially, of the Swiss army and preparation for war against the supposed or real eastern enemy. Many Christians insisted you had to defend the country, the faith, and the "free world"—including, of course, the free market—against the "ungodly" socialists. Emotionally and in my faith convictions, I felt much closer to the peace movement and wondered why such a small country like Switzerland should have an army at all rather than invest heavily in development cooperation. The blatantly asymmetric terms of trade worldwide

also upset me deeply. An eye-opener was the 1989 Basel Assembly on "Peace, Justice, and the Integrity of Creation", six months before the Berlin wall came down."[1] There were delegates from all over Europe, including Eastern Europe, discussing such crucial issues relatively freely. During the event, all could cross over freely into France and Germany on a three-country pilgrimage. For once, the borders were removed. Both Russia and Ukraine were states of the Soviet Union then. In the midst of a sophisticated, but for him too unengaged discussion on how to best protect and preserve the environment, an Irish priest said: "I have fire in my belly—but love in my heart." Throughout many important debates and encounters, sharing prayer, knowledge, wisdom, and food, I never forgot that restless and impatient Irish priest. This became for me an ecumenical motto: passion and patience, struggle and love, prophetic denouncing and gospel announcing must go together. Peace is not a harmonious still life. It is active non-violent engagement with creative means. It implies dialogue as much as honesty and speaking up to power. The same is true for what I understand by ecumenism. It is staying together despite sometimes deep differences, without leaving out necessary questioning and criticism—of oneself first, and then of the other. It is staying together not because of each other, but because of our common and shared task entrusted to the church by God.

In this sense, the way the World Council of Churches' (WCC) 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, held 31 August to 8 September 2022, dealt with Russia's invasion of Ukraine can serve as a case study for an ecumenical global community seeking to hold together criticism, dialogue, and solidarity. In terms of the assembly theme, "Christ's Love Moves the World Toward Reconciliation and Unity," *love*, *reconciliation*, and *unity* are rich terms in theology in general and ecumenical theology in particular. They are biblical terms. However, the message they send toward the WCC's 352 member churches (representing about 25 percent of worldwide Christianity) and beyond is at first sight rather ambiguous: Can one speak of love, reconciliation, and unity without also speaking of a pilgrimage of justice, repentance, and honest confrontation with the wounds opened by the churches' own action?[2]

I live today in the capital city of Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil, within a diversity of cultures of a variety of origins, churches, and religions, coming from Germany,

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1. *Frieden in Gerechtigkeit: Dokumente der Europäischen Ökumenischen Versammlung*, edited by mandate from the Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen und des Rates der Europäischen Bischofskonferenzen (Basel: Reinhardt/Benziger, 1989).

2. The WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe decided, in adopting the report of its Programme Guidelines Committee, to reformulate the earlier "Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace," in place since the 2013 Assembly in Busan, to "Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation and Unity."

Italy, Poland, Japan, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as from the territory that today is Ukraine. Brazil has a Ukrainian diaspora of about half a million persons, mainly in Paraná state, with over 10 percent of them in Curitiba. In the municipality of Prudentópolis, 200 kilometres from Curitiba, 75 percent of the population is of Ukrainian descent.[3] In terms of religion, they are Catholics of oriental rite, Orthodox, and Jews who have come since the last decade of the 19th century. In a first migratory phase, workers came from western Ukraine (Galicia), which at the time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A second wave came after World War I, during a short phase of independence combined with great political instability. The largest migration of workers, prisoners of war, political refugees, and soldiers happened after World War II.[4] A recent wave of migration occurred after the country's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, mainly of highly skilled professionals. Refugees from the current war have come in small numbers only.[5] The Ukrainian memorial has become one of the most visited places in Curitiba. The community and their neighbours are scared and appalled.

It has been more than a year since Russia's invasion began on 24 February 2022. There is destruction wherever we look, without any reasonable solution in sight. On the one hand, there is Russia, with aspirations to annex a territory it considers its own, populated by a people it considers its own. Its justification is that it is fighting what it calls "Nazism" or "fascism" in Ukraine—a country that, like Russia itself, was born in its present configuration only in 1991. There are voices that attribute fascism to Russia because of its totalitarian, imperialist, and destructive behaviour toward a country that had been considered a sibling. On the other hand, there is a country wounded, suffering, but determined to offer resistance as far as possible. Their common roots are not denied, but the attack on the sovereignty of an independent country that wants to follow its own politics, including its own alliances, is unacceptable. Those who cannot resist seek refuge—more than 8 million have left the country in what is the largest and fastest migratory movement

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3. Data appears on the website of the Eastern-rite Ukrainian Catholic Metropola, accessed 9 May 2023, https://metropolia.org.br/cultura-ucraniana/etnia/ucranianos-no-brasil/.

4. Oksana Boruszenko, "A imigração ucraniana no Paraná," in *Anais do IV Simpósio nacional dos professores universitários de história* (São Paulo: ANPUH, 1969); Paulo Renato Guérios, "As condições sociais de produção das lembranças entre imigrantes ucranianos," *Mana* 14, no. 2 (2008): 367–98; Alessandro Cavassin Alves, "A etnia ucraniana na política paranaense," *Revista NEP* 4, no. 1 (2018): 56–72, doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.5380/nep.v4i1.60213.

5. As of June 2022, only 176 humanitarian visas for Ukrainian refugees had been issued: Thaiza Pauluze, "Ucraniana vai voltar para Europa por falta de auxílio do governo brasileiro; em 100 dias de Guerra, país recebeu 176 refugiados," GloboNews, 6 March 2022, https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2022/06/03/ucraniana-vai-voltar-para-europa-por-falta-de-auxilio-do-governo-brasileiro-em-100-dias-de-guerra-pais-recebeu-176-refugiados.ghtml.

in modern Europe. Within Ukraine, there are over 5.3 million internally displaced people, according to data from the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR).[6]

In addition to the cruel moment that we are following with a certain tiredness and continued incomprehension, the sovereignty and national identity of at least two post-Soviet countries are at stake, intertwined as they are with their religious identity and the loyalty of their population. Along with this, the understanding of what is "Europe" is at stake. Westerners, including myself, tend to know far too little about the East. Many Easterners' ideas about the West tend to be very negative—probably also because of knowing far too little. We have a war that is not only physical, but one of interpretation: Which Europe does one want to talk about, and to what extent does one want to get closer or stay away from it? Historically, all "Rus," as it was known, was centred in Kyiv, on the border between Europe and Asia; it understood itself to belong to the former rather than the latter, guarding itself against the Mongolians to the east. Today—I am aware this is a simplified position, which admittedly does not take into account all the diversities and dissonances—Europe has become the desired elder brother of Ukraine, while Russia is experienced as an enemy.

This position is older than 24 February 2022. It stems especially from the so-called Euromaidan, or Maidan Uprising, in 2014—the massive popular protests on Kyiv's central square, the Maidan—and the subsequent annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russian invasion. The latter was a conflictive constellation quite similar to today's.[7] On Russia's side, it involved denouncing the construction of a Europe and a West as decadent, mainly for its secularism and liberalism, particularly in relation to homoaffective relationships and unions. Liberalism is associated with Protestantism or a complete lack of religion. This position is, in principle, shared by the churches and a considerable part of the population in both countries and is also voiced in WCC events and meetings. However, there is more tolerance and openness to pluralism in Ukraine, and at this time, this moral position gives way to other loyalties and does not serve as a strong bond between the Orthodox churches of both countries.

On the other side, there is a Europe seen as defender of liberal ideas, human rights, freedom, diversity, and democracy, with less corruption and greater public control over politics and the economy. It is not the place here to evaluate whether

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6. UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, "Ukraine Situation Flash Update #46," 5 May 2023, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/100493.

7. See Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer, eds., *Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

one or the other perception is correct, or more correct, but to state that they are, obviously, in sharp contrast to each other. If the intention of President Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia was to align a brother country and a sister church with the greater of the two siblings, in strong opposition to the West, their actions and positions clearly seem to be having the opposite effect. They have deepened the ditch, strengthened the little sibling's resistance, and discredited both the president and the patriarch of Russia. When borders are removed by force unilaterally, they have first to be put back in place before any meaningful dialogue can occur.

After this lengthy but (I believe) necessary introduction, I shall first offer some historical and conceptual clarifications, then focus on the Orthodox churches in Russia and Ukraine and their role in the conflict. Third, I shall analyze the debate within the WCC and, finally, offer some reflections on the relationship between critical prophecy and ecumenical dialogue.

History and Concepts

The Orthodox churches of Eastern Europe have, through history, remained close to the political authorities. Between the patriarch and the emperor, there existed a "symphony," that is, a state in which two types of action cooperate for a single goal. The cooperation was described in this way by Emperor Justinian the Great (482–565), in the preface to the 6th "novel" of the *Codex Justinianus:*

> The greatest gifts that God, in his celestial benevolence, has bestowed on mankind are priesthood (*hierosýne*) and sovereignty (*basiléia*), the one serving on matters divine, and the other ruling over human affairs, and caring for them. Each proceeds from one and the same authority, and regulates human life. Thus nothing could have as great a claim on the attention of sovereigns as the honour of priests, seeing that they are the very ones who constantly offer prayer to God on the sovereigns' behalf. Hence, should the one be above reproach in every respect, and enjoy access to God, while the other keeps in correct and proper order the realm that has been entrusted to it, there will be a satisfactory harmony (*symphonia*), conferring every conceivable benefit on the human race.[8]

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8. David J. Miller, trans., and Peter Sarris, ed., *The Novels of Justinian: A Complete Annotated English Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 97–98. I thank Archimandrite Prof. Dr Cyril Hovorun for providing me with the quotation from this book. See also Alexander Ponomariov, "'In the Spirit of Symphony': On Russian Orthodox Church's Refinement of Secular Legal Standards in the Russian Federation," *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 7, no. 1 (July 2021), 234–60, doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.30965/23642807-bja10013.

The church, in general, constituted the weaker part of the partnership, subject to the emperor's decisions, although there were moments when the patriarch interfered more directly in political issues—which has earned the scholarly concept of "political orthodoxy."[9] Patriarch Anthony IV of Constantinople, in a letter to the grand duke of Moscow, Basil I, famously wrote: "It is not possible for Christians to have a church and not to have an Emperor."[10] However, this understanding of the virtual union of church and state suffered a number of serious setbacks, the chief of which was the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The Empire was now no longer Christian, but Muslim. Even so, according to Cyril Hovorun, "symphonic mentality continued to be an important part of this experience" in an "Ottoman symphonia," whose Sultans called themselves "Caesar of the Romans" (*Qayser-i Rûm*).[11]

During the Ottoman Empire, the Patriarch of Constantinople was also the political leader of his non-Muslim religious group, the *millet,* more specifically, the *Rum millet* (the Rome/the Romans' *millet*) which had, among other things, to collect taxes for the Empire. In the 19th century, nation-states emerged that held a national Orthodox church responsible, at least in part, for the preservation of national identity. In Russia, which had not been under the Ottoman Empire, the relationship between church and state followed the symphony model, a relation that benefitted both.

Under Peter the Great (1672–1725), there was a reform inspired by Protestant and Catholic Reformations, which subjugated the church to the Czar's power; it abolished the office of patriarch and created a collective church government instead. With the Russian Revolution of 1917, the church got back its patriarch, but was severely persecuted by former seminarian Joseph Stalin. Were it not for the German invasion of Russia in 1941, when the church aligned with the state, it might have been extinct.[12] It survived, but under strict state control. After the end of the Soviet Union, in Russia as in her neighbouring countries, the Orthodox Church gained prestige and configured itself as marker of national identity.

Religious, ethnic, and political issues have always been intertwined. The

9. Franz-Xaver Bischof et al., *Einführung in die Geschichte des Christentums* (Freiburg: Herder, 2014), 320.

10. Patriarch Anthony IV of Constantinople, as quoted by Archimandrite Prof. Dr Cyril Hovorun, in "Ukrainian Public Theology versus the Political Theology of the 'Russian World,'" lecture at the VI Consultation of the Global Network of Public Theology in Curitiba, Brazil, 6 October 2022; publication forthcoming in the congress volume. Hovorun in turn refers to Franz Miklošič and Joseph Müller, eds., *Acta et Diplomata Graeca Medii Aevi* II (Vienna, 1862), 191.

11. Hovorun, "Ukrainian Public Theology," 3.

12. Bischof et al., *Einführung*, 324.

origin of it all is the "Rus' of Kyiv," the baptism of Prince Vladimir in the year 988, when Kyiv was his capital and the emperor of Byzantium's daughter his wife. Later, the capital was transferred to Moscow. While Russia understands that Moscow and its patriarchate are the legitimate successors of this political and religious tradition, it intends to bring together "all Russians" from the Rus', whether they live in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, or Moldova, the countries of today. Many Ukrainian Orthodox, however, today see Russians linked to Moscow as foreign intruders. In turn, Roman Catholics in Ukraine are often understood as Poles, Lutherans as Germans, Reformed as Hungarians, and so forth, all of which are tolerated but not seen as part of the national tradition and conscience.

From this understanding came the idea of the *sviataia Rus'* (the holy Rus'), propagated by Patriarch Kirill. The expression was first used in Prince Kurbskii's letter to Ivan the Terrible (1530–84), although at that time it was associated with dissident subtleties rather than with the installed power. In the 19th century, it reappeared with a purely religious designation. Among Russian Orthodox intellectuals in the 20th century, however, the term emerged with a strong geopolitical connotation. From there, it was welcomed by Patriarch Kirill, who ascended to the ecclesiastical throne in 2009 after having headed the church's department of foreign affairs for many years. As President Medvedev greeted Patriarch Kirill on his enthronement, he recalled the "spirit of symphony" which, in his view, "opens up wonderful prospects for the development of church-state relations in such a way that neither the state or the church would interfere in each other's affairs, [yet] respect each other's position on these internal affairs and, at the same time, build a wide-rang[ing] interaction, dialogue, and cooperation."[13] In 2018, as prime minister, Medvedev reinforced this relationship with Patriarch Kirill, hoping such "symphony" would continue to exist.

As to the reference to *Rus'*, it is necessary to remember that there is an important terminological difference here: *Rus'* designates medieval Russia and therefore encompasses the territory of the two countries currently at war. *Rossiia* would be the term to describe modern Russia. The adjective *Russkii* emphasizes the ethnic aspect, while *rossiiskii* emphasizes the civil aspect. The most secular correlate of "Holy Rus'" is the *russkii mir*, the Russian world in the ethnic sense, including all "Russians" in any territory—similar to the idea of pan-Germanism that emerged with the unification of the German Reich in 1871. Hovorun, indeed, draws an analogy to the "German world" with its idea of a strong state anchored in the respective *Volk* with its morality and rationality, similar to the language of Helmuth Graf von Moltke (1800–91) and Ferdinand Kattenbusch (1851–1935). This

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13. Dmitry Medvedev, as quoted and translated by Ponomariov, in "The Spirit of Symphony," 238.

entails the idea of a messianic state whose "mission would be to bring culture and authentic Christianity to its neighbours."[14] If, at that time, republicanism, derived from the French, was for Germany the mortal sin, in today's Russia it would be liberal Western legislation on human sexuality.[15]

On his first visit to Ukraine as patriarch, Kirill designated "Holy Russia" as "an essentially decentred entity, whose focal points and strongest geopolitical metaphors (the metonym of Russia, Russia's cradle, Russia's sacred capital, fortress of the Orthodox faith, etc.) are located on the geographical periphery, in Ukraine."[16] This initial indication of the centrality of a non-centre—Kyiv and Ukraine—came with the idea of Patriarch Kirill taking up a patriarchal residence in Kyiv and even obtaining Ukrainian citizenship. However, Russian politicization and expansionism meant that Ukraine ended up once again being relegated to the periphery to be managed by the centre in Moscow. Moving and removing borders does not work with highly unequal partners.

The rhetoric only increased with the growing confluence of the "Russian world" (*russki mir*) and "Holy Rus." The new idea that was propagated was that "today's 'Russian world,' led by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), is waging a war of liberation with a de-Christianized, hegemonic West."[17] The same tone was also used against the Orthodox Church united to Rome, alleging that it had collaborated with Nazi Germany and was nationalist and anti-Russian. The "schismatics," that is, the Orthodox churches considered non-canonical, were condemned. According to researcher Mikhail Suslov, the Russian Orthodox Church was now defining its borders no longer in temporal but in spatial and therefore geopolitical terms; Ukraine became the battleground between the West and Russian and Orthodox civilization.[18]

Churches and Conflicts

There have been a variety of Orthodox churches in Ukraine. The major one is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church linked to the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP). It disputes space with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Patriarchate of Kyiv

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14. Cyril Hovorun, "Interpreting the 'Russian World,'" in Krawchuk and Bremer, *Ukrainian Crisis*, 199.

15. Hovorun, "Interpreting the 'Russian world'" 201.

16. Mikhail Suslov, "The Russian Orthodox Church and the Crisis in Ukraine," in *Ukrainian Cris*is, 169.

17. Suslov, "Russian Orthodox Church" 172–3.

18. Suslov, 162 "Russian Orthodox Church," 172-173/.

(UOC-KP), with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), and with the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) that originated in the Union of Brest in 1596, was suppressed in 1946, and was re-established in 1989.[19] There are also Roman Catholics, Protestants—such as Lutherans, Reformed, Baptists, Mennonites, and Pentecostals—and, in smaller numbers, Jews, Muslims, and others. In 2018, 57 religious communities were registered in Ukraine according to the Department of State for National and Religious Affairs.[20] I will concentrate on the first three, those most relevant to the current conflict.

The UOC-MP was created as such in 1990, emerging from an exarchy of the ROC into a national church with a certain autonomy but not autocephaly (that is, sovereignty). It was overseen by a local metropolitan, whose election had to be confirmed by the Moscow patriarch. Metropolitan Filaret (Denysenko) had served in his role since 1966, and was then promoted, but soon became *persona non grata* with the ROC because of his attempts to rally the Ukrainian episcopate behind him in two requests for autocephaly, both of which were denied and classified as "politically motivated." He was eventually deposed and later suffered the severest church penalty, excommunication, in 1997. A 1992 council in Kharkiv elected—before Filaret's deposition, but without his participation—a new metropolitan, Volodymyr (Sabodan), and committed to pursue autocephaly by canonical ways. These initiatives, however, ceased in 1996.

The UOC-MP still holds the majority of parishes in Ukraine today. About 40 percent of the ROC's parishes are situated in Ukraine, which shows how important Ukraine is to the ROC. According to Suslov, in a statement made before the Orthodox Church in Ukraine (OCU) was established, "if the UOC-MP were to break away from the ROC and consolidate with the others into one Ukrainian Orthodox Church, such a new entity could conceivably deprive the ROC of its status as the centre of world Orthodoxy."[21]

A "unification" council in 1992, convened to merge the UOC-MP and the UAOC, ended up deepening the divisions by creating the Kyiv Patriarchate and appointing Filaret initially as its deputy head. A minority of the UAOC did not join the merger, so there were at that point three Orthodox churches: the UAOC, the UOC-KP, and the UOC-MP. Until 2018, they co-existed in relative peace,

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19. See Nicholas Denysenko, *The Church's Unholy War: Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and Orthodoxy* (Eugene: Cascade, 2023), from which I take much of the information included here. This book helped to hone what I had drawn from other, more disparate sources in the original version of this paper.

20. Data offered by Prof. Dr Thomas Bremer (University of Münster) in his online presentation to the Research Group on Public Theology in the Latin American Context, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná at Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil, 18 March 2022.

21. Suslov, "Russian Orthodox Church," 164.

albeit in mutual exclusivity as to administration and liturgy. In 1995, succeeding Volodymyr (Romaniuk), Filaret became patriarch of the UOC-KP and emerged as "the public and ideological champion of Ukrainian autocephaly."[22] In 2004–5, during the so-called Orange Revolution, the UOC-KP sided with the protesters, as did the UAOC and UGCC, but the UOC-MP did not, at least not on official levels. The same also happened during the Euromaidan protests in 2013–14. The UOC-KP opened its cathedral to the wounded among the protesters and temporarily became a hospital. After the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, Patriarch Filaret called Putin the "New Cain" in an encyclical.[23] President Petro Poroshenko (in office 2014–19) steered a nationalist, anti-Russian line and favoured the national churches. The UOC-MP, now under Metropolitan Onufry (Berezovsky), protested the Russian invasion in 2014, but at the same time remained reserved as to Porochenko's course, which helped to make and keep the church highly unpopular.

The UAOC had been created in reaction to an "All-Ukrainian" council held in 1918 with the blessing of Patriarch Tikhon (Vasily Ivanovich Bellavin), the first ROC patriarch after the reestablishment of this office in Russia. The council, initially heading towards autocephaly, ended up pleading for autonomy and decided to retain Slavonic rather than introduce Ukrainian as the language of the liturgy. According to Denysenko, this was the fruit of manipulation and exchange of delegates favourable to maintaining the ties to the ROC.[24] The sector favourable to autocephaly and "Ukrainian Church liberation"[25] eventually convened a council in October 1921, having bishops ordained by priests and allowing them to marry, two elements unacceptable to Orthodox churches in general. The church also permitted the remarriage of widowed and divorced clergy and had sympathy for Christian socialism. It was well-received by Ukrainian intellectuals but remained somewhat alien to the people who continued to congregate in parishes belonging to the ROC. The ROC, in turn, considered this dissidence a threat to church and ethnic unity. The newly established church had against it also the stigma of canonical illegitimacy. Its leadership was exiled to the United States during the Soviet period. In 1989, it was allowed to return and was legalized.

After various presidential visits to the Phanar in Istanbul, the see of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Patriarch Bartholomew proceeded, in 2018, to publicly adopt this project of uniting the Orthodox churches in Ukraine. Obviously, this

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22. Denysenko, *Church's Unholy War*, 67.

23. Patriarch Filaret, quoted in Denysenko, 70.

24. Denysenko, Church's Unholy War, 50.

25. Denysenko, Church's Unholy War, 50.

aroused Moscow's anger and so, once again, in October 2018, it broke eucharistic fellowship with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, a very strong move in Orthodox terms. The Phanar continued its policy. A patriarchal *tomos* issued in early 2019 stated that it "recommend[ed] that all Orthodox Churches throughout the world acknowledge and commemorate it by the name 'Most Holy Church of Ukraine,' with its see in the historic city of Kyiv."[26] It was finally registered under the name of Orthodox Church in Ukraine (UCO). Considerable parts—but not the totality—of the UAOC and the UOC-KP joined the UCO, which now acquired canonical status. Some Orthodox churches, like Greece, Cyprus, and the Patriarchate of Antioch, recognized the new church. Immediately, the ROC ceased ecumenical fellowship with these.

A recent survey (data as of July 2022) showed that 72 percent of Ukrainians self-identify as Orthodox. More specifically, 54 percent (!) associate themselves with the recently established Orthodox Church of Ukraine (an increase of 20 percent in relation to 2020), while only 4 percent identify with the UOC-MP (a decrease of 11 percent in relation to 2020). Fourteen percent did not specify a particular commitment within the Orthodox fold (down from 22 percent in 2020). A stable 8 percent identified as Greek Catholics, below those who affirmed being atheist (10 percent in 2022).[27]

There have been, then, both political and religious disputes between Russia and Ukraine, and some argue that the longstanding church conflict between Ukrainization and Russification is also an important ingredient in the current invasion by Russia. In any case, if the idea behind the invasion was a quick success to bind Ukraine to Russia, the contrary has occurred. Even the UOC-MP has been estranged from the ROC and has given signals (albeit somewhat generic and non-concrete) for a rupture. On the day Russia's invasion began, Metropolitan Onufry called it a "fratricidal war." The Russian Patriarch, in a sermon on 6 March 2022, attributed to the war a "not physical, but metaphysical" dimension. For Ukrainian theologian Cyril Hovorun, once the head of the External Relations Department of the UOC-MP, the religious dimension is for President Putin a more important motivator for war than is imperialism. Hovorun draws an analogy to Iwan Schatow in Dostoevsky's *Demons* of 1872, who develops a strong faith in Russia, but only timidly in God: "He [Putin] managed to transform the ROC into

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26. Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, "Ecumenical Patriarchate Publishes Text of Tomos for Ukraine," *Ukrinform*, 15 January 2019, https://ukrinform.net/rubric-society/2619561-ecumenical-patriarchate-publishes-text-of-tomos-for-ukraine.html#.

27. Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, "Dynamics of Religious Self-Identification of the Population of Ukraine: Results of Telephone Survey Conducted on July 6–10, 2022," news release, 5 August 2022, https://archive.ph/Gdul6.

such [an instrument of mass manipulation]—with the latter's full consent."[28] Indeed, says Hovorun, the war has a metaphysical, but paranoic dimension.

There is growing resistance by theologians, monks, and priests, Ukrainian or not, including some Russians, to the war and the conception of the "Russian World" that underlies it. "A Declaration on the 'Russian World' Teaching" was published on 13 March 2022, the Sunday of Orthodoxy, and has since been translated into more than 14 languages and signed by 1529 persons.[29] It rejects the "ethno-phyletist religious fundamentalism, totalitarian in character, called *Russkii mir*," and calls it a heresy. It further affirms that "just as Russia has invaded Ukraine, so too the Moscow Patriarchate of Patriarch Kirill has invaded the Orthodox Church, for example in Africa, causing division and strife, with untold casualties not just to the body but to the soul, endangering the salvation of the faithful." In six theses and antitheses, subscribers "affirm" and "reject" what is Orthodox and what is not. It is clearly inspired in style and content by the Confessing Church's Theological Declaration of Barmen (1934). Such implicit, but evident reference to Barmen seems significant in a moment of *status confessionis* a time of immense peril for the identity of the church, as well as for the nation and its citizens. As is the nature of *status confessionis,* it is the moment when a clear and unmistakable language is used. Thus, the first "truth" affirmed states:

> There is no separate source of revelation, no basis for community, society, state, law, personal identity, and teaching, for Orthodoxy as the Body of the Living Christ than that which is revealed in, by, and through our Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God.
>
> **We therefore condemn as non-Orthodox and reject** any teaching that seeks to replace the Kingdom of God seen by the prophets, proclaimed and inaugurated by Christ, taught by the apostles, received as wisdom by the Church, set forth as dogma by the Fathers, and experienced in every Holy Liturgy, with a kingdom of this world, be that Holy Rus', Sacred Byzantium, or any other earthly kingdom, thereby usurping Christ's own authority to deliver the Kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24), and denying God's power to wipe away every tear from every eye (Revelation 21:4).

There are, of course, differences in language and theology between Barmen and the above declaration. In the case of Protestant Barmen, the reference is

28. Cyril Hovorun, "Putin's Metaphysics," *Publik-Forum* 9 (13 May 2022), 34, https://publik-forum.de/Religion-Kirchen/putins-metaphysik.

29. "A Declaration on the 'Russian World' Teaching," *Public Orthodoxy*, 13 March 2022, https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching.

exclusively to scripture and God's word, while the Orthodox document includes references to the Church Fathers as well. On the other hand, the latter is more explicit and concrete as to the current context, which is understandable given that it was written by Orthodox who do not live in Russia and, thus, did not have to fear immediate retaliation. It was different for Protestants in 1934, when Hitler had already taken power and the leaders of the Confessing Church were at great risk as they were situated, so to speak, in the eye of the hurricane. In both cases, however, the addressee is the church, which is to remind itself of its foundation in Jesus Christ and its evangelical tasks, not permitting a blind adhesion to an authoritarian state. The first loyalty of Christians, according to both declarations, must lie with God, who revealed Godself in Jesus Christ, and acts through the Holy Spirit. Following this logic expressed more clearly in the recent declaration on (and against) the "Russian world," any discrimination and stigmatization of other peoples and/or minorities is rejected. The Manichean vision of a Christian, morally correct, and Orthodox "East" against a secular, immoral, and heterodox "West," as implied in the positions of Patriarch Kirill and the "Russian world" doctrine, is not accepted either.

Ecumenism, Conflict, and Dialogue

The ecumenical movement is a privileged space in which to learn, as long as it is able to provide "safe and brave" spaces where people can be honest with one another, but also offer solidarity in crying and laughing, in sharing a meal, and in praying for one another. Personally, I have been enormously enriched by such meetings within the ecumenical movement, especially within the WCC, ever since I served as a steward at the 7th Assembly in Canberra, Australia, in 1991. One of my colleagues in that group was a young Russian, today a priest and professor, whom I was privileged to encounter again, 31 years later, at the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. In ecumenical space, many people experience more freedom and equality than in their domestic contexts, be that in the church or in society, or both. Much of what is said and heard there can and, in fact, must not be made public. It is not possible nor wise to expose to the public how persons present themselves when they make themselves vulnerable to others. However, it is necessary to make public the nature of the WCC as a place of such encounters of dialogue and of non-violent conflict.

The WCC's central committee issued a bold declaration against the war at its meeting in Geneva in June 2022, and again at its assembly in September of that year. Between (and beyond) these events, there were visits to Ukraine and to Russia. This was necessary to convey the minimum of what had to be said. On his side,

the former head of the Department of External Relations of the ROC, Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), in his address to the Orthodox pre-Assembly, underlined the diaconal task of the church: "Day after day, strenuous humanitarian and peace-making activities are being carried out, much of which remain unseen. We invite all interested parties to join efforts in rendering aid to the suffering. I think that time and again, our conflict-torn world will need Christians' help."[30] This is the other bottom line: Churches have to help the suffering. Metropolitan Hilarion also thanked the WCC explicitly for what it has done in other cases of conflict. At the same time, however, he did not spare harsh words and affirmed that "we must not be indifferent, seeing certain parts of the Western Christian world sliding into the abyss of absolute rejection of the Gospel and Christ and following the path of moral relativism and degradation."[31] In this way, he reinforced one of the very pillars of the conflict on the Russian side, a construction of "us" against "the West." An experienced participant at ecumenical gatherings for decades, he should know better about the real West.

In Karlsruhe, Christians were present from both sides of the conflict, all of them suffering and struggling, be it for conviction, coercion, or survival. One of the plenaries was dedicated to Ukrainian churches, present as guests as they were not yet members of the WCC. Russian delegates also had moments of raising their voices. Much was discussed in the corridors. It was evident, at least for the majority, that an exclusion of the ROC from WCC membership, which was promoted by some, especially from Western Europe, and echoed in unusually sharp words in the German Federal President's address to the assembly,[32] is not the solution. It would signify the total failure of ecumenical dialogue, and once that church was out of the ecumenical fold, it would probably not return for a very long time, if at

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30. Metropolitan Hilarion of Budapest and Hungary, "Reconciliation and Unity Are the Purpose of the Divine Love Incarnate in Jesus Christ," in *Orthodox Reflections on the Way to Karlsruhe: Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity*, ed. Ioan Sauca and Vasile-Octavian Mihoc (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2022), 59.

31. Hilarion, "Reconciliation and Unity," 55.

32. "There are also representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church here today. The fact that they are here is not something we should take for granted in these times. I expect this assembly not to spare them the truth about this brutal war and the criticism of the role of their church leaders. Yes, time and again Christians are called to be bridge-builders. That is and remains one of our most important tasks. But building bridges requires willingness on both sides of the river; a bridge cannot be constructed if one side tears down the pillars that support it. . . . What sort of dialogue will we engage in here? That is the choice this assembly has to make, and Germany's stance—I am speaking also on behalf of the Federal Government—is clear." German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, *Address to the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches,* 31 August 2022, https://www.oikoumene .org/resources/documents/german-federal-president-frank-walter-steinmeiers-address -at-the-wcc-11th-assembly. Steinmeier is a confessing Protestant Christian and has been an important lay leader, for instance, in the presidency of the German *Kirchentag*.

all. Such exclusion would be grist for the mills of very conservative and anti-ecumenical sectors in the ROC that have been vociferous for many years. Furthermore, the church would be out of the conversation and cooperation so important for the post-war period, when it finally comes. It is also good to remember that the WCC has never excluded member churches on the basis of their position in political and religious conflicts; at the same time it has not spared them from fierce criticism when necessary, as happened with the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa for its theological support for the system of apartheid. The church itself withdrew from the WCC as a consequence. The fact that such withdrawal has not yet, as of this writing, occurred in the ROC's case can be seen as a positive signal of a search for alternatives, albeit in non-public ways. After all, in today's Russia, persons critical of the war—let's remember it may not even be named thus in Russia—and of President Putin are threatened with very severe punishment. Sometimes, silence can talk loudly—that is, in not defending the war, which, as far as I could perceive, Russian delegates did not. They also did not boycott the WCC's declaration. Instead, they simply tried to minimize criticism, especially in relation to the ROC and its patriarch—which can be seen a sign of hope, modest and timid as it may be.

As for the central committee and the 11th Assembly, documents from both deplore the war as "illegal and unjustifiable war inflicted on the people and sovereign state of Ukraine" and declare it "incompatible with God's very nature and will for humanity and against our fundamental Christian and ecumenical principles," rejecting "any misuse of religious language and authority to justify armed aggression." Furthermore, both affirm "the mandate and special role of the World Council of Churches in accompanying its member churches in the region and as a platform and safe space for encounter and dialogue in order to address the many pressing issues for the world and for the ecumenical movement." The assembly statement did not restate the central committee's declaration that "a fresh and critical analysis of the Christian faith in its relation to politics, the nation and nationalism is urgently called for," but added that the "churches are called to play a key role in the healing of memories, reconciliation, and diaconal care."[33]

Thus, in my perception, while dialogue was upheld, it was not harmonious, but rather honest and clear. Words of rejection of the Russian invasion and—less so, it is true—of its religious support were clear and consistent. This could have, of

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33. Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, "Statement on the War in Ukraine," 18 June 2022, https://www.oikoumene.org/sw/node/72938; "War in Ukraine, Peace and Justice in the European Region*,*" statement of the World Council of Churches 11th Assembly, 8 September 2022. Available at https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/ADOPTED-PIC01 .1rev-War%20in-Ukraine-Peace-and-Justice-in-the-European-Region.pdf.

course, been more incisive. Time will show whether this was the right way to act. It is my hope and prayer that while we do not shy away from bold statements and fierce criticism when they are needed, we do this in a spirit of humility. As a Lutheran and, even more importantly, one bearing the name "sinner," it is very clear to me that good and evil, justice and sin, are often intertwined in concrete situations. This should prevent us from being arrogant and feeling justified in judging others. At the same time, our prime loyalty is to the gospel, especially to Jesus' ministry and proclamation. As this is our common calling, it is correct to call each other to account when we see the message blurred or damaged rather than clear in a way that the world may believe (see John 17). As the ecumenical movement intends to stay together, move together, and act together, it must not forget the statement of the Irish priest—that critical prophecy with ecumenical dialogue is like fire in the belly and love in the heart.

Chapter 11

Multidirectional and Multilayered Intersectionality:

Future Issues in Ecumenical Theological Education

Septemmy E. Lakawa

This essay is based on the presentation I gave during the final plenary—"GETI Goes Public!"—of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2022 at the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Karlsruhe, Germany. The term *public* reflects the orientation of the plenary toward finding connections between GETI's concerns and the wider communities of the global ecumenical movement—academics, church leaders, activists, ecumenical bodies, the media, and broader networks of Christian movements.

In this essay, I identify future issues in ecumenical theological education. I argue that these future issues are embedded in and oriented toward the multidirectional and multilayered intersections of contextual, ecological, and digital transformation, the various publics, and the intertwining of the mental, spiritual, and cosmic spheres within the historical and contemporary ecumenical praxes of unity, peace, justice, integrity of creation, mission, and evangelism, and so on. I identify four themes that reflect the multidirectionality and the multilayered intersectionality of future issues in ecumenical theological education:

- God, creation, and artificial intelligence
- ecumenical memories and witnessing practice
- the post-pandemic imagination: ecumenical theological education amid crisis and opportunities to harness the winds of change
- ecumenical pedagogy: theological aesthetics and eclectic teaching methods

Method

Given the complexity and the broad scope of ecumenical theological education within the global landscape of the ecumenical movement, this essay is constructed and particularized around three guiding questions:

- What should or will future conversations on ecumenical theological formation be like thematically, methodologically, and pedagogically?
- What theological imperatives must undergird these conversations?
- What practices do theological imperatives or future conversation (in)form?

I begin by naming my social location and positionality, which provide me with a particular theological lens in identifying future issues in ecumenical theological education. My intention is to explicate the contextuality of the themes discussed. Therefore, the issues identified are not meant to be universally relevant. Rather, they provide insights into promoting further conversations on the future of ecumenical theological education.

This essay responds to these questions by identifying the relevant themes, theological imperatives, and practices identified during the onsite GETI process in Karlsruhe. As an active observer and participant throughout the two-week process, I identified and synthesized the common threads among the six plenaries as the primary basis for my naming the future issues in ecumenical theological education. Methodologically, this essay uses an eclectic approach. In addition to synthesizing the plenaries, I also highlight and reflect on the questions, concerns, hopes, and critical voices I heard inside and outside the classrooms and in formal and informal conversations where ecumenical formation in its richness, fluidity, and creativity often takes place. Furthermore, I connected my GETI reflections with my previous reflections on the similar theme of the future of ecumenical theological education in southeast Asia. Finally, I note that the essay does not provide a holistic picture of nor a conclusion to GETI 2022. It is, rather, an invitation, a look forward into an exciting, complex, yet worthwhile journey of unity, compassion, healing, justice, reconciliation, and joy.

My Social Location and Intersectional Positionality

Let me first describe my social location and intersectional positionality, which have radically shaped my understanding of the ecumenicity and relevance of theological education and formation. In 1998, Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, was experiencing one of the most catastrophic economic and political crises in its modern history. After several months of street protests led by women activists, university students, and human rights activists, especially in the capital city of Jakarta, Indonesia's second president, Soeharto, was forced to resign in May 1998. He had ruled the country under his New Order regime for 32 years, from1966 to 1998. Days before his resignation, four students were killed by snipers during on-campus protests against the president. Urban poor people were also killed amid the riots and looting of many business places in Jakarta.

At that time, I was renting a room available only to females that was owned by a Muslim woman, a retired police officer. My room was a 20-minute walk from the Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Theologi Jakarta (Jakarta Theological Seminary) campus. The campus is located right in the centre of Jakarta, near the most famous and symbolic place of Indonesian independence day, and not far from the most important political site of the national government offices, such as the presidential palace and the official residences of the vice president and Jakarta's governor. On the day of the riots, I remember standing behind my residence's gate and peeking out to watch people carrying away various things that they had looted from nearby shops and offices. The sound of the mob and the visual image of hundreds of angry people walking and shouting on the street have remained with me ever since. This was also the day when my landlady asked all of her tenants, myself included, to wear headscarves, and she showed us the exit behind the house as a safety precaution in case the mob attacked our place. I was not sure what was happening at the time, but later I realized that our landlady knew the headscarf would be a sign that we were Muslims and would probably save us should an attack take place.

The significance of this symbol started to make more sense in the following weeks after a tragic reality during the four days of chaos in Jakarta started to be revealed. On the bright, sunny days of 13–15 May 1998, in Jakarta and a few other cities in Indonesia—while I was hiding behind the gate of my rental place and the landlady was providing us with headscarves—none of us tenants knew that Indonesian Chinese women were being attacked, humiliated, gang-raped, and even murdered in their homes and at public sites.

These May 1998 rapes then became a new site of memory that was contested by those who denied the event—mainly the military and the political leaders—and

those—especially the women's network—who fought for recognition of the allegedly planned and systematic sexual violence against Indonesian Chinese women. The raping and killing of these Chinese unveiled the history of political and social discrimination against the Chinese in Indonesia.

After information spread about the raping and killing of Indonesian Chinese women and their family members and attacks that included the burning down of their houses and business places, silent fear spread throughout the city. I remember that during the following weeks, even months, I carried a knife in my bag every time I went outside. Here I was, a young feminist theologian, a seminary lecturer, a feminist activist who had worked with the broader interreligious women's network in and outside Indonesia, and I was carrying a knife—a symbol of fear and violence that contradicted my faith in nonviolence. The knife also represented the existential fear of women whose bodies have, over the long history of humanity, symbolized hatred, anger, and woundedness, as well as resistance, resilience, and flourishment.

This was when hard questions about the relevance and contributions of ecumenical theological education started to challenge my way of teaching and of formation, both at the seminary and in the church. The socio-political context at the turn of the century in my country challenged me to extend my theological horizon and perspective during the many years since 1998. My perspective has become more complex as my research has brought me to a new realization of the history of the violence and trauma involving religious communities in Indonesia and of the corrupt and violent state and regime of the New Order. My involvement with the Indonesian, Asian, and global ecumenical movements added to the web of my understanding not only of the unity of churches but also of the fact that one of the most challenging tasks of churches is to be ecumenical while embracing the existential differences that go along with the prayer of the Lord "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

God, Creation, and Artificial Intelligence

Six main plenary themes were addressed—"Healing Memories," "Kairos for Creation," "Witness from the Margins," "Engaging with Plurality," "Body Politics," and "Fourth Industrial Revolution and Artificial Intelligence." Throughout the plenaries, hard questions were asked. Although the responses may not always have been satisfactory, they undeniably provided insights for further analysis and reflection. Moreover, the social immersion and the space for sharing allowed both students and facilitators to identify factors and dimensions as well as connections and disconnections between what they had encountered in local sites there in Germany

and in neighbouring countries with their own particular social and ecclesial contexts. The final plenary emphasized the specific context and character of ecumenical theological education that is public. It connected ecumenical theological education with questions of war, not only within Europe but also in other regions and places worldwide. It aimed to provide a broader space for safe, open, and respectful conversation on the public dimension and future issues of ecumenical theological education.

The plenary on artificial intelligence (AI) by Dr H. S. Wilson, in particular, invited and inspired the emergence of new theological imaginations of God and humanity and their ethical repercussions. In regard to the task of imagination, Serene Jones, in her book *Trauma and Grace*, defined imagination as "the thought stories that we live with and through which we interpret the world surrounding us."[1] She further stated that theology's task is "to re-narrate to us what we have yet to imagine."[2] The question is whether our theologies are open enough or are willing to embrace and to reimagine what has yet to be imagined.

Dr Wilson raised many fundamental questions related to the tasks not only of identifying future issues in ecumenical theological education but also, more profoundly, of reimagining and re-narrating the vision of the ecumenicity of churches vis-à-vis the parochiality of churches and Christian communities faced with the complex challenges and advances of science. Furthermore, his plenary alluded to the theological imperative of the theme of the triune God, humans as *imago Dei*, and Christian eschatology vis-à-vis the scientific eschatological imagination.

Linking the AI plenary with the "Kairos for Creation" plenary is a fundamental question regarding humanity, creation, and the shared future. While the climate crisis, global warming, points toward the risk of annihilation of the human body and thus of humanity, the innovations and progress of AI allude to existential changes in our pre-existing conceptions about humans, especially our biological nature. Such a connection challenges our theological imagination to unveil and reimagine the meaning of embodiment in our theological discourse. Dr Wilson's statement that "with augmented intelligence, we are transcending some of the constraints of earlier biological, including cognitive, limits of humanity" points to the urgency of deepening the theological discussion on the theme of the human being as "becoming divine"—a similar theological proposal offered by a feminist theorist of religion, Grace Jantzen. Jantzen referred to the work of Luce Irigaray, a feminist philosopher, on femininity that deconstructs the normativity of masculinity as a

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1. Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 20.

2. Jones, Trauma and Grace, 21.

symbol of the divine. This can also be discussed together with the Orthodox theological discourse on divinization.

Theological discourse on mind, body, and intelligence in the context of the challenges of AI requires the use of multidimensional resources. These interlace the biblical narrative of human becoming as a complex, spiritual, and embodied process with mystical spirituality and imagination, the biblical narrative of breath, and local cultural narratives of the relationship between humans and nature. Dr Upolu's metaphor of the "dirt community" offers a useful source to reference regarding the persistence of earth theology in challenging and shaping the discourse and practice of AI, including metaverse reality. The persistence of earth-based spirituality as represented by dirt—that is, the messiness, unpredictability, multiform nature, incomprehensibility, slowing down, and embodiment of Christian theology—paints an image of Christian theological processes and their ability to offer new avenues for ethical responses to the scientific advances that will change aspects of humanity and the entire creation within the next 50 to 100 years. This still may not be sufficient to respond to the narrative of breath (for example, in John 20:22) that sustains the life of the human brain, which operates using coded language as well as the unencrypted and unsayable reality caused by multiple layers of suffering and trauma.

From within this context, AI is limited in its response to how the human brain works and how humans communicate not only through speech, which can be done by machines, but also through the human body, senses, and feelings. Here, the proposal of Dr Amele Ekue on remembering as relational ethics is crucial in responding to the ethical impact of AI on the discourse of the human as a relational being and on God, the Trinity, as a relational God.[3] Within these intertwined dimensions, a statement in the WCC's publication *Cultivate and Care* is meaningful: "If the churches are to be in a pilgrimage together, it can only be in the context of journeying toward the unity of the church within creation."[4]

The challenge, however, is to perceive the complex challenges of scientific advances within the horizons of a theology of creation. Here, the late Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama's metaphor of the "three mile an hour God"—a theology of speed—can perhaps be used in conversation with the metaphor of a high-speed God—the 300 km/h InterCity Express (ICE) train in Germany—that hints at the issue of speed representing the urgency, the need to be punctual, the

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3. See Amele Adamavi-Aho Ekué, "Intangible and Embodied Desires: Healing Memories in Church and Society," chap. 2 in this volume.

4. *Cultivate and Care: An Ecumenical Theology of Justice for and within Creation*, Faith and Order Paper No. 26 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2020), 5, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/cultivate-and-care.

need to rush, and the predictability that shape our lives together in our postmodern communities. Moreover, a theology of vulnerability and disability can offer a fresh look at the discussion of a scientific approach to human intelligence from the perspective of intellectual disability, which will invite a more nuanced theological response to AI, which is becoming the dominant paradigm of our century.

Ecumenical Memories and Witnessing Practice

The issue of healing memories is one that remains relevant for future discussion. Dr Ekué's approach to the theme of healing memories can be elaborated using the notion of ecumenical memories. Her proposed model of "eucharistic remembering" provides a basis for further exploration of the kind of eucharistic space or imagination that the ecumenical movement has failed to provide. How can eucharistic remembering occur when we refuse to share bread and wine in the eucharistic space in remembrance of the One who has invited all of us around the table? Here, ecumenical memories can be painful and can even wound relationships that rely on the common ground of being Christians—the sacrament of remembrance of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that has become the border that divides instead of bridging the gaps and differences within the fellowship.

The mission concept of *witness* emerged several times in our conversations, especially during the plenaries on healing memories, focusing on *diakonia* from the margins and engaging plurality. The notion of witnessing can have multiple understandings. The long history of mission and mission discourse, however, has played a major role in defining and normalizing the term in relation to Christian conversion.

My research on trauma theology over the past several years has taken me into the complex landscape of the human brain, particularly in terms of the two profound understandings of how trauma ruptures theology and how the Christian missional concept of witnessing provides a bridge for responding to the rupture. A missional "hermeneutic of rupture" is urgent, a hermeneutic in which the reimagination of Christian practices of witnessing is extended beyond the framework of converting others—strangers—for the sake of Christ.[5] It is a hermeneutic that understands the failure of theology in the context of individual and collective traumas.

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5. "The hermeneutic of rupture disrupts, discerns, and disorders faith claims and narratives that negate wounds. It re-imagines and reconfigures sacred texts, symbols, and narratives from the complex elision of wounds and healing and reconstructs a theology and praxis of life that persists and a love that remains in the abyss of the wounds." Septemmy E. Lakawa, "Teaching Trauma and Theology Inspires Lives of Witnessing Discipleship: Theological Education as Missional Formation," *International Review of Mission* 107, no. 2 (December 2018): 337, https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12234:331–346.

Dori Laub, a survivor of the Holocaust and a professor at Yale University, started the archive project that collects the voices of Holocaust survivors. These are accessible for further research and reference. He defined witnessing as a listening practice. Under the theme of "bearing witness and the vicissitudes of listening," he stated: "The listener . . . must listen to and hear the silence, speaking mutely both in silence and in speech, both from behind and from within the speech. He or she must recognize, acknowledge, and address that silence, even if this simply means respect—and knowing how to wait. The listener to trauma needs to know all this so as to be a guide and an explorer, a companion in a journey onto an uncharted land, a journey the survivor cannot traverse or return from alone."[6]

Connecting the Christian practice of witnessing to the act of listening to silence as well as speech seems to contradict the common understanding of Christian proclamations as relying heavily on speaking, even public speaking. Koyama, mentioned earlier, was a missionary who worked many years in Thailand, and was well known for his critique of such a practice. He was known to say that Christianity is a noisy religion. How do you respond to the imperative of Christian witnessing to the love of Christ in this sense while facing the challenges of the trauma phenomenon and the need to reimagine Christian witnessing?

Shelly Rambo, in her book *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, defines new challenges to theology that touch on the central feature of theological discourse and practice, stating that "the body bears the marks of trauma in ways that escape cognitive knowledge. Trauma causes the loss of one's ability to register the event and its effect through the use of language."[7]

Identifying trauma as "suffering that remains," Rambo's work provides crucial insights into the Christian witnessing practice that embraces this kind of theology as the remaining narrative of survival and healing.[8] Theology thus becomes, for her, a discourse of healing. How do we, as churches on a journey toward healing, create a public space where stories of violence and trauma find their way into speech without losing sight of the presence of silence—the unsayability of humans' and nature's woundedness—in our theological realm?

The plenary on body politics by Dr HyeRan Kim-Cragg hinted at this unsayability in the theological discourse of the body—a theology of and through the

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6. Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening," in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History,* ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992), 58–59.

7. Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 21.

8. Rambo, Spirit and Trauma, 15.

wounded body—and noted that the theological discourse of the body should receive further attention in ecumenical education and formation with *body* as its main metaphor.[9] In the context of wars, violent conflicts, and ecological crises with victims and survivors of the climate crisis, a trauma-sensitive theology embedded in ecumenical theological education and formation is crucial.

The reality of human sexualities and spiritualities needs to be discussed within this new theological framework. A question that remains controversial in many churches and communities is, Can one be homosexual and Christian? This requires a reimagination of Christian theological discourse not only on the human body but also on the human mind and soul. The complex reality of genders and sexualities requires a new theological discussion on trauma, silence, resilience, and healing. As Jennifer Baldwin states, "Theology . . . need[s] to matter to someone in the midst of their suffering."[10]

A trauma theological perspective offers a different way of looking at the meaning of witnessing in the context of wars, hatred of strangers, and the rise of xenophobia in relation to the practice of what I called "risky hospitality" across religious, ethnic, and various other borders.

The Post-pandemic Imagination: Ecumenical Theological Education amid Crisis and Opportunities to Harness the Winds of Change

This section is based on my presentation at the conference of the Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia (ATESEA) held on 19 July 2022. I gave a response to the keynote speech by Dr Frank Yamada, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools and the Commission on Accrediting, titled "Winds of Change in North American Theological Education."

Money, health, power, and leadership

The COVID-19 pandemic has radically unveiled the interconnectedness of our global community in fighting the pandemic. But it has also revealed the global disconnect regarding the social and economic structures of injustice that are enlarging the gaps among countries, including their theological schools. The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged churches and theological schools

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9. See HyeRan Kim-Cragg, "Body Politics: Uprooting Systems and Unsettling Practices That Degrade Bodies," chap. 8 in this volume.

10. Jennifer Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 5.

worldwide to rethink the relationship between money, health, power, and education. In his presentation, Dr Yamada identified the impact of this global scene on the decrease in student enrolment from the so-called mainline Protestant denominations. The increase in students from other denominations not only shifts the main Protestant features of many theological schools in North America but also, perhaps, reorients and reclaims the ecumenicity of theological schools, especially in today's divisive world.

Features of global Christianity, especially in southeast Asia, render fundamental the ecumenicity not only of theological education but also of theological schools in the future. These include migration, religious plurality vis-à-vis radicalism, the rise of Pentecostalism in the context of mainline Catholicism in countries such as the Philippines and Timor-Leste, and the everyday and multifaceted dimensions of Christianity.

Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Theologi Jakarta (Jakarta Theological Seminary), the oldest ecumenical seminary in Indonesia, has experienced changes in its student profile in the past ten years through an increase in the number of enrolled students from evangelical, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, and charismatic backgrounds. Furthermore, the current war in Europe and the continuing violence and war in various regions, including political crises in communities in Asia, such as in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, have challenged theological education to bring the ecumenical spirit and platform to the shaping of the winds of change toward peaceful, just, and egalitarian societies.

Endowment funds, investments, and various models need to be discussed and incorporated into long-term plans by many theological schools in southeast Asia. However, the relationship between foreign financial support and the independence of theological education has not yet been clearly defined. The financial independence principle often becomes challenging, as it was during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the possible approaches is to shift schools' relationships with their foreign partners from programme-based cooperation—where programmes are often decided on by the donors/partners—to partnership-based collaboration—where partners are part of the conversation about the dreams of the school to achieve a future that is financially sustainable and independent while retaining the freedom to embed its theology and resources in the Asian hemisphere.

In addition to academic credentials, mapping gender equality, age groups, and church traditions is an essential element of leadership formation in planning for leadership sustainability. Financial sustainability is closely related to a school's faculty and staff development plan. The pandemic has also confirmed the urgent need to reconnect the issues of spiritual health and mental health and integrate them into the whole design of academic and ecumenical formation.

GETI is an important platform not only for theological formation but also for ecumenical leadership formation. Many current GETI students may already know what they will do after GETI. However, if they include leadership in their plans, they may find that a deeper conversation is needed regarding ecumenical leadership, allowing young Christians and theologians to envision and build their dream and to imagine the kind of ecumenical formation and education needed to support that dream. Thinking about their future contributions to the shaping of the ecumenical movement and the ecumenicity of theological education, young theologians may find that the themes of money, health, power, and leadership are rarely discussed together. In practice, especially in the post-pandemic reality, the intertwining of these factors is fundamental to sustaining the ecumenical vision of Christian formation.

Green Campus Blue Seminary: A roadmap for ecumenical eco-theological education

Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) is one of the public voices and witnessing practices of the World Council of Churches. Dr Dietrich Werner spoke of the pioneering work of the ecumenical movement on ecological awareness since the 1970s.[11] The World Council of Churches has produced an ecological roadmap for churches.

What is lacking, however, as I confirmed in a conversation with Dr Werner, is a roadmap for eco-theological seminaries and education. On 1 October 2022, after two years of difficult preparation during the pandemic, Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Theologi Jakarta launched its plan called Green Campus Blue Seminary. This is a five-year programmatic focus (2022–27) on ecological integration in the overall work outlined in the seminary's 20-year grand design plan (2022–42). One output of the programme is a roadmap that is available for ecumenical theological education and formation. It focuses not only on green theology and the sustainability of the seminary campus but also on habituation—the moving forward of a collective way of life that is based on water justice, the sea, and ecological justice overall (blue theology). Here, a dirt theology will be in conversation, for example, with an ocean theology because more than 60 percent of Indonesia, a southeast Asian maritime country located between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, is covered by water. Furthermore, within Jakarta, the school is aiming for a contextual and ecumenical blue theology and emerging blue communities amid the predicted sinking of the capital city within the next 50 years.

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11. See Dietrich Werner, "Kairos for Creation: Theological Perspectives in the Context of a Global Climate and Biodiversity Emergency, or What Does It Mean to Do Theology in the Anthropocene?" chap. 4 in this volume.

Ecumenical Pedagogy: Theological Aesthetics and Eclectic Teaching Methods

Theological aesthetics: Bringing art back to ecumenical theological teaching and formation

Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, former dean of Boston University School of Theology, defines teaching as a "sacramental act." In her words, "to say that teaching is sacramental . . . [is] to emphasize the role of education in mediating God. . . . Teaching is more than a defined body of subject matter and practices . . . it is a holy practice in response to the Holy One who gifts the world with grace and power beyond imagination."[12] Applying her definition to the role of art in ecumenical theological teaching and formation implies the necessity of bringing art back as it transcends the binaries of thinking and feeling, of seeing and touching, of word and breath in ecumenical theological education and formation.

GETI 2022 reflected the multidimensionality and multidirectionality of the theology classroom. Eclectic methods were used to emphasize the safe and open space where differences were allowed and respected while the authentic voices of all were welcomed. Much of our theological education still disconnects art and theological teaching and formation. Although we include art in the liturgy, there is still a tendency to keep art out of the classroom. The chapel has become an embodiment of art while the classroom has become a disembodiment of art.

The chapel has become a symbolic space where ecumenical formation is an embodied practice, where art is connected to the theological space and embodied ecumenically. In the chapel, the gestures of standing and moving, intertwined with sitting and listening, opened us up to the embodied practice of theological formation. However, in the meeting hall, the posture of sitting remained dominant. Students sat and listened to the speakers, while speakers stood in front of them. Although the method and the spatial relationship this represents are familiar and comfortable, bringing art into the classroom to—in reference to Dr Vinoth Ramachandra's first plenary—bridge the borders between theology and aesthetics is crucial.[13]

Ecumenical theological teaching and formation has been and will be an inspiration due to its use of eclectic methodology that is embedded in the pedagogy of healing, justice, liberation, and compassion. Here, the Christian imagination of

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12. Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 22.

13. See Vinoth Ramachandra, "Christ's Love and Borders," Chapter 1 in this volume.

healing, what Serene Jones called "healing and grace imagination," has an important role in the conversation across boundaries. I quote her at length here:

> The Christian faith provides a manner of imagining that inspires a way of life shaped deeply by biblical stories, rituals, traditions, and it has its own ways of ordering the imagination. . . . A Christianly formed imagination tells stories about people who are agents in their own lives, with God-given grace to act, moving through concrete embodied history in time, coherently connected to their own pasts and the stories of others who come before them, related intimately to other people and to the good creation that sustains them and looking forward in hope to a flourishing future. The challenge: to explore how an imagination shaped by grace might meet and heal an imaginative world disordered by violence. If grace has power to reshape the imagination, then theology is the language that both describes that power and evokes it in the lives of people by telling grace-filled stories of new imagining.[14]

The wars and violence that shape the geography and demography of our world today challenge us. Annie Rogers, a child psychiatrist who coined the term "unsayable" in relation to bringing trauma into broken speech, asked in her book entitled *The Unsayable*, "What should we do when violence becomes a way to bring history [of trauma] into speech?"[15] I ask, What should ecumenical theological education and formation do when we cannot deny that trauma is one of the features of the 21st century?

A Final Charge

In September and October 1998, as described above, Indonesia was facing a financial and political crisis. Women activists and students, including my seminary students, were going into the streets demanding a just and equal share of economic and political power from the ruling government. One day, a young undergraduate female student came to my office asking for advice on whether she should join the student protesters. I knew the danger of being on the street, where being shot or killed was possible, and based on my own experience of joining the street protesters, I asked her why she would risk her life. She replied, "Because I want to meet

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14. Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 21–22.

15. Annie G. Rogers, *The Unsayable: The Hidden Language of Trauma* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006), xv.

the Jesus you have taught about in class!" We shared a moment of silence.[16] During this time, I was teaching a course entitled "Reading the Bible with New Eyes." The student who asked this question is now an ordained minister who pioneered the opening of a crisis centre for women victims and survivors of violence across faith backgrounds in the central office of her synod. In 2019, she was elected the general secretary of the Association of Christian Women Theologians in Indonesia. The ecumenical formation of this student and her cohort occurred not only in the classroom but also on the streets during a political crisis. If the same question were to be asked of me today about why I would risk my life, I would answer, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19), knowing the risk, even the danger, of witnessing to Christ. Witnessing in this sense, according to Jon Sobrino, is not the readiness to die for one's faith because of hatred (*odium fidei*) but to live like Christ.[17] Death is not the purpose, but it is the risk.

As the final charge to all my fellow GETI students and scholars, I shared a video of myself dancing a culturally based Indonesian meditative dance based on the song "God Breathes." I composed the song during the five-day spiritual accompaniment that I and a small team of colleagues and students from my seminary created for the survivors of the tsunami and earthquake in 2018 in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. The dance is also a testimony to the importance of art in the theological reimagining of the future of ecumenical theological education and formation, especially in the context of healing.

At the end of my presentation, I offered three questions for discussion:

- What practices and resources do theological schools need to acquire to respond to the challenges they face and to shape the ecumenicity of theological education in the future?

- What are the issues of GETI 2022 that resonate with you the most and that you want to continue to explore in your respective contexts as part of your contribution to local and global ecumenical formation?

- In what ways can the next GETI respond to the proposed future issues in ecumenical theological education?

During the discussion, the prophetic voice of a young male participant from Africa challenged us by asking a rupturing and honest question in the first session

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16. I shared this story in a previous publication. Septemmy Lakawa, "Teaching Trauma and Theology Inspires Lives of Witnessing Discipleship: Theological Education as Missional Formation." *International Review of Mission* 107, no. 2 (December 2018), 331-346. 332.

17. Quoted in Septemmy Lakawa, *Risky Hospitality: Mission in the Aftermath of Religious Communal Violence in Indonesia* (ThD dissertation, Boston University, 2011), 251.

of the final plenary on the Russia–Ukraine war by Dr Rudolf von Sinner. He asked whether, for the sake of unity and of being ecumenical, we should give up the space and time for truth-telling to respect our differences. The question was crucial since it was raised in the context of a war in Europe and in many other parts of the world, and the WCC assembly was expected to be a safe space. It is a space where differences could pave the way for a mutually deeper and more honest, often rupturing conversation, one in which expanding the space around the table is required rather than allowing some to leave the table.

This essay has discussed and identified several themes for future discussion in ecumenical theological education. The themes unveil the multidirectional and multilayered intersections of the discourse and practices of ecumenical theological education of the future.

Students' Contributions

Chapter 12

The Devilish Mirror in Our Eye:
An Eco-theological Reading and Retelling of Genesis 3

Benedikte Emilie Thorup Steensgaard

After attending the World Council of Churches (WCC) 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe and the WCC Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2022, I have realized how important eco-theology is, not just in the ecumenical movement but for our world and theology in general. Being from Denmark, I don't experience the consequences of climate changes very clearly in my everyday life. It is mostly present in the news from other places of the world and as a threat for the future. In Karlsruhe, I heard stories from people who are very affected by the climate changes. A story that touched me deeply was by a woman who is living on a small island in the Pacific and is afraid that she will have no place to live soon because the water level is rising, and it is only a question of time before the water will cover the whole island. Another story that I was touched by was from a man from Kenya who is experiencing people dying from hunger because the lack of rain causes food scarcity. Stories like these made a huge impact on me.

I realized that I want to engage more in eco-theology, which is not well-represented at my university—maybe because I live in the global North. But I want to look past the university and submit a contribution to the eco-theological field that will encourage all Christians to act eco-ethically in accordance with

the Bible. I will do so by relating Genesis 3 to a fairy tale called, "The Snow Queen." by the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen (1805–75). In my context, people know the fairy tale very well. Most people around the world know Andersen, so I think this project is relatable in many contexts. Therefore, after seeing the links between "The Snow Queen" and Genesis 3 and how it can be understood eco-theologically, I thought this fairy tale might open people's minds to the importance of acting eco-ethically. I will use storytelling as an analogy of biblical stories to offer a way to rethink the Christian tradition in the light of the climate crisis, as some have requested.[1] I think it is time to find ways to open up the Bible to more eco-theological interpretation. The method of storytelling as "retelling" can probably be used in other areas of ecumenism as well, and other fairy tales or stories can be used depending on the context.

Fairy Tales and Theology

I am not the first person to use a fairy tale to interpret a text from the Bible. Maybe one could even argue that parts of the Bible itself are a kind of fairy tale that expounds the word of God—at least storytelling that captures something divine. The Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) used fairy tales as an analogy of biblical texts and the divine.[2] Kierkegaard made up his own fairy tales to depict the divine, but I think the same method can be used with existing fairy tales, although some have a closer relation to biblical texts and themes than others. Several people have already emphasized the close link between Andersen's fairy tales and biblical stories.[3]

Carl S. Hughes has worked on Kierkegaard's use of fairy tales. Hughes points out that Kierkegaard thought that no human situation is a valid analogy of the divine, but the fairy tale can be used to awaken the mind to an understanding of the divine.[4] Hughes writes: "Climacus (Kierkegaard's pseudonym) can identify the failures of his fairy tale, but he still cannot depict divine love directly—not in

1. Marthe Maleke Kondemo, "Care for Creation: An Ecotheological Reading of Genesis 2," in *International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia*, ed. Dietrich Werner et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2022), 16; Lynn White Jr, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," in *Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders: An Ecumenical Reader, GETI 2022*, ed. Kuzipa Nalwamba and Marietta Ruhland (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2022), 116, 119.

2. Carl S. Hughes, "Prologue: Theology and Fairy Tales," in *Kierkegaard and the Staging of Desire: Rhetoric and Performance in a Theology of Eros* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 5.

3. See, for example, Carsten Bach-Nielsen and Doris Ottesen, *Andersen og Gud: Teologiske læsninger i H. C. Andersens forfatteskab* (København: Forlaget ANIS, 2004); Monica Papazu, *I Guds klare solskin. H. C. Andersens kristne eventyr og historier* (København: Forlaget ANIS, 2006).

4. Hughes, "Prologue," 5.

another fairy tale, not in the most eloquent novel or play, and not in the most rarefied theological discourse. The best that all these forms can do is to show where they break down, in order to awaken a desire for that which they can never contain."[5] I think it is important to take this into account when working with "The Snow Queen" as an analogy of Genesis 3.

I will clarify here that I am aware of the lack of depth in "The Snow Queen" when it comes to interpreting Genesis 3 eco-theologically. There are flaws in my interpretation both because of the limitations of this project and because of my current level of theological education—but I also think it is important to note the "failure of the fairy tale" that Kierkegaard was also aware of. "The Snow Queen" might not be able to completely depict the human condition after the Fall. Perhaps it can only be used to wake a desire, but that may be just enough.

Summary of "The Snow Queen"

"The Snow Queen" begins with a wicked sprite, the devil, making a mirror that will make everything good look bad: "In this mirror the most beautiful landscapes looked like boiled spinach."[6] A group of sprites takes the mirror and flies up in the sky to make fun of God and the angels. But as they come closer to God, the mirror falls, breaks apart, and spreads all over the world. It gets into people's eyes and hearts.

The two main characters of the fairy tale are a young boy and girl, Kay and Gerda. They live with their grandmother at a place with a beautiful garden with roses. The garden is described in almost paradisiacal terms. One day, Kay gets a splinter from the devil mirror in his eye. After that, the first thing he does is to question why Gerda is crying; then he destroys the roses in the garden. Suddenly, he acts like an adult. He does not want to read their picture books as before, and the adults think he is fun and brilliant. Also, he says that the snowflakes are prettier than real flowers, because they have no flaws.

One day Kay gets picked up by the snow queen. Gerda does not know where he is, so she goes out into the world to look for him. On the way, an old lady picks her up and wants to keep her. The old lady is afraid that the roses in her garden will remind Gerda of home and Kay, so that Gerda will leave her. Therefore, she hides all the roses in her garden with magic. But the lady forgets about one rose: the rose

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5. Hughes, "Prologue," 5.

6. H. C. Andersen, "The Snow Queen," in *Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc, 2017), 115. All quotations are from this English translation. My summary of the story is based on the Danish version: H. C. Andersen, "Snedronningen," in *81 Eventyr* (Viborg: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 1996), 217–41.

painted on her hat. When Gerda sees it, she is reminded of home and Kay. Gerda feels sad about the missing roses in the lady's garden, so she sits down and cries in the place where the roses were. Her tears make the roses come back up from the ground.

When Gerda finds Kay at the snow queen's castle, he is cold and stiff. She cries warm tears on his chest, which get into his heart and break the mirror. Then she sings some lines of a hymn by the Danish theologian and hymnist H. A. Brorson (1694–1764), which they also sang in their grandmother's garden: "The rose in the valley is blooming so sweet, and angels descend there the children to greet."[7] That makes Kay cry, so the splinter falls out of his eye, and he recognizes Gerda.

In the end, they come back home. The roses are blooming and "the grandmother sat in the bright sunshine."[8] She reads aloud words that probably by no coincidence resemble Mark 10:15: "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." At that moment, Kay and Gerda understand the hymn that they sang. In the end, Anderson wrote, they were adults, but in their hearts they were children.

"The Snow Queen" and Genesis 3

My interpretation draws on an article written by theologian Yolande Steenkamp. Her article builds on philosopher Richard Kearney's post-metaphysical theories about the re-imagination of God using methods from phenomenology and hermeneutics.[9] Steenkamp interprets the narratives of Eden and the Annunciation in light of Kearney's theory on interpreting sin and salvation along post-metaphysical lines.[10] They both read the Bible narratives through the lens of the Hebrew term *yetser* (יָצַר, to form).[11] This term is, for instance, used in Genesis 2:7 where God creates/forms the humans from the dust. It is also used in Genesis 6:5, where God sees the human *yetser* as evil: "The Lord saw that man's wickedness on earth was great and that every form (*yetser*) of his heart's thoughts was evil all the time."[12]

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7. Andersen, "The Snow Queen," 171. The original text in Danish is "Roserne vokser i dale, Der får vi barn Jesus I tale" (Andersen, "Snedronningen," 220). A more literal translation of that line is "The roses grow in valleys, where we will get child Jesus talking."

8. Andersen, "The Snow Queen," 171.

9. I am not taking a critical approach to Steenkamp's article, nor am I referencing Kearney's own words.

10. I am not considering Steenkamp's interpretation of the Annunciation in this paper.

11. Yolande Steenkamp, "Of Eden and Nazareth: Stories to Capture the Imagination," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1, a1713 (2017): 1.

12. Translation of Genesis 6:5 by author. וַיַּ֣רְא יְהוָ֔ה כִּ֥י רַבָּ֛ה רָעַ֥ת הָאָדָ֖ם בָּאָ֑רֶץ וְכָל־יֵ֙צֶר֙ מַחְשְׁבֹ֣ת לִבּ֔וֹ רַ֥ק רַ֖ע כָּל־הַיּֽוֹם.

Steenkamp writes that "Kearney interprets the *yetser* as the human person's 'creative impulse to imitate God's own creation.' Associated with the *yetser* are both an ethical consciousness of good and evil and an historical consciousness of past and future. Thus, Adam and Eve's eating of the fruit does not only impart knowledge of good and evil but also marks the beginning of time, enabling humanity to 'project itself into the future through its creative activity.'"[13] In this way, the *yetser* contains human beings' ability to be morally oriented co-creators. Kearney draws on a Talmudic tradition that interprets the *yetser* as being good or evil depending on human choice, with the Torah as a moral guide.[14] He holds that "a human *yetser* that is redirected towards the fulfilment of divine will and purpose (that is, the divine *yetser*) may therefore partner with God in the task of historical recreation."[15] Goodness is eschatological and is only possible to realize through imagination. Jesus Christ enables the imagination to draw toward God's will because he submits his *yetser* to God's will and thereby "becomes the perfect embodiment of the word of God to a humanity whose *yetser* is perpetually put in service of itself in an act of idolatry."[16]

Taking these theories about the *yetser* into account, I considered how the human condition changed after the Fall. "The Snow Queen" can contribute to an interpretation of Genesis 3 in accordance with Steenkamp and Kearney's understanding of the *yetser*. Previously, it has been noted that "The Snow Queen" is a retelling of Genesis 3.[17] At the beginning of the fairy tale, there is a clear analogy to the Fall. The sprites are trying to get near to God, which results in a fall and evil spreading out all over the world. If we look at the human condition in Genesis 3, there is a clear change in the humans' relation to God, which might define the human *yetser*. In Genesis 3:4–5, the snake tells the woman (later called Eve) that they will not die when eating from the tree in the middle of the garden, but "God knows that on the day when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will

13. Steenkamp, "Eden and Nazareth," 2.

14. Here, we see a central difference between the Hebraic ethical understanding and the Hellenistic ontological understanding of imagination. The Talmudic interpretation of the *yetser* does not understand evil as pre-existing in humans. It also means that goodness is never obtained as a full condition: "Rather, goodness is an eschatological horizon which opens up the path of history as a dynamic movement towards the end (*eschaton*) or goal of perfect goodness—a goal which would only finally be realized in the arrival of the Messianic era" (Steenkamp, "Eden and Nazareth," 3–4.). An interpretation of the *yetser* as the moral consciousness of good and evil would lead to a discussion on understandings of sin, redemption, and free will, but I will not pursue this topic here.

15. Steenkamp, "Eden and Nazareth," 3.

16. Steenkamp, "Eden and Nazareth," 7.

17. Svend Bjerg, "Troldspejlet," in Bach-Nielsen and Ottesen, *Andersen og Gud*, 29.

be like God and know good and evil."[18] Knowing good and evil is then the
God-likeness. But Adam and Eve cannot walk around in the garden being like
God, so God sends them out of Eden to prevent them from also eating from the
tree of life (Gen 3:22–24). There is a significant difference between humans' rela-
tion to God before and after the expulsion from Eden. In the garden, they are in
some way closer to God. It does not say whether they were able to see God in the
garden, but they can hear when God is walking (Gen. 3:8a), which indicates a
close relationship. They physically hide from God (Gen. 3:8b), which could indi-
cate that they somehow know where he is. After the expulsion, according to the
Old Testament, no human sees God directly. God only shows himself through
something else, like the fire in Exodus 3. God says in Exodus 33:20: "you cannot
see my face; for no one shall see me and live." Therefore, the expulsion from the
garden indicates a "fall" in humans' relation to God.

When Adam and Eve eat of the fruit, "the eyes of the two of them were
opened, and they know that they were naked."[19] The devil mirror from "The Snow
Queen" makes me think of the consequence of eating the fruit as a mirror being
put up in front of them—it is as if they see themselves for the first time. They do
not see themselves neutrally, but critically; they are ashamed of themselves for
being naked, so they hide, since they now know the difference between good and
evil. There is a similarity between eating from the fruit and getting a piece of the
devil mirror from "The Snow Queen" in one's eye or heart. By the mirror through
which one sees the world, one tends to act wickedly. But the consequence of eating
the fruit is not just seeing oneself, it is also not seeing God anymore. Since the Fall,
only through self-reflection can humans imagine God. In choosing between good
and evil, humans must assess whether in their actions they are co-creators with
God's will. We must ask ourselves: Did God see that it was good? or Is our *yetser* in
accordance with the divine?

Jesus is the way of knowing that. Through the life and actions of Jesus Christ,
we can imagine God's will and our co-creation in accordance with the divine pur-
pose. This happens as Jesus sets the moral example.[20] Then, we direct our *yetser*
toward Jesus and not toward ourselves, which has been our idolatrous behaviour
since the Fall.[21] Humans' tendency to direct the *yetser* toward themselves is a

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18. Translation of Genesis 3:5 by author. כִּי יֹדֵעַ אֱלֹהִים כִּי בְּיוֹם אֲכָלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ וְנִפְקְחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם וִהְיִיתֶם כֵּאלֹהִי
יֹדְעֵי ם טוֹב There is a scholarly discussion about why God tells them that they will die if they eat from
the tree, but they don't die. See James Barr, "Is God a Liar? (Genesis 2–3)—and Related Matters,"
The Journal of Theological Studies 57, no. 1 (2006): 1–22.

19. Translation of Genesis 3:7a by author. וַתִּפָּקַחְנָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי עֵירֻמִּם הֵם.

20. There are different theological views on Jesus as a moral example, but I will not go into them here.

21. All through the Old Testament there are stories about kings who worship other gods and thereby

result of the *imago Dei*; because we are created in God's image, we think that we can reflect God. Directing the *yetser* toward oneself is evil. The evil is when you start imagining yourself as God, which was possible after the Fall, since humans were able see themselves as co-creators. In a call for care for our common home, Pope Francis states: "A spirituality which forgets God as all-powerful and Creator is not acceptable. That is how we end up worshipping earthly powers, or ourselves usurping the place of God, even to the point of claiming an unlimited right to trample his creation underfoot."[22]

Before the coming of Christ, who reveals God's will to us, it's not possible to direct our *yetser* toward the total good, toward God. That is why God declares the human *yetser* evil in Genesis 6:5, where it says: "every 'form' (*yetser*) of his heart's thoughts was evil."[23] This resonates with my reading of Genesis 3 and "The Snow Queen," as the Fall induces a devil mirror to turn humans' *yetser* to evil.[24] This also aligns with another part of the same verse: "the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth." This emphasizes that the wickedness is on earth; that is, the place to which the humans are expelled after the Fall. Because of all the evil between humans, God sends his son to be the human that humans should have been. By mercy, God gives his son the *yetser* humans should have had, which enables humans to have a good *yetser* after all—a *yetser* that is not directed toward oneself but toward God.[25]

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break the covenant with God (for instance, King Ahab in 1 Kings 16:30–33). This must be because of their self-centredness. Before Christ, humans failed to have a good *yetser*. Paul also writes in Romans 1:24–25: "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator."

22. Pope Francis, "Encyclical Letter Laudato si' of The Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home," in *Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders*, 134.

23. Based on my translation of Genesis 6:5. See n. 12.

24. It is noteworthy that in Genesis 8:21, God declares "human's *yetser* of the heart evil from its youth" (יֵצֶר לֵב הָאָדָם רַע מִנְּעֻרָיו). We can only wonder what time period is referenced here concerning "the youth"—before or after the Fall? Genesis 8:21 is the first time this term נָעוּר (youth) is used in the Old Testament, so we cannot know for sure. If it is before the Fall, then we can question whether humans even have a choice or if God is responsible for the *yetser*.

25. Whether good actions bring humans closer to God is a dogmatic issue on which Lutherans and Catholics will not agree. Catholics learn that good deeds affect God's grace, while Lutherans learn that humans have no influence on God's grace at all; that salvation happens because God wants it, not because humans want it (Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio*). Luther also argues in his *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen* that the good deeds "jump" out of the faith; that is, they come as a consequence of the faith, not as a way to obtain it. I argue that my reading of Genesis 3 can be accepted in both traditions, because I do not go into the discussion of whether doing good deeds is possible before coming to faith. I argue that we can only have a good *yetser* according to God's will after the coming of Christ. Whether this can be accepted or rejected by different church traditions is a matter for a longer discussion.

"The Snow Queen" as an Eco-theological Retelling of Genesis 3

Marthe Maleke Kondemo has written an eco-theological reflection on Genesis 2 and states: "Our minds and hearts should increasingly see life through God's lens, which should begin to shape our daily choices."[26] I could not have said it better myself, and I think her statement fits very well with my reading of Genesis 3 as elucidated by "The Snow Queen" and the theories of Kearney and Steenkamp. I will now relate some examples from "The Snow Queen" to interpret Genesis 3 eco-theologically and to explain that destroying our nature is against God's will.

The roses clearly play an important role in the fairy tale. Roses are commonly seen as an allegory of Jesus. In the hymn by Brorson in "The Snow Queen," it is even written that "where the roses grow, Jesus is talking." Just as the rose on the old lady's hat enables Gerda to remember her home garden, Jesus enables us to remember "our home garden." If Jesus is like the rose in the fairy tale, Jesus is the one who makes us remember paradise. Just as the rose on the hat is not a real rose but an imagined rose, Jesus with his God-given *yetser* is a sort of image of God's will, which he enables us to see glimpses of. He shows humans that self-centredness is ungodly. Humans might think that we reflect God and God's will through the mirror in which we see ourselves, but Jesus shows us that that is wrong.

Kay destroys the roses, just as humans are destroying nature. Humans who have a devil mirror in their eye cannot see what harm their destruction does to the planet. Just as Kay destroys the roses when he gets the splinter in his eye, people who are centred toward themselves do not care for nature, since they do not see that it is against co-creation with God. The devil mirror makes people imagine that what is evil is good. Just as Kay fancies the snowflakes more than real flowers because he thinks they look more like a perfect flower, people value their own image of how the world is perfect rather than seeing it in accordance with God's will. If someone has a splinter in their eye, if they direct the *yetser* toward their own self, they cannot see what is truly beautiful. The splinter is a wrenching of reality, just as a self-centred *yetser* is. Christ is the rose that shows us that loving God and our neighbour is to have a good *yetser*.[27] I would argue that since nature is a part of creation just like humans, we must see it as a neighbour and act with love toward it. Kondemo writes in her eco-theological reflection on Genesis 2: "Every creature in the world is a

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26. Kondemo, "Care for Creation," 22.

27. The great commandment in Matthew 22:37–39: "He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'"

mirror of God's presence and is therefore worthy of being treated with respect."[28] I can only agree. Nature is a part of God's creation, and we should treat it with respect.

Christ helps us to point to the beauty of nature. Pope Francis reminds us that "The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things: 'Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest' (Jn 4:35)."[29] I guess most people can relate to that majestic feeling of seeing or thinking of really stunning nature. Nature is a part of the divine. It saddens us when nature is ruined, since beautiful nature reminds us of our long-lost garden. Jesus points to that. When Gerda is reminded of Kay and the garden, she cries, and her tears make the roses come back. Just so, may our tears of sadness make nature come back to us. Gerda's tears both make the roses grow back and get the splinter out of Kay's heart. There is a clear connection between the tears, the roses, and getting rid of the splinter. I think the hymn of Brorson offers the key to this connection; where the roses are, Jesus is, and so comes the faith. I interpret the removal of the splinter from Kay's heart as him getting faith. Then he is no longer evil and, I would argue, no longer directed toward himself. Somehow the tears are the ones who enable the faith to come. It is written in John 16:20, "Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy." Hans Christian Andersen saw this connection as a time of evil and destruction leading to tears, which will lead to faith and happiness. Gerda can be interpreted as one who has faith and helps Kay come to faith. Maybe Gerda can even be seen as symbolic of Christ, or at least as one who has the spirit, since she helps Kay to get rid of the devil mirror. Christ is the one who makes us rid ourselves of the devil mirror in our eye, by making our tears wash it out, which enables us to come to faith. Christ removes the splinter that blinds us from seeing God's paradise, blinds us from "seeing" God's will.[30] I think that coming to faith is also seeing the beautiful nature that surrounds us and wanting to keep it. Coming to faith means acting eco-ethically.

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28. Kondemo, "Care for Creation," 19.

29. Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, 138.

30. When H. C. Andersen uses the metaphor of the splinter in the eye, he must, to some extent, have in mind Matthew 7:3: "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"

When the fairy tale ends with Kay and Gerda coming back to the garden, the description is obviously paradisiacal. Gerda leads Kay to faith, back to childhood. The resemblance to Mark 10:15 in the passage that the grandmother reads, about receiving God's kingdom like a child, is not coincidental. Kay and Gerda say that they suddenly understand the verse from Brorson's hymn when they hear the passage. Then they understand that being able to know that the roses lead to Jesus means that we need to receive the roses like a child. I think it is significant that the hymn says that it is where the roses are in valleys that we will get Jesus talking. When we are in "valleys," that is, when we are sad or hopeless, that is where God plants a rose seed (or shows a glimpse of a rose on a hat), and that is where we meet Jesus. That is where we get rid of the devil mirror. Being free from the devil mirror is like seeing the world as a child. Children do not destroy nature. They explore it, play in it. They are a part of it. As adults should be. In that way, we will receive the kingdom of God through our daily choices, through acting with God's will. By acting eco-ethically, we direct our *yetser* toward God, not toward ourselves. The fairy tale helps us awaken our inner child, to look for roses and keep them. For the roses awaken a desire inside of us for something beautiful, something beautiful between and among us.

Conclusion

This project has sought to offer an eco-ethical interpretation of the Bible. I have used the method of storytelling and the fairy tale "The Snow Queen" to interpret Genesis 3 eco-theologically. If we find ways to retell biblical stories, we can learn to see them in today's context. As I discovered at GETI and the World Council of Churches assembly in Karlsruhe, storytelling is already an integral part of the ecumenical movement. The shared stories create a living movement; they are how we touch and connect with each other. A common story and sharing our stories are what binds us all together as a unity even though we are far from each other in distance or culture. Storytelling can be a part of our co-creation, as we seek to define our own story according to how we want the future to be. If we understand that following Jesus means to act eco-ethically, we have to retell the story of how we treat this planet in accordance with the faith. With an urgent need for action due to climate change, we need to find ways to show that the Bible encourages us to act eco-ethically. If Christianity does, in fact, have as much responsibility for the climate crisis as Lynn White argues, Christians and theologians must step forward to show that a massive exploitation of nature is against the biblical message.[31] My

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31. White Jr., "Historical Roots." 119.

intent has been to show that following Jesus means to act eco-ethically. And to follow Jesus means that we rid ourselves of the devilish mirror of our eye to see the real beauty in our world, the beauty that God has created. Only when our tears wash out the devil mirror in our eye are we capable of having a good *yetser* and preserving nature as God intended.

Witnessing from the Margins through a Liberating God

Christopher Latchman

Overview: General Contextual Reflections from GETI Tracks

I looked forward in many ways to the challenge that the ecumenical framework of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) would present. The programme started with a virtual study for about four weeks, in which we engaged in rigorous conversations around six theological tracks.

The Healing Memories study track was both strategic and timely, considering the current socio-political issues of a divided world and rumors of war that are plaguing our common world. The track developed key responses to healing and mending the wounds surrounding these issues, looking particularly at the history of how war plays. Not only was this biblical and powerful, but it also seemed appropriate to have the host be Germany, a country that could somewhat understand what it requires to heal memories. Further, healing memories proved to be a key learning event for me, a "Caribbean wanderer." European colonization has been the ghost haunting the people of the Caribbean even after some years of independence. It is not easy to understand the struggle of hope against the struggle of systemic poverty, systemic racism, and systemic classism (repetition intended). In order to uncover solutions to systemic, generational traumas, truth-telling and a spirit of healing are necessary.

A second track, Witnessing from the Margins, was another that stood out to me as a collaborative effort that is needed to unify a divided world. The idea of Black Lives Matter may seem to be somewhat biased, but when reframed to fit the context, it is relevant.

Understanding that there may be a sense of white Eurocentric privilege is a place where we can begin to contextualize our theology. Then the questions of why there is an image of God as white or even why there are "clothing narratives" in the Caribbean become essential frames for deconstructing negative notions of Caribbean livelihood. The topic of witnessing from the margins illuminates the biased thought that poverty is primarily the problem of the poor. It is time for emancipation to arrive in the Caribbean!

Other tracks covered the concepts of plurality, representing engagement with other religious faiths; creation, which helped to deconstruct common positive notions of industrialization, giving life to Indigenous groups; and artificial intelligence, which was quite relevant to the current state of the world, considering the problems of ecocide and the possibility that we are heading toward an act of extinction.

A general overview also points to the revelation that we could gather together from different geographical locations and decipher the meaning of Christ's love within a life-giving, faith-sharing community. What that means depends on the need for different spaces and on the understandings we develop as we work together in unity, under God.

Locating God: The Image of God in Caribbean Culture

"Could u white God save me from white man oppression" is the cry of Jamaican singer and song writer Sizzla Kalonji, as he protests the staunch reality of a society that professes a Western version of Christ.[1] A rough image by Richard Neave, a forensic anthropologist, shows that Christ may not have looked the way he is portrayed in modern-day movies and paintings.[2] This proves that there is something definitely wrong with the way in which Christ is interpreted by the world.

Many may say, what does it matter? But images, signs, and symbols have a particular psychedelic effect on the human understanding of reality. A person's understanding of the image of God influences their actions, either positively or

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1. Sizzla Kalonji (Miguel Orlando Collins), vocalist, "No White God," on *Total Reggae (One Drop),* VP Records, 2014.

2. Joan Taylor, "What Did Jesus Really Look Like?" BBC News, 24 December 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35120965.

negatively. For instance, if it is believed that God is loving and kind, then love and kindness may dictate how the other is treated. At the same time, if Christ is an English-speaking white male, then our theology could foster a view of the superiority of men over women and the English language as opposed to Indigenous language. Likewise, if Christ is thought to be white, the closest thing to the white God is the white man. There are even arrogantly robust claims that the black race was cursed to be servants to the other races.[3] This assuredly leads to a theological problem.

Malcolm Gladwell gives insight into the power of signs and symbols in his book *The Tipping Point*. He reflects on the violent crimes in the United States in the 1980s and '90s, claiming that "crime began to fall in the city" because of the crackdown on petty street crimes, which give the indication for larger, much greater crimes.[4] He continues: "For a crime to be committed, something extra, something additional, has to happen to tip a troubled person toward violence, and what the power of context is saying is that those *tipping points* may be as simple and trivial as everyday signs of disorder like graffiti and fare beating. The implications of this idea are enormous"[5] (author's emphasis).

It was because of an understanding that it was the "minor, seemingly insignificant quality of life crimes . . ." which became "tipping points for violent crime."[6] In fixing the broken windows from street corners, repainting the graffiti from the walls, and countering the fare-beating and peeing on the streets from those crime-centered areas, crimes were reduced. *"An epidemic can be reversed, can be tipped, by tinkering with the smallest details of the immediate environment."*[7] In the way that small details carry massive power, the Christians of Europe have managed to advertise and promote, through symbols and signs, a western Christ that has led to the creation of a dominant, sophisticated white race.

In the Caribbean, there are several concepts that promote white supremacy and the identity of God as white. This can be traced back to two paintings, Leonardo Da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi* and Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ,* which have become popular representations of Jesus Christ. While these images may be uplifting to many, it becomes a matter of context and education. To say that the context

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3. Alvin O. Thompson, "Race and Colour Prejudices and the Origin of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade," *Caribbean Studies* 16, no. 3/4 (October 1976): 29–59, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25612783.

4. Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2002), 109.

5. Gladwell, *Tipping Point*, 122.

6. Gladwell, *Tipping Point*, 109.

7. Gladwell, *Tipping Point*, 109; emphasis added.

of Western countries produces an image of God that promotes solidarity for the majority is something worth considering. However, such claims about Christ's appearance being of a particular race should be understood, for the most part, as a metaphor in describing the meaning of God for the everyday people.[8]

It is a limitation of human understanding that language tends to serve only as a tool for understanding reality or imagination. Giving preference to the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God spoken of in Psalm 139 reflects an idea that humans are created in God's image.[9] Remembering that limitation may be a good place to start to deconstruct dominant images of the unseen God. At the same time, allowing other images to be fostered may bring liberty to the other suffering races of the world.

Contextually, releasing strong images may be the clue to a "just" Christian education practice for a decolonial God figure, as the perfection that can overcome the negative images of everyday life. Similarly, the Black Lives Matter movement started a quest for liberation of the "unjustly treated" black race, but still does not negate the truth that "all lives matter." Rather, it asks the sharper question, Why are people of a particular racial society treated with such disdain? The idea of *relevance* and *context* is powerful in the sense of pointing to the unjust treatment of Black people. This does not rule out the "all lives matter" point. It is also important to observe that opponents of the Black Lives Matter movement were not necessarily white— they were also from other groups who were also marginalized by whites, such as Asians, Mexicans and Indians. At this point, the suffering people who make up the "two-thirds world"[10] are joining the movement for justice in the way that makes sense to them. Such movements expose the great need for liberation of the masses.

Diving into history, it can be noted that the problem began during the time when the Europeans came to the Caribbean with the direct intention of making Christians of the global South, doing so by force and the assertion of superiority. It was a quite disheartening reality, which should now be a preamble to discern the problems facing not only the Caribbean, but other countries which were once under colonial rule. Below are attempts to further define the ways in which colonialism is staunchly present after a period of colonial rule.

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8. See Marcus J. Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 42.

9. Borg, *Reading the Bible*, 42.

10. "Why the Life of Philip Potter Is So Relevant for the New Generation—and How to Find Out More," interview with Stephen Brown, World Council of Churches News, 19 August 2021, https://www.oikoumene.org/news/why-the-life-of-philip-potter-is-so-relevant-for-the-new-generation-and-how-to-find-out-more.

God as a Colonial Deity Rooted in Whiteness

As scholars Ennis Barrington Edmonds and Michelle A. Gonzalez write:

> According to the cardinal, when Christ came into the world, he divested all heathen powers of their authority and became the sole sovereign over humankind. Before returning to heaven, Christ passed this authority on to Peter, the first pope, and to succeeding popes, who are Christ's representatives on earth. Popes therefore have the authority to assign jurisdiction of any territory to "Christian princes." Acting on this premise, Pope Alexander VI issued a papal bull assigning all newly discovered land beyond an imaginary line in the Atlantic to Spain, giving it the right to occupy, govern, and profit from these lands, as well as the responsibility to Christianize the local peoples."[11]

Noble Christians from all denominations of Guyana believe that the first set of missionaries came with humble and Christlike attitudes to exuberantly proclaim the word of God. But according to a letter issued from the notorious leader of the Christian church of the 16th century, the Christian missionaries at that time came with the intention of making slaves of the people of the Caribbean. Through their conquests, the Spanish believed that the people outside of Spain belonged solely to the powers of Spain. The mission was to bring the natives to Christianity at all costs, even if it resulted in violence, which it did. It is a shame that Christianity has sugar-coated this truth with a cover-up story premeditated to condone the power of the colonial West, which became the source of Christianity in the Americas.

This notion is widely considered to be the foundation of our educational system. The natives of the Caribbean were "homeless," "foodless," and "unclothed", then came the colonizers with their saving arms, who embraced the indigenous locals, bringing articles of clothing to cover what missionaries believed to be their shameful nakedness. Before this, the locals would dwell together in communities and never thought of themselves to be naked apart from a few, who "supposedly wore coverings of leaves for their genital areas."[12]

The Arawak were the first group to inhabit the Caribbean lands. Their presence in the Caribbean can be dated to as early as 4000 BCE.[13] From then until the arrival of the colonizers, the Arawak of the Caribbean never saw themselves as

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11. Ennis Barrington Edmonds and Michelle A. Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 34.

12. Edmonds and Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History*, 32.

13. Edmonds and Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History,* 16.

naked nor did they believe their existence was shameful until they were classified as uncivilized by the colonizers that came. This is where decency was defined for the people: they needed to be clothed. Today, they abandon local attire for Western trends—since that is what brings the profits now. This notion of "decency" is important to understand the clothing worn throughout the countries of the Caribbean today.

In a country where the temperature almost never gets below 20°C, it is troubling that it is "necessary" to be up to our necks in clothing. It does not add up logically. Politician and Indigenous tribe leader Lennox Shuman was found to be unfit for a court hearing, the court deeming that his Indigenous clothing did "not coincide with the code of dress for the court."[14] The judicial system and other public systems that should accept the rights of all ethnic communities have made a mockery of people's cultural heritages. This has distorted the essence of the life of the people.

Moreover, this idea of what is deemed to be socially acceptable clothing defines our values. An understanding that Western pants and a colourful bowtie are more socially acceptable than my native wear tells where the power in my mind is centred. The reason Caribbean culture is considered to be low in comparison to that of Europe and the United States is simply because we are allowing it to linger in our subconsciousness. The ideal of "civilization," which, in reality, was and still is "Western civilization," is not the measuring stick of righteousness for all humanity and needs to be dismantled.

Indigenizing God: Colonial Happiness Rooted in Whiteness

Western civilization has also led the people of the Caribbean into the vanity of material wealth in trying to establish the great American dream. To live the American dream is to be a part of the growing empire with a lifestyle that flourishes and blooms according to the new standards of society. A car, cell phone, and Wi-Fi are now necessities for a citizen born into this social construct. Life revolves around them as essential for a comfortable life. An individual is deemed ignorant, socially unacceptable, old fashioned, or poor if he or she does not succumb to this modern lifestyle.

As a result of social trends and wealth, a divide now surfaces. The poor are placed into one group, whereas the community of high achievers forms a second

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14. "Shuman Appears in Court with Traditional Wear," *Kaieteur News*, 11 March 2020, https://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2020/03/11/lennox-shuman-appears-in-court-in-traditional-amerindian-wear.

group. The petty bourgeoisie who have seen themselves as overcomers of the system believe that they have started off poor and would have worked hard to achieve their status at the higher end of the wealth spectrum. Most people envision a life on the wealthy side of the spectrum. This idea of wealth achievement is believed to make the common person happy, but in many ways, it accentuates the deeper societal problem.

Theories have been developed and built upon the foundation of happiness and ultimate achievement. One such is Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which induces persons to think they must have more than that which is needed.[15] It is a concept promoted in social media and in advertisements for major business industries. Starbucks, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, all make up a consumer paradise, portrayed as essential for major city dwellers around the world. Local producers must supply the big market chains if they want to stay in business. Adversely, for the natives, the necessities are still the ever more prolific requirements for a happy life, perhaps just the first stage of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, our physiological needs for food, shelter, and clothing.

The pursuit of happiness is ever-evolving, challenging humankind to newer, greener fields in other countries and places. This evolution involves newer, re-formed inequalities of oppression. The concept of evolution also makes relevant a biblical hermeneutic of John 10:10, describing the motive of killing, stealing, and destroying to attain possession of materials that they believe will constitute a happy life.[16] It is disheartening to think about the extent to which some people are going to satisfy a self-fulfilling demise. During the pandemic, there was a story about the closure of some McDonald's in Indonesia because of overcrowding by people clamouring for the "BTS Meal," named after the wildly popular Korean boyband. The contents of the meal were fries, a Coke, and chicken nuggets, and they were packaged in a purple box.[17] Happiness is now a frantic idea of need and greed powered by industries that are desperate to get richer by enticing the poor to buy their products. The sad reality about this is that in the long run, people realize that after working so hard to achieve their dreams, there is still an overwhelming unhappiness. Gregg Easterbrook concluded that Western nations have achieved everything they could have possibly dreamed of, and they are now retreating to simpler lifestyles trying to preserve life experiences over long working hours and

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15. Abraham H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation.," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370–96, https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346.

16. See the treatment of John 10:10 in Vuyani Vellem, *Bible and Theology from the Underside of Empire* (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2017), 3–11.

17. "McDonald's BTS Meals: Indonesia Branches Forced to Shut Due to High Orders," BBC News, 10 June 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-57426198.

job security: "Most men and women in the Western nations have attained the conditions of which previous generations dreamed . . . and although this is excellent news, the attainment makes it possible for society to verify, beyond doubt, that personal liberty and material security do not in themselves bring contentment. . . . That must come from elsewhere, making it time to awaken from the great American dream."[18]

The context of Guyana and other colonial countries is one of a people who are shaped by the reality of the *whiteness* of development. In a sense, the great American dream does nothing but distort the essence of development and put people under unnecessary pressure in the name of trying to achieve what is believed to be happiness.

Therefore, from a critical lens, it is much more important to consider the reality of people deemed to be in poverty. Context offers the possibility of becoming familiar with the problems facing people in poverty due to race and class structures. It is important to foster awareness that image matters; our understanding of oppression matters. Moreover, as a solution for the problems in the Caribbean, the church, our leaders, and the community are called to witness to the suffering in a way that liberates God's love from cultural captivity.

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18. Greg Easterbrook, quoted by Gary Marx, in *Sixteen Trends: Their Profound Impact on Our Future. Implications for Students, Education, Communities, Countries, and the Whole of Society* (Alexandria, VA: Educational Research Service, 2006), 274, https://archive.org/details/sixteentrends the0000marx/page/n9/mode/2up.

Chapter 14

Stumbling on the Border:
Reflections on the Church from the Perspective of Multitudinism

Elio Jaillet

The impetus for this work comes from a personal difficulty experienced during the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2022 meetings, as well as the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in general. It concerns my struggle to articulate my church's story.

This paper presents the elements of difficulty linked to the fact of proposing a story. This is followed by the development of the image of the church corresponding to these difficulties: that is, the multitudinist church as a form of church that tends to adjust its visible form to the liminality proper to Christian existence. The final section indicates the role that the description of limits takes in order to assume its place on the border.

Struggling with the Narrative

The *Talanoa* method proposed as a basis for GETI 2022 places storytelling or narrative as the foundation of learning, negotiation, and research. In contexts where only exposure to a multiplicity of perspectives provides access to an adequate perception of reality (as is the case in deliberations about the climate crisis), the passage through narration makes room for specific perspectives and thwarts

hegemonic postures.[1] Through the story, I assume the contextuality of what I carry in the speech-space—I renounce being the holder of a discourse that encompasses the whole of reality. I expose myself to others by offering a coherence to what remains scattered and fragmentary in the impressions that compose my existence, as much for me as for the others. At the same time, I expose myself to the interpretation that others will give to my story, which may throw another light, harmonious or discordant, on it.[2]

Within the framework of GETI, I felt called and encouraged to enter into this dynamic of narrative, which would bring me into solidarity with a history, a place, a temporality, a culture, a confession. Story makes me a part of a visible church. But in trying to do this, I encountered several stumbling blocks, shattering the story I could tell of a multitudinist church.[3]

Three Stumbling Blocks

The first stumbling block is the ecumenical dimension of the multitudinist church. I was sent to GETI by the Protestant Church in Switzerland (PCS). At the same time, if I was to narrate my story of the church I have experienced in my life, I should talk instead about the Evangelical Church of the Canton of Vaud (Église Évangélique Réformée du Canton de Vaud), or EERV. PCS is a church fellowship and EERV is a member church of this fellowship.[4] From which perspective should I tell my story? Should I do it from the perspective of the national

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1. *Talanoa* is not only characterized by storytelling, but also by a certain procedure that allows for hospitality and reciprocity in exchange. See Timote M. Vaioleti, "Talanoa Research Methodology: A Developing Position on Pacific Research," *Waikato Journal of Education* 12, (2006): 21–34.

2. This ties in with important developments in the role of narrative in contemporary ethics in German-speaking research—which takes up many elements of English-speaking research, led by figures such as Stanley Hauerwas and James McClendon. See also Marco Hofheinz, Frank Mathwig, and Matthias Zeindler, eds., *Ethik und Erzählung: Theologische und philosophische Beiträge zur narrativen Ethik* (Zürich: TVZ, 2009); Howard F. Perry-Trauthig, *Story und Ethik* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997). See the axiomatic use of story in Dietrisch Ritschl, *Zur Logik der Theologie*: *Kurze Darstellung der Zusammenhänge theologischer Grundgedanken* (München: C. Kaiser, 1984), 45–47. For the French-speaking world, the work of Paul Ricoeur on narrative identity and its significance for ethics is particularly important. See Ricœur, "L'identité narrative," *Esprit* 140–41, no. 7/8 (1988): 295–304; *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 11–35.

3. On this designation, see Bernard Reymond, "Multitudinisme/Volkskirche: À propos de deux vocables caractéristiques de l'ecclésiologie protestante," *Études Théologiques et Religieuses* 91, no. 2 (2016): 259–71; David Plüss, Matthias D. Wüthrich, and Matthias Zeindler, eds., *Ekklesiologie der Volkskirche: Theologische Zugänge in reformierter Perspektive* (Zürich: TVZ, 2016); also the classic article by Wolfgang Huber, "Volkskirche I" in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 35 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 249–54.

4. On the notion of church fellowship, see Mario Fischer and Martin Friedrich, eds., *Kirchengemeinschaft. Grundlagen und Perspektiven* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019).

fellowship, or can I do it only for my cantonal church (which is not, strictly speaking, the local church, the life of the local parish)?

The second stumbling block concerns the legal form of some multitudinist churches. Originally, the EERV was an institution of the state of the Vaud Canton and the pastors were state officials, following a classic model in the Swiss Reformed landscape, where civil authority ruled over clerical authority in the organization of the church. However, this model was challenged during its institutionalization in the 19th century and by the nationalist catastrophe of the 20th century.[5] Today the EERV is recognized by the State of the Vaud Canton as a public-law institution.[6] Legally, it is no longer a national church and has full autonomy in matters of organization and doctrine. At the same time, its legal existence is linked to the cantonal constitution and the missions it gives to the EERV. How to narrate the story of my church, given this legal form?

The third stumbling block concerns the conditions of belonging to the multitudinist church. I was baptized as a child in the Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Fribourg. I received my entire religious education in the EERV, and it is in this church that I volunteer and occasionally preach. At the same time, I have never confirmed my membership in the EERV. The Reformed churches that are members of PCS have given up requiring their members to adhere to an explicit confession of faith and often don't even keep a register of their members. Thus, no document allows me to ratify my membership in this church, unless I am ordained to the ministry or elected to a leadership position.[7] As a non-ordained member, the ratification of my church membership rests entirely on my *forum internum*. This is in keeping with the fact that the sociological boundaries of the multitudinist church are blurred, according to the way in which it determines its own boundaries; the state on its side keeps registers of religious affiliation that define a "reformed" population in the canton.[8]

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5. In Article 5 of the Barmen Declaration*,* the central affirmation of the exclusive lordship of Christ places the church in radical autonomy from the state. On this subject, see Mario Fischer and Martin Friedrich, eds., *Church-People-State-Nation: A Protestant Contribution on a Difficult Relationship* (Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck Verlag, 2002), 150–54.

6. For the legal system of the religious community recognized as a public-law institution, see Hans Michael Heinig, *Öffentlich-rechtliche Religionsgesellschaften* (Berlin: Duncker and Humbolt, 2003).

7. The Second Helvetic Confession has ceased to have "force of law" for pastors since the 19th century in most of reformed Switzerland, and in Geneva, since 1725. On this subject, see Rudolf Gebhard, *Umstrittene Bekenntnisfreiheit: Der Apostolikumsstreit in der Reformierten Kirche der Deutschweiz im 19. Jahrhundert* (Zürich: TVZ, 2003). For a brief overview of French-speaking Switzerland, see the same text, 24–27.

8. Some important Swiss reformed theologians speak of a Church with "dirty borders." See David Plüss, Matthias D. Wüthrich, and Matthias Zeindler, "Perspektiven einer Ekklesiologie der Volkskirche," in *Ekklesiologie der Volkskirche*, ed. Plüss, Wüthrich, and Zeindler, 401–2.

The different stumbling blocks I have just mentioned all point to the same issue: that of defining the boundaries from which I can structure my narrative of a multitudinist church. The ecumenical identity of the multitudinist church calls into question its location: Where does it take shape? The juridical constitution of the multitudinist church in public law questions its ultimate authority: Who is its Lord? The blurring of ecclesial boundaries questions participation: What qualifies me as a member?

Multitudinism: Being on the Border

Mitigation

The difficulties associated with these questions are not insoluble. From an individual perspective there are elements of a narrative that I can lay out from my experience of lived faith, and from a doctrinal point of view. Through my baptism I hope to bear witness to the fact that I am part of the story of reconciliation between God and the world in Jesus Christ, and that as a member of his body I am part of the ministry of proclaiming the gospel of the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, manifested in celebration (*liturgia*), community life (*koinonia*), witness (*martyria*), and service in the world (*diakonia*).[9] This is my prayer to God, what I believe, and how I hope to live my life, in relation to this fundamental trust. To that extent, the difficulties I mentioned above do not prevent me from telling my own personal story. From a collective point of view, there are also explanations and arguments that normalize these difficulties.

What determines the location of the multitudinist church is the proclamation of the gospel, the celebration of the sacraments, and the gathering of the community at that moment and from which it is sent out into the world.[10] A church fellowship is defined by the mutual recognition of the validity of the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. The articulation is clear in principle. The church in which I participate takes shape in a dynamic of mutual recognition marked out by localizable acts.

The question of lordship has also a clear answer: "The Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Vaud has as its sole authority Jesus Christ, the Son of God."[11] This affirmation is reflected in the cantonal constitution by the recognition

9. See Wilhelm Hüffmeier, ed., *Die Kirche Jesu Christi: Der reformatorische Beitrag zum ökumenischen Dialog über die kirchliche Einheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2001), esp. 37–43.

10. See the Augsburg Confession, Art VII. Of the Church, https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/of-the-church/.

11. Principes constitutifs de l'ÉEglise réformée vaudoise, Art. 1, Église Evangélique Réformée du Canton de Vaud, 31 August 2007, https://www.eerv.ch/accueil/qui-nous-sommes/nos-principes-constitutifs. Translation by author.

of the spiritual independence and organizational freedom of the church.[12] The fact that the church affirms the validity of its link to the state can be justified by a covenant theology recognizing the role of the state in the economy of a creation awaiting its full redemption—notably in relation to the upholding of freedom of religion.[13]

Regarding participation, the fact that the sociological contours of the church remain blurred points to an important reservation: the church is the assembly of those who by faith have been called into a renewed communion with God, but the church itself does not decide who is ultimately in that communion.[14] Only Christ can decide. The only visible participation in the body of Christ is that manifested in the celebration of the sacraments, community life, witness, and service in the world. This visibility always refers only indirectly, in a fragmented and twisted way, to the effective fulness of the community of God, hoped for and believed in by the members of the church. This church can only be understood as being on a pilgrimage toward a fulness that is promised and already partially lived in Christ.[15] At a time when the church renounces territory or nationality as markers of its boundary, the ecclesial peregrination consequently takes a cosmopolitan form.[16]

A Programmed Stumbling

These different elements mitigate the stumbling blocks I encounter when trying to offer my own story in *Talanoa*. From a doctrinal point of view, these are legitimate elements of the multitudinist church. One could say that the difficulty in positing a narrative that contextualizes me on an ecclesial level is part of the ecclesial

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12. Constitution du Canton de Vaud, Art. 172.2, 14 April 2003, LexFind, https://www.lexfind.ch /fe/fr/tol/18476/fr.

13. This reasoning needs to be updated for the context of the Reformed churches in Switzerland. For a basic reflection, but one that does not yet take into account the covenant motif, see Markus Sahli, "Unvermischt und ungetrennt: Zum Verhältnis zwischen Kirchen und Staat nach evangelisch-reformiertem Verständnis," in *Kooperation zwischen Staat und Religionsgemeinschaften nach schweizerischem Recht / Coopération entre État et communautés religieuses selon le droit Suisse,* ed. René Pahud de Mortanges et Erwin Tanner (Zurich, Basel, and Geneva: Schulthess Verlag, 2005), 827–50.

14. The "parable of the weeds" (Matt. 13:24–30) plays an important role in this regard. See Plüss, Wüthrich, and Zeindler, "Perspektiven," 402.

15. "The wandering Christian community (*communio viatorum*) on its earthly pilgrimage (*peregrinari super terram*) is both the starting point and the center of Reformed ecclesiology." Frank Mathwig, "Offenheit und Grenzen. Volkskirche zwischen Konfessionalität und Ökumenizität," in Plüss, Wüthrich, and Zeindler, *Ekklesiologie der Volkskirche*, 360. Translation by author.

16. See Henry Mottu, *Recommencer l'Église. Ecclésiologie réformée et philosophie politique* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2011), 149–50; see also Mario Fischer and Miriam Rose, eds., *Theologie der Diaspora: Studiendokumente der GEKE zur Strandortbestimmung der evangelischen Kirchen im pluralen Europa* (Vienna: Evangelischer Presseverband, 2019).

program of my church, which generates and promotes a "fuzzy identity."[17] The ecclesial profile that takes shape from here expresses the type of relationship to identity generated by these churches. This identity is not defined primarily by ideological, aesthetic, or ethical markers, but rather by a relativization of these markers in favor of a human identity that goes beyond the concrete boundaries of the visible community while promoting forms of concrete commitment, whether it be through religious practice, service to society, or other forms of commitment. It is an identity that is articulated around a decentring and it generates "spacing."[18]

This form of identity corresponds to the idea that Christian existence should be understood as liminal.

> Christian life is a life on the border: a life between the old person we experience ourselves as and the new person we are, the sinner and the righteous *(simul iustus et peccator)*, those of this life and those who are what they will be from God—in the world, but not of it, citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany and at the same time citizens of the kingdom of Heaven, members of a national church and at the same time inhabitants of the New Jerusalem.[19]

To tell my story in order to take part in Talanoa can only refer to Christ as the one in whom my story is played out. The contours of my situation cannot express the fulness of the story in which I participate—but this situation remains at the same time the only one from which I can witness to this identification of who I am in Christ.[20] The way in which the multitudinist church tends not to define its borders too precisely—always referring to an individual, collective, and public recognition of ecclesial belonging—can, in my opinion, be understood as a way of making the visibility of the church correspond to the liminality of Christian existence. We need now to reflect further on the characteristic ambiguities of this form of the church.

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17. Plüss, Wüthrich, and Zeindler, "Perspektiven," 406–7. This conception of identity runs counter to sociological and economic analyses which would instead call for a clearly identifiable profile to ensure the public presence of the Reformed churches and their internal cohesion. See Jörg Stolz and Edmée Ballif, *L'avenir des Réformés: Les Églises face aux changements sociaux* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2011), 221–27.

18. This situation of ecclesial identity could correspond to what the Reformed theologian Pierre Gisel calls a "signifying heteropia." See Gisel, *Sortir le religieux de sa boite noire* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2019), 210–16. The religious community does not have to seek to adapt to a founding truth, but to engage into the habitation of space.

19. Alexander Deeg, "Leben auf der Grenze: Die Externität christlicher Identität und die Sprachgestalt kirchlicher Gottesrede," in *Identitä: Biblische und theologische Erkundungen*, ed. Alexander Deeg, Stefan Heuser, and Arne Manzeschke (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2008), 285–86 (translated by E. Jaillet).

20. Deeg refers here to the figures of prayer and preaching as the form in which the liminality of Christian existence is manifested in the world. Deeg, "Leben auf der Grenze," 290–300.

Ambiguities of the Presence on the Border

Positive features

The self-understanding of the multitudinist church has certain positive attributes. It can maintain the tensions or contradictions appropriate to a church that knows that it is constitutively linked to faith. At the same time the church refuses to force any expression of faith. It realizes that it does not express the fulness of humanity renewed in Christ. It refuses to set boundaries that are too distinct for its own community. It knows that it is linked to a particular social and political situation and to the constraints and commitments that accompany it; at the same time it refuses to be confined by this situation.

This ecclesial form resonates with the title of GETI 2022: "Christ's Love (Re)Moves Borders." The multitudinist church does not defend its borders. Rather, by situating itself on the border, it speaks and acts for the benefit of the world, taking the perspective of a universal solidarity, whose horizon is the coming of the kingdom in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[21] It tries to understand itself as a community of witnesses to Jesus Christ, at the service of all, inclusive, participatory, and democratic.[22]

The other side of liminality

At the same time, this relationship to borders, characteristic of liminal existence, is marked by ambiguity. By claiming to stand on the border, it seems to me that the multitudinist church is trying to highlight openness without accounting for what still remains closed.

The relationship to identity proposed by this discourse on the multitudinist church is correlated with the vision of an existence that allows itself to be moved because of the knowledge that this existence is given by a life-giving otherness, full of promise that it can never grasp, but which nevertheless drives it forward. The characteristics of this vision correspond to the modern movement of transgression by anticipation of any form of border—which leads on the sociological level to the construction of a space without exteriority.[23] The absence of exteriority encourages

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21. This understanding of the church resonates with what was presented by Vinoth Ramachandra in his keynote address at GETI, held in conjunction with the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Karlsruhe, Germany, 28 August 2022, 8–9.

22. See Christian R. Tappenbeck, *Das evangelische Kirchenrecht reformierter Prägung: Eine Einführung* (Zürich: TVZ, 2017), 139–45.

23. On this movement, see Michael Makropoulos, "Grenze und Horizont: Zwei soziale Abslußparadigmen," in *Grenzenlose Gesellschaft? Verhandlungen des 29. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie, des 16. Kongresses für Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Soziologie, der 11. Kongresses der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in Freiburg i.Br. 1998,* ed. Claudia Honegger, Stefan

a certain blindness to the borders and limits that remain in the liminal existence. On the border, there is always someone who has more resources than another, whether symbolic, financial, human, or material, or is gifted with benefits such as institutional allegiances and privileges, legal or cultural recognition, or facilitated access to the means of public presence.[24]

Describing to open

The dissolution of boundaries, characteristic of the self-understanding of the multitudinist church, should not mask the persistent asymmetries. While on a pilgrimage, there are moments when a church is called to be a shelter, a house that protects, welcomes, and provides a space for life and support in a hostile environment. The challenge for a church that defines its horizon of existence in terms of liminality is to avoid a "thick" description of its own reality, especially in situations of asymmetry, or when its hospitality is requested.[25] The moment of description anchors the ecclesial narrative in its limits. It indicates the gap between the discourse or image that the church generates to orient itself and the reality in which it unfolds. If the image—or the myth[26]—of the multitudinist church opens the empirical reality beyond itself, the passage through a thick description of its ecclesial reality should be the starting point for deploying a presence, a discourse, and an action where the church reveals itself to the gaze of others.

If Christ's love (re)moves borders, it does not do so without revealing the borders that remain—and for a church that wants to consider itself as being on the border, that generates a whole imaginary and juridical system that tries to embrace the liminality of Christian existence. The recognition of effective borders can be perceived as failure, generating shame and guilt. But since the announcement of grace accompanies and precedes the confession of sins, it should be possible to use this description with confidence. It could be the condition for an opening of another kind, where one no longer saturates the global horizon with the projection of one's own liminal existence, but where the frontier becomes a possibility of

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Hradil, and Franz Taxler (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1999), 387–96.

24. This asymmetry should be further examined in the relationship of the multitudinist churches to the so-called free churches (*freikirchen*) in Switzerland, or to migration churches.

25. In an article on community building (*gemeindeaufbau*), Swiss theologian Ralph Kunz emphasized both the lack and the importance of empirical studies of communal forms of church life to accompany the more theoretical reflections on the current development of the church. See Kunz, "Gemeindeaufbau," in *Handbuch für Kirchen- und Gemeindeentwicklung*, ed. Ralph Kunz and Thomas Schlag (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlagsgesellschaft, 2014), 275–76. This lack of research, or lack of interest, resonates to my mind with the ambiguity of the discourse about the multitudinist church.

26. See Michael Welker, "Der Mythos der 'Volkskirche,'" *Evangelische Theologie* 54, no. 2 (1994): 180–93.

encounter, in a space that allows for hospitality—but also for conflict, open to the risks of violence and the awareness that others come with their own borders. And this is where the openness, the journey, which is appropriate for the liminality of Christian existence, plays a crucial role: it orients the encounter or the shock, according to the promise of a possible dwelling-in-the-space that refuses to use the border as a reason for violence. On the contrary, the border guarantees and arranges a space for welcoming life in its most precarious states: "and here shall your proud waves be stopped" (Job 38:11).

Conclusion

The multitudinist church is a form of the church of Christ. In order to find its place in the movement of reconciliation and unity, driven by God's love, it must both deepen its understanding of its identity and its ability to take up the boundaries that characterize its visible existence. In this essay I have indicated the importance of liminality for the self-understanding of the multitudinist church and the need for it to assume a description of the asymmetries that characterize its visibility. This last point seems to me particularly important in the context of an ecumenical pilgrimage, where the pilgrims are called to support each other, to show hospitality, to prove their consistency—and not to remain in constant uncertainty, for fear of setting borders that may shatter the myth of the multitudinist church. For this they can have the confidence that these borders have already been taken upon and crossed by our Lord, that we do not have to be paralyzed by fear of remaining enclosed in them, and neither do we have to fear the gaze that is cast upon us. Perhaps this at least is something I can say to myself in the face of my stumbling, as I told my story in the GETI 2022 *Talanoa*.

Chapter 15

Healing Memories:
The Central Bloodline of One Heart

Hannah J. Andres

Throughout this paper, the term Aotearoa will be used as reference to the nation of New Zealand. Both terms are internationally accepted; however, Aotearoa is the Māori term for the island nation.[1] The 2017 legal decision in Aotearoa to grant personhood to the Whanganui River was an unprecedented move that honours the river's nature as more than a resource to be taken and used as people see fit. Rather, this legal decision reflects and honours the Māori Whanganui tribe's physical and metaphysical relationship with the river, while simultaneously reflecting the desire of the country's political leadership to find ways to embody their commitments to strengthening environmental health and responsible stewardship. This decision has had ramifications beyond the national borders of Aotearoa and has led to similar legal actions and conversations in other countries, like India and Bangladesh, centring such moves around the health of the ecosystem and prioritizing natural life over corporations and institutions. When these considerations are taken into account and valued, it not only assists in renewing the health of an ecosystem, it also establishes a legal value for Indigenous Communities and

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1. Stacey Morrison and Scotty Morrison, "Why Referring to New Zealand as Aotearoa Is a Meaningful Step for Travelers," *Condé Nast Travelers*, 15 November 2021, https://www.cntraveler.com/story/why-referring-to-new-zealand-as-aotearoa-is-a-meaningful-step-for-travelers.

wisdom in a way that takes steps toward healing the damage and trauma of colonization and genocide.

This paper explores legal tradition in Aotearoa, including various Māori grievances over the last 100-plus years, which led to this landmark decision—and what the decision means for Māori sovereignty and spirituality in relationship with the Whanganui River. While this paper will look at historical grievances and legal precedents in Aotearoa, it also aims to explore the future potential for tribal and governmental partnership in Aotearoa in terms of environmental justice and the global climate crisis.

Legal Traditions of Aotearoa

Treaty of Waitangi

The history of colonization in Aotearoa is not exclusive to the island nation. It is also reflected in the narrative of "discovery" throughout the South Pacific region. In 1642, a Dutch explorer became the first European to travel in the South Pacific region, specifically to the island cluster known as Aotearoa.[2] This region of the South Pacific did not garner much attention during this era of oceanic exploration by Europeans; but at the tail end of the 18th century, it drew the attention of the English explorer Captain James Cook, who wrote detailed accounts of Aotearoa.[3] After the attention of the British Crown was drawn to Aotearoa by Captain Cook, the numbers of whalers, missionaries, and traders on the islands swelled and in 1840 Britain formally annexed them.[4] That same year, the Treaty of Waitangi—an agreement between the British Crown and a number of Māori chiefs—was signed.[5]

The treaty established Aotearoa as a British colony, giving the Crown "the right to govern New Zealand and to represent the interests of all New Zealanders"; it also was written to protect Māori culture and to enable Māori to continue living as an Indigenous People on the islands of Aotearoa.[6] The treaty included accommodations for the Māori, such as being able to continue their traditional Indigenous practices, but that has not been entirely honoured during the period of

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2. "British Colonists reach New Zealand," *History*, updated 21 January 2020, para. 2, https://www .history.com/this-day-in-history/british-colonists-reach-new-zealand.

3. "British Colonists Reach New Zealand," para. 2.

4. "British Colonists Reach New Zealand," para. 3.

5. "Te Tiriti o Waitangi—Treaty of Waitangi," New Zealand Ministry of Justice, 11 March 2020, para. 1, https://www.justice.govt.nz/about/learn-about-the-justice-system/how-the-justice-system -works/the-basis-for-all-law/treaty-of-waitangi.

6. "Te Tiriti o Waitangi," para. 2.

colonization. In 1975, Aotearoa passed the Treaty of Waitangi Act, which allowed any Māori to submit claims to the Tribunal alleging that they have been "disadvantaged by any legislation, policy, or practice of the Crown since 1840. . . . The Tribunal does not enforce the law but has the power to make recommendations to the government. . . . Historical Treaty breaches are mostly settled by negotiations with the Crown through the Office of Treaty Settlements. This often occurs after the Waitangi Tribunal has issued a report and made a recommendation to the government."[7] While the inclusion of the 1975 act challenges the pattern of historic oppression against the Māori, real steps toward addressing these engrained issues have been occurring more recently.

The Treaty of Waitangi was a contentious matter for many Māori tribal leaders leading up to its ultimate signing, but with the promise of strengthening their status of Indigenous sovereignty, around 540 Māori *rangatiratanga* (chiefs) signed the Māori text of the Treaty.[8] In this treaty, the term *rangatiratanga* was utilized in the Māori version to convey an "unqualified exercise of Māori chieftainship over their lands, villages, and all their treasures."[9] There were additional significant differences between the Māori and English versions, the most significant of which was that the word "sovereignty" was translated as *kawanatanga* (governance) in the Māori language.[10]

"Some Māori believed they were giving up government over their lands but retaining the right to manage their own affairs. The English version guaranteed 'undisturbed possession' of all their 'properties,' but the Māori version guaranteed '*tino rangatiratanga*' (full authority) over '*taonga*' (treasures, which may be intangible). Māori understanding was at odds with the understanding of those negotiating the Treaty for the Crown, and as Māori society valued the spoken word, explanations given at the time were probably as important as the wording of the document."[11]

While it is impossible to know now where intentions lay with the creators and writers of the Treaty, Māori outcries during the 1970s pushed the creation of the Tribunal in order "to investigate alleged breaches of the Treaty by the Crown."[12]

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7. "Te Tiriti o Waitangi," paras. 5–6.

8. "The Treaty in Brief," New Zealand History, 17 May 2017, para. 1, https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty/the-treaty-in-brief.

9. "Rangatiratanga," Independent Māori Statutory Board, para. 1, https://www.imsb.maori.nz/maori-wellbeing-in-tamaki-makaurau/rangatiratanga.

10. "Treaty in Brief," para. 6.

11. "Treaty in Brief," para. 6.

12. "Treaty in Brief," paras. 7, 8.

Tribal grievances

Grievances from Māori regarding breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi date back to the 1840s, almost immediately after the ratification of the Treaty.[13] Beginning in 1849, Ngāi Tahu chiefs complained about the methods employed to purchase their lands; this complaint ultimately took almost 150 years to be resolved.[14] At the time of the Ngāi Tahu complaint, the population was weakened by many of the impacts of colonization, including disease, intermarriage, and warfare with Te Rauparaha from the north.[15] The protests generated from Ngāi Tahu over land purchases have a long legacy beginning in 1849, and over 150 years there have been protests related to the Crown's broken promises and the Crown's failure to provide schools and hospitals.[16] The largest contributor to the grievance was related to the price that Crown paid for the land, especially in addition to the unclear boundaries, loss of customary tribal gathering places, and the Crown's leasing of land to settlers in perpetuity of reserved lands without consent.[17] It wasn't until 1998 that this grievance was settled, or even addressed by the Crown when it signed a Deed of Settlement providing compensation.[18]

As Mark Pollock notes, "the Whanganui River has provided food, water, transportation, spiritual and cultural sustenance" for the duration of the Māori Whanganui tribes' presence.[19] There is an understanding, *Te Awa Tupua*, of "the inseparability between the people and the river," and it serves as the foundation for the protection and maintenance of the Whanganui.[20] The river has a history of legal disputes and complaints: "in 1895, the tribes approached the Supreme Court of New Zealand to assert customary fishing rights"; and as a response, Aotearoa established a Whanganui River Trust Board, which gave control of the river to the Crown.[21] Similar issues arose in 1898 when the Crown extracted gravel from the river to build roads; in 1903, the Coal Mines Act was passed, claiming the riverbeds for England.[22]

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13. "The Treaty in Practice—The Ngāi Tahu Claim," Ministry for Culture and Heritage, updated 5 October 2021, para. 1, https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty/the-treaty-in-practice/ngai-tahu.

14. "Treaty in Practice," para. 1.

15. "Treaty in Practice," para. 3.

16. "Treaty in Practice," paras. 5, 6.

17. "Treaty in Practice," para. 6.

18. "Treaty in Practice," para. 10.

19. Mark Pollock, "How the Whanganui River Gained Personhood Status," *Story Maps*, 4 May 2021, https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/cd586fc9b985467aa83897a17aa06e25.

20. Pollock, "Whanganui River."

21. Pollock, "Whanganui River."

22. Pollock, "Whanganui River."

Petitions for "damages to their native rights and ownership of the riverbed continued for 24 years. Parliament rationalized increased control of the river by passing legislation that they used in court in opposition to Māori petitions. This systemic abuse occurred for over 150 years."[23]

As mentioned above, the Waitangi Tribunal was established in 1975. In 1999, its Whanganui River Report "stated that the Māori have customary authority and possession of the river, that these rights were not relinquished to the tribes, and that the Crown's policies and laws eroded the Whanganui tribes' ancestral ties to the river. The tribunal's findings laid the groundwork for the decolonization and recognition of its cultural and spiritual states."[24]

In 2014, an edict was released known as the Whanganui River Deed of Settlement which recognized the connection between the river's health and the health of the Māori.[25] The settlement that resulted from the Waitangi Tribunal's report regarding the Whanganui River was one focusing on "the health and well-being of the river."[26]

By 2015, its 40th anniversary, the Waitangi Tribunal had achieved a number of goals, including registering over 2500 claims, of which over 1000 were fully or partially reported on, and issued 123 reports. It ultimately issued district reports on 79 percent of Aotearoa's land area.[27]

The final result of the Whanganui River controversies and grievances was the landmark 2017 Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Bill, in which "parliament granted the river personhood, recognizing the river as an indivisible and living being."[28] This decision and its subsequent legal ramifications mean that the river is not owned by either the Crown or the Māori.[29] However, the move of granting legal personhood to a river reflects the unique ancestral relationship between the Whanganui River and the Whanganui tribes.[30] The Te Awa Tupua bill is "a piece of legislation passed by a colonizing government that takes

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23. Pollock, "Whanganui River."

24. Pollock, "Whanganui River."

25. Pollock, "Whanganui River."

26. "Te Awa Tupua-Whanganui River Settlement," Whanganui District Council, March 2020, para. 3, https://www.whanganui.govt.nz/About-Whanganui/Our-District/Te-Awa-Tupua-Whanganui -River-Settlement.

27. "About the Waitangi Tribunal: Past, Present, and Future of the Waitangi Tribunal," Ministry of Justice, Waitangi Tribunal, 16 June 2017, para. 7, https://waitangitribunal.govt.nz/about-waitangi -tribunal/past-present-future-of-waitangi-tribunal/.

28. Pollock, "Whanganui River."

29. Pollock, "Whanganui River."

30. "Whanganui River Settlement," paras. 4–6.

into account an Indigenous people's cultural values and spiritual worldview as a framework for law. The bill even uses the traditional Māori language and phrases to properly represent Māori ideals and customs."[31]

Māori Spiritual Connection to Place

One of the major differences in the approach of the Crown and the Māori when it comes not only to the Whanganui River but to other natural resources and places as well is the framework of Western versus Indigenous relationships to place. In the West, that relationship is often understood as one of service, where natural landscapes and what are viewed as resources, like lumber, water, and minerals, only exist in service to human needs. "Place calls us to the challenge of living together."[32] Indigenous worldviews tend to embrace the living nature of the non-human world, in ways that emphasize the profound relationality of life; however, Indigenous dispossession of land is centred in a denial of coexistence between human and non-human natures.[33] Place expresses a certain agency, and when the nature of place is explored, scholars like Belden Lane use the terms of ontology to express that intrinsic value of place. Lane identifies three categories for understanding differentiating place: ontological, cultural, and phenomenological.[34] While Lane approaches this topic from the context of understanding sacred places in North America, these categorizations can serve as beneficial tools in conversations elsewhere in the world, particularly in conversation with colonized peoples, in the places where the tricky ground of coexistence is explored. To understand the nature of place, especially sacred place, means to understand the nature of indigeneity. Vine Deloria Jr indicates that to be Indigenous means to "be of a place," where it is a "way of being and knowing . . . grounded in the agency of place to teach the responsibilities of the land."[35] A vast difference between Western approaches to land and place governance, as opposed to Indigenous approaches, is that Western frameworks largely operate in a universe, whereas Indigenous governance practices have always been pluriverse in nature.[36]

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31. Pollock, "Whanganui River."

32. Soren C. Larsen and Jay T. Johnson, *Being Together in Place: Indigenous Coexistence in a More Than Human World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 1.

33. Larsen and Johnson, *Being Together in Place*. 1.

34. Belden C. Lane. "Giving Voice to Place: Three Models for Understanding American Sacred Space," *Religion and American Culture* 11, no. 1 (2001): 57, https://doi.org/10.1525/rac.2001.11.1.53.

35. Larsen and Johnson, *Being Together in Place*, 3.

36. Larsen and Johnson, *Being Together in Place*, 4.

Scholar and theologian Belden Lane explores the concept of sacred places and the various ways in which individual people interact with and understand physical geographies, including those that are understood and documented as sacred.[37] As mentioned above, the three models Lane operates with are the ontological, cultural, and phenomenological, each of which occur and present differently to individuals.[38] Lane defines the ontological understanding of place as those which lack any sort of intrinsic meaning and value. The cultural is defined as places of value that people are willing to fight and die in defence and protection of. The phenomenological are those places that give voice to the operations of esoteric power of the divine.[39] These methods for understanding and interacting with geographies both mundane and sacred operate as a framework for those of us from Western cultures and socializations to embrace a broader conversation around sacredness of place.

Place requires us to engage in the messy struggles toward a balance of coexistence. There is no question that humans during the 20th and 21st centuries have had a disproportionate impact on the natural world. "Our messy entanglements in place oblige us to recognize the interrelated kinship we humans have with the more-than-human world around us. Coexistence is grounded in the agency of place, which creates, teaches, and speaks of this deep interconnectedness of all life."[40] The nature of place invites us, or rather, calls us to the intrinsic value of being-together, pulling us toward the relational work of embracing pluriverse.[41] Places have significant lessons to teach, and for centuries, Western impacts throughout the world have drowned those lessons for personal benefit. Our work now is to honour the places and welcome not only other human beings but ancestors along with the land.

The Legacy of Whanganui Personhood: Place and Mutual Recognition

The legacy of the Whanganui River decision is only starting to be experienced, as countries like India, Bangladesh, and Ecuador are exploring similar legal moves to protect waterways and habitats. One thing among many that the decision centres is an Indigenous way of thinking that is rooted in the agency of place and ancestors teaching coexistence. Such agency entangles us in a way which turns political work

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37. Lane, "Giving Voice to Place," 53.

38. Lane, "Giving Voice to Place," 57.

39. Lane, "Giving Voice to Place," 57.

40. Larsen and Johnson, *Being Together in Place*, 184.

41. Larsen and Johnson, *Being Together in Place*, 184.

into simultaneously spiritual processes of recognizing and participating in the interwovenness of creation.[42] Tahi Nepia, a Māori man who is a caretaker at the immersion school and an expert *waka ama* paddler, says of the decision about the Whanganui's personhood, "That's how we see that river. It's a part of us."[43] The law incorporates the physical and metaphysical natures of the Whanganui River in its recognition and legal acceptance of the Māori's existing understanding that the river is a living force.[44] The Māori tribes of the Whanganui have a saying, *Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au* (I am the river, and the river is me).[45] While the river cannot be held legally liable for an instance such as an accidental drowning the way an individual person or corporation can, the settlement requires there to be two individual representatives for the river who speak on its behalf and seek to act in its best interest. Such minor and community agreed-upon improvements like a pedestrian bridge, then, required the local council to consult with the tribe, the community, and the river's representatives.[46] The move to grant personhood to the Whanganui River forces an alternative to binary thinking within colonial structures, offering a route for permanent shifts in thinking about the natural world. Gerrard Albert, the lead negotiator for the Maori in the process of declaring the river's personhood, says, "This is truly about giving power back to the community."[47]

Throughout the years of Aotearoa's occupation, the Whanganui River has been the recipient of hardships like erosion, waste, dumping, and—because of the global climate crisis—warming waters, which endanger native fish populations.[48] What led up to and informed the statute needs to be considered carefully and intentionally because while the story was very quickly taken up by global media outlets heralding the Aotearoa River that has become a person, the realities of the statute remain a very local story, "in which legal recognition of the river's personhood is deemed to be a postcolonial incorporation of Indigenous concepts of ecological spirituality and interdependency with nature. Both the local historical context for its making and the tensions that the statute manifests

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42. Larsen and Johnson, 186.

43. Nick Perry, "New Zealand Rivers Personhood Status Offers Hope to Māori," Associated Press Religion News Service, 15 August 2022, https://religionnews.com/2022/08/15/new-zealand-rivers-personhood-status-offers-hope-to-maori.

44. Perry, "New Zealand Rivers."

45. Perry, "New Zealand Rivers."

46. Perry, "New Zealand Rivers."

47. Perry, "New Zealand Rivers."

48. Perry, "New Zealand Rivers."

need careful unpacking."[49] Considerations in evaluating such legal precedents are not only related to clarifying differences of interpretation when operating with two or more very different worldviews but must also take into account the motivation behind one or more parties for pursuing such legislation at certain times. Miranda Johnson, who approaches the legal precedent with a critical eye, writes, "it may also be another example of particular postcolonial imaginings in this country as it re-locates itself in the watery south Pacific rather than a distant outpost of Britain. In this process of geopolitical reorientation, notions of Indigeneity and the sacred provide new ways of expressing national identity."[50] These are important considerations to take into account, particularly in the face of colonization and imperialism.

Conclusion

The decision regarding the legal standing of the Whanganui River in Aotearoa serves as an Indigenous-led embodiment of a colonial settler-state beginning to reconcile its cultural and political influence on Indigenous Peoples and Communities in ways that cause more harm than assistance, particularly in considering Indigenous connections and intertwined identity with place and with rivers. Questions of intention are important to bring into the conversation, particularly in cases like this, where the global media latched so quickly onto the attention-grabbing headline of a river being granted personhood. One consideration that should be taken into account is the government's motivation in taking this step. Miranda Johnson writes: "In this case, the fiction of legal personality singularizes diverse and heterogeneous understandings of the river in a form that, it is claimed, actually recognizes Māori beliefs and practices. This claim serves a wider politics of national identity in which Aotearoa becomes postcolonial by incorporating, through a process of translation, key elements of Indigeneity."[51] The motivation of the Aotearoa government in taking this step, however, needs to be considered, because while there is no doubt that many Māori are excited by the possibilities that come with this legal change, has the government taken this step only for the image of achieving a postcolonial governance status?

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49. Miranda Johnson, "The River is Not a Person: Indigeneity and the Sacred in Aotearoa New Zealand," Immanent Frame website, 14 June 2017, https://tif.ssrc.org/2017/06/14/the-river-is-not -a-person.

50. Johnson. "The River."

51. Johnson. "The River."

While this is an important question, it remains true that this legal decision is a monumental step in recognizing and placing value on Indigenous wisdom and connection to place. For more than 700 years, the Whanganui tribes have cared for and depended on the Whanganui River, and recognized it as their *awa tupua* (river of sacred power).[52] On 20 March 2017, the Aotearoa government took a remarkable legislative step, declaring that what the Māori have known is now also legally true, that "the river and all its physical and metaphysical elements is an indivisible, living whole, and henceforth possesses all the rights, powers, duties, and liabilities of a legal person."[53] While this shift in legal status is essential, what many hope remains the central focus is rather an invitation for humans to a new orientation to the natural world, based not on rights but on responsibilities. The Whanganui River has always been more than just a body of water; since time immemorial it has served as a provider, healer, priest, parent, protector, connector, and medicine for the Māori Whanganui tribes, it is the central bloodline of their one heart.

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52. Kennedy Warne. "A Voice for Nature," *National Geographic,* https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/graphics/maori-river-in-new-zealand-is-a-legal-person.

53. Kennedy Warne. "Voice for Nature."

Chapter 16

Sabbath for the Caretakers

Jack Veatch

Before, in the most humdrum of days, it felt as though every day was the same. The passing of time only made itself known by the punctuation of tragedy. Each tragedy made him aware that the monotony was not just one moment in time stretched into infinity. Monotony was interrupted by pain. He knew by heartache that time had passed; he knew by sorrow that today was not, in fact, yesterday, or even tomorrow.

He often thought of these tragic punctuations as exclamation points: Another state-sanctioned homicide, violence in response to protest, a shooting in a supermarket not too far away, war, death, violence. They were punches to the gut: rare, but notable in their impact.

He grew to know that tragedy has the peculiar quality of coming in all forms of punctuation. Or, perhaps, the tragedies that punctuated life were becoming less rare, less impactful than his metaphorical perception of them as exclamation points. They were still halting, still changing the flow and construction of the story of life, but they didn't *feel* as impactful. A period may not be as arresting as an exclamation point, but it halts all the same.

Sometimes tragedy took the form of commas: continuations that interrupt but do not stop the course of life. One particular event was the illness and recovery of a beloved congregant; then another illness and recovery, until death placed a

period where previously there had been those halting, but continuing commas. Life goes on, even if her life didn't.

As time went on, the sentences filling the book of life took on the characteristics of a graduate student's writing. A graduate student who felt the need to eliminate the suggestion that he has ever even *thought* in run-on sentences. The punctuation marks came frequently, in all shapes and kinds. There were, of course, the commas, continuing but still arresting the flow of events, but there were still quite a few periods and exclamation points. Looking at a paragraph would tell you that this particular author had no sense of mood or tone; his galloping verse did not allow the reader to ease into a sense of rhythm. Several sentences in a row would end with exclamation points, then others would still have the compounding and confounding inclusion of colons and semicolons. It seemed life was grammatically varied but not grammatically disciplined; it seemed the tragedies that punctuated life were increasingly common and made decreasing sense to him.

But this is how he knew that one day was distinct from another, because it was punctuated by tragedy. It seemed that before . . .

Before what, he wondered? Every time he stopped to reflect on when *before* was (is?), the date of delineation kept creeping earlier. Before he started having anxiety that seized his body and blurred his vision? When exactly was that, or what exactly caused that? Was it his job—the spiritual leadership of people who had lived twice as much life as he had? Was it that the illusion of health and safety did not merely slowly melt away, but was ripped apart? That every interaction became a gamble of whether or not he would get the virus—and if he did get it, would he able to breathe the same afterward? Was *before* even before treading a path of life that seemed right, but also seemed easy? That easy path was getting slippery. Was he sliding now?

It seemed that, before, tragedy was not the only punctuation. He could remember delineations of time marked by events, marked by activities, marked by emotions and feelings, marked by lovers and friends. The punctuation built to joy, and the solidity of a period often marked a transition into something new: a new thought, a new goal, a new journey. Life was punctuated by cousins getting married, by graduations and celebration. Tragedy was only one tool in the author's toolkit, a rarer tool, less often used.

It felt like tragedy was the only punctuation now.

There was punctuation until there wasn't. It was hard to tell when precisely tragedy no longer marked moments in time but itself became part of mundane reality. It made it hard to determine if yesterday was today or today was tomorrow. Everything seemed the same. Heartbreak happened so regularly that the punctuations in time were when his heart *stopped* burning. Like heat turned up so

the frog doesn't jump out of the kettle, the frequency of the reasons to mourn for this world meant that mourning was no longer a liminal state but a perpetual way of being. He was getting used to mourning; it felt odd not to mourn.

Odd thing that, how tragedy turns to normalcy. But it wasn't just tragedy that made him ache. The world had become hostile to *living*. There were not many places where he felt that nothing was being extracted from him: his energy, his time, his money, his *being*. It felt hostile, not a place for living or being, not even a place for doing, but a place for being used. He wondered: If you become accustomed enough to a pain, to tragedy, to a feeling, can you even know who you are without it? Does the *between* place, the place of grief, become the only place? If the grief place is the only place, does grief even still exist?

The empathy, the attention, the energy, it had run dry. What was once unacceptable became acceptable. What had become acceptable became common. What became common was now just a fact of life. It was no longer dry. It simply was. If meaning is made by comparison, there was nothing wet to compare the dry to. Nothing full to compare the empty to. It simply was. It could no longer be called *dry*. It just . . . was.

He wasn't aware of this. It happened gradually; it happened over time; it happened while he was sleeping.

It was like a room being darkened at an imperceptible rate of change—the eyes adjusting until, at the end, he looked up and the room was totally dark. The sun setting without notice until there was no sun anymore.

The color from life had been drained. Everything had become gray and amorphous; he was unable to delineate shapes, unable to tell the contours of life by even the colors of emotionality. No dull aching rusted oranges, no sharp jagged reds of anger, no deep blues of serenity, no proud royal purples . . . just gray.

It had run dry. The energy, the color, the punctuation, everything. If something runs dry, does it not eventually turn to dust? If something runs dry, doesn't it eventually cease to have a form at all?

Dry, cracked.

Every breath his lungs drew was accompanied by the unconscious knowing that it was not quite right. This wasn't how air was supposed to feel. This wasn't only *life* entering into his lungs: it was tainted. It tasted—which was alarming in and of itself—it tasted like smoke and haze. Not the smoke and haze of a campfire warming an autumn's night, but the smoke and haze that made the body instinctively breathe lightly. Yet the body drew breath still.

The walls of his nose bled because the nose is a moving thing. Expanding and contracting, it worked to fill his lungs—but there was no moisture to lubricate its

moving. In fact, there was not even enough moisture for the blood; it too was dried and cracked. Stuck to the walls, the blood dried and new blood took its role; it told of a world that was not quite meant for him to live in.

After careful . . . extraction of the . . . detritus . . . accumulated in his nostrils, he inserted the tip of the nasal spray that would bring temporary sweet relief, and squeezed.

It's like crack, he said to himself, having no idea what crack was like. Maybe for him, it was more akin to a bag of chips, but that's not how the saying goes.

It was a part of the morning routine on that holiest of days. Taking a shower, brushing his teeth, drinking a cup of coffee, pouring the rest into a travel mug, slowly taking account of the aches and pains of his body, and taking mental inventory of how much he might be able to do that day. Driving the half hour to work. Leading his people through a liturgy, getting snacks at the coffee hour, going home, and falling asleep on the couch. Even this holy day became another day, even this palace set apart in time muddled into the gray—a routine designed to dull the edges. Holy space became middle space, too.

Reflection

In reflecting on this creative writing, I will first offer a background into why and when I wrote this particular piece. I will then tie it into a reading from M. Shawn Copeland, building from her theories of what the Black sermonic movement can do as an instrument of recovery and healing of distorted and wounded representation. Finally, based on my experiences, I will call for a theology of restoration of the caretakers, rooted in understandings of the Sabbath.

During the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was the pastor of a small church. This church was in the foothills of the mountains, in a place where home prices were rapidly increasing; people were beginning to move into both the state and the town the church was located in. The church had almost died and was looking to revitalize its life and live into the gospel. On top of these ecclesial and socio-economic upheavals, everything in life was simultaneously complicated and simplified by COVID.

The GETI theme of "Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders" was interesting to me, not only in its ability to open space for the theological treatment of the many tensions inherent in shared life and ecumenism, but also because it spoke deeply to the spiritual and personal turmoil I was feeling. Not only were boundaries between my health and my neighbour's health being blurred, the pandemic also brought into stark contrast the political borders in the United States and the distinct ways

we are segregated.[1] In many ways, the publicly witnessed police brutality and the pandemic were apocalyptic in the sense of the Greek root αποκαλυπτω (to uncover or lay bare). It is not that the pandemic and these instances of police brutality were new or that disparities in health care were caused solely by the pandemic, but the borders of how we treat one another were very clearly demarcated for a population of people who didn't know those borders were being obfuscated to begin with.

Borders were alternately solidifying and dissolving around me. In my own spirit I felt as though life was taking on this dullness. My wife put it well when she remarked that it felt as though the colour had been drained from life.

I was dealing with a high amount of anxiety, which was unfamiliar to me. The sources of anxiety were many: fear of getting sick, fear of my elderly loved ones getting sick, my family being influenced to not take any kind of vaccine, mass shootings near me, public protests being met with state-sanctioned violence, my Black partner living in a largely white community at a time of increased racial tensions—and I was shepherding a congregation through all of this. What prompted me to start writing, however, was an anxiety about the "dullness" I felt around all of these things.

 M. Shawn Copeland wrote that "religion and theology, language and art all too easily can be insinuated in the legitimation of misogyny and sexism."[2] I felt, and still feel, that there is a dulling, even a legitimation, of the horrors that constantly berate our daily living. In cases of mass shootings, we look to any cause of the shooting except guns, and lately the tactic of legitimation for the machinery of death has been to all but celebrate that the violence happened at all because of *who* it happened to. An air of indifference is a form of complicity: the complicity legitimizes the act. When the complicity legitimizes action of extremist groups, the extremist groups are not framed as so extreme. The violence becomes the norm; the violence becomes an expected part of daily life. To live is to prepare oneself to die. As I edit this piece, another mass shooting happened this week in the town where my parents live, at the mall where my brother used to work. Certain groups of people have tried to claim that the shooter, who had Nazi tattoos on his body, was either not a white supremacist, or was planted to push a narrative. I am not

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1. We are not only segregated; these segregations also enforce a class structure and contribute to systemic racism's criminalization and destruction of black and brown bodies. The pandemic drew particular attention to disparities in health care, and the ways black and brown people are policed in everyday life. I am speaking from a US context with the understanding that racism and colourism are not uniquely US sins.

2. M. Shawn Copeland, "Body, Representation and Black Religious Discourse," in *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse*, ed. Laura Donaldson and Pui-Lan Kwok (New York: Routledge, 2002), 267.

surprised. I am angry that I am not surprised. I feel numb, because these events happen too frequently for me to truly and deeply feel their horror.

It was the same way with the pandemic. The foregone conclusion that people would die became a way of legitimizing preventable death in the name of recapturing lost revenue streams. There was an attempt to legitimize the police brutality toward protestors by those who invested in the protection of the state apparatus and the protection of capital. State-sanctioned violence is therefore normalized as a natural interaction of everyday life. The scope of the state's effort to normalize behaviour expands,[3] and it in turn legitimizes and encourages violence against the other. As I edit this text, Jordan Neely, a homeless man who often impersonated Michael Jackson on the New York City subway system, was murdered by a Marine veteran. Distraught after the death of his mother, he yelled that he was hungry, thirsty, and had little to live for. His murderer put him in a chokehold after he cried out; his lamentations were "disturbing behaviour," outside the realm of the "normal." Again, there have been attempts to paint this murdered man as "violent," as if any sort of inconvenient disturbance, any atypical behaviour should be met with force. Jordan was hungry, thirsty, and disconsolate, and he was killed for his human vulnerability.

It felt as though even the responses resisting these horrors and opposing their legitimization became themselves co-opted, either to legitimize the status quo or to extract wealth and resources from a motivated and activated population. Rallying cries for change became admonishments to vote. Votes placed leaders into positions of political deadlock. The very people who captured the motivated populace's desire for change became themselves part of the deadlock, part of a transactional form of politics that changed nobody and nothing. Even if these political actors were sincere in their wish to stop forms of harm, their transactional nature betrayed that they were still beholden to interests counter to true transformation. They would not disrupt the systems that perpetuate the violence and discard the poor and marginalized because these very same systems benefit them. Rather, they merely resist—weakly—the forces pushing for an intensification and legitimization of the violence perpetrated by those systems. It is, in its own way, legitimizing violence by not seeing the violent systems as the sources of that violence.

I am not trying to claim an objective truth in my assessment of my life as a pastor, but I am rather trying to explain what I was feeling as I pastored the church. As we experienced in life the urgent subjects detailed in the thematic tracks of the GETI programme, I was called to care for this congregation and for God's

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3. By normalize, I mainly mean to control behaviour in a way that protects the interests of capital and continued consumption.

creation. As during times of prayer and praise, congregants listed names of loved ones who had died from COVID, as wildfires destroyed homes and made our air unbreathable, as our elderly congregants struggled to live in an increasingly inaccessible and isolating world, as a congregant's kids battled cancer or the congregants contracted cancer themselves, as they feared for their bodily autonomy, I internalized leading them through their own life circumstances and shepherding them in how to be faithful Christians in a world that demanded so much of them.

Somehow in caring so much for each new tragedy that befell us, in caring for each new diagnosis, in grieving their deaths and the deaths of their loved ones, it felt as if I started to not care at all. The truth is that I cared deeply; this is exactly why I felt the aching dullness. The body can only give so much of itself before it begins to censor what it can no longer handle.

It was right around the time that I was dealing with changing life circumstances that I began writing this piece. I was moving to be with the woman who was at that time my girlfriend. I was leaving a call I felt I had not finished, I was looking for a new job, and I was dealing with a mixture of feeling very proud of the work I had done but very ashamed that I was not staying around to do more. I felt a deep desire to stay and do that work and also to go where life was happening for me. Around this time, I read some sermons by Granville T. Walker during a silent retreat, In one sermon he said:

> But some never give God a chance. They do not go placidly amid the noise and haste. They are never silent. They rush through life, never stopping to think. They move from one thing to another. Every hour is filled; they are afraid to be alone. The silences of God are never given a chance. No, never relaxed, or quiet, or silent, they are never in a mood to receive. It is a way of life which cannot for long be sustained, for they cannot move as fast as everything is moving and they cannot keep the pace. Consequently, something takes place which they did not foresee or anticipate. And then in a moment life itself makes a silence for them.[4]

I was on the verge of having a moment in which life itself made a silence for me. I realized that the time I had typically set aside in life to be quiet with God I was now filling, not with trivialities but with the very real problems of multiple layers of belonging. The GETI tracks highlight areas that critically need a robust and theological treatment, a way of navigating and understanding God's covenant at work in a fractured world. In studying the thematic tracks, I began to understand that what I was dealing with was the critical urgency of these themes

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4. Granville T. Walker, *Go Placidly Amid the Noise and Haste: Meditations on the "Desiderata"* (St. Louis, MO: Bethany Press, 1975), 7.

manifested in personal, familial, congregational, regional, and national ways—all the time. I felt, both as a person and as a pastor, that there was no break from it: that it was my job to worry about it. It was exhausting, on top of the ways that living in a society designed to extract your labour and capital is already exhausting.

In the narratives of enslaved persons in the antebellum South, there is a throughline of hush harbour churches, places where enslaved persons could worship in private, away from their enslavers, becoming places of comfort and protest.[5] They were places where enslaved persons were seen as human before God, where they were not subjected to the extraction of their labour for capital, but were free to be children of God under the eyes of God. James Cone wrote that attempts to warp Christianity into a tool of oppression legitimizing current suffering through a futuristic eschatology, "trying to convince the slave that the Christian gospel was concerned with pietistic moralities in this life as a means of gaining eternal life upon death," was transformed into a healing correction through the sermonic moment. In Cone's words, "though the black preacher looked to the future and spoke of it in heavenly terms, it was because of his vision into the future that he could never reconcile himself to the present evil of slavery. To look toward the future is to grasp the truth of God, and to grasp the truth of God is to become intolerant of untruth."[6]

The church is a place to see truth and to be seen in truth, and the sermonic moment is a moment of reimagining. As Copeland writes, "The sermon is a challenge to the members of a community to question, to analyze, and to transform their social and historical situation, and to do so *as* and *in community*." This "heals and frees the congregation and each of its members from dread, from psychic breakdown, from nihilism." It is "disruptive, therefore, transformative discourse"; it "can serve as an instrument in the recovery and healing of distorted and wounded imagination which is the ground of representation."[7] I felt that I needed a sermon; I felt I needed Sabbath to carve away the dull ache that blurred time; but that dull ache was not disrupted for me. There was no Sabbath. It was not the fault of my church, which offered me time and space; nor my denomination, which had programs for young clergy; nor will I entirely blame myself. It raised for me a need for a theology of caring for the caretaker.

I do not think I am alone in the burnout and the dull ache I was feeling. I felt the ache that captures not only clergy, unable to find Sabbath when their work is

5. See Allan A. Boesak, *Comfort and Protest: The Apocalypse from a South African Perspective* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987).

6. James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 114.

7. Copeland, "Black Religious Discourse," 267.

to institute Sabbath for others, but which I believe has captured a generation, if not a population, so inundated in the demands of life and swept up in the pace of life that there is no Sabbath to be found. Perhaps if I had a more sacred attunement I could have realized that I was not completely dry and cracked, that I could have found living waters in the surprisingly eucharistic moments of coffee hours and hospital visits. I was not attuned, and I did not know what I needed.

Copeland's writings about the sermonic moment being healing and disruptive—the imaginative landscape of a symbolic universe—was the very intercession that I did not know my soul needed. This is a prophetic reordering of the world for the good of God's people. It dares the church to become a place not "of the world" in a fashion similar to Abraham Joshua Heschel's description of the Sabbath: "All week long we are called upon to sanctify life through employing things of space. On the Sabbath it is given us to share in the holiness that is in the heart of time. Even when the soul is seared, even when no prayer can come out of our tightened throats, the clean, silent rest of the Sabbath leads us to a realm of endless peace, or to the beginning of an awareness of what eternity means."[8] It feels as if the whole created world needs a Sabbath to shed a dull ache. It needs a Jubilee.

By rightfully giving a theological treatment to the crises and complications of our time, we are necessarily saying that the church should, can, and does speak to these issues. It is acting as an instantiation of the body of Christ and manifestation of God at work in the world for the good of God's people on these issues. A theological treatment of these thematic tracks also necessitates not only practical theologies for how these pressing concerns emerge and are addressed, but also how to equip and sustain the leaders doing the work of the church. Any theology that addresses kairos moments for creation and the church's role in those moments, but not the restoration of the caretakers is incomplete. A deep understanding of Sabbath, one that is transformational and not merely transactional, is necessary to address the root systems that the church is called to reimagine, including the church itself. Without the restoration and transformation of her leaders, the church will not restore and transform itself nor the world. The challenges that these GETI tracks address, such as the replacement of human labour with automation, the instrumentalization and destruction of the Earth, the wounds we have caused in one another, the violence done against the marginalized, cultural, and religious divides, and the church's complicity in racism, sexism, and queer phobia and transphobia require us not to merely respond but to be transformed. I believe this transformation can happen in the church, as illustrated by the contributions of the church in history and the potential for the church to "dream God's dream," as

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8. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 101.

Rev. Dr William Barber says. I also believe none of this will happen for a population too broken and tired to be transformed. The Israelites rested during the plague of darkness before their liberation from their captors; we too must attend to our souls in this time. It is a kairos moment for us all, a time for us to meet a crucial demand for our own Jubilee. The church must testify that restoration is possible, especially in its own leadership. The church must undertake the ecclesial and theological transformation necessary as witness to God's liberating and healing love.

"What a marvelous thing to see someone facing a bereavement that requires the complete reorganization of life, and doing it in such fashion that his own response leaves a benediction on everyone whose life he touches,"[9] Walker preached. Let us, tired and weary though we may be, bear witness to a tired and weary world through our own restoration and transformation. Let us be like trees planted by the water, a benediction for all who thirst and hunger for more, all who thirst and hunger to feel again and be restored.

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9. Walker, *Go Placidly*, 77.

Chapter 17

Humans in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

Jebin Thankaraj

The world is permeated with the presence of artificial intelligence (AI) and it is hard to escape its impact. The advent of AI has been a revolution, as it is able to investigate and learn different things and manipulate concepts. At the same time, there are risk factors that could affect democratic institutions, jobs, and civil rights. Throughout human history, people have been apprehensive whenever there is a new invention, be it airplane or train. But in due course, people become familiar with it and use it with ease. Can we approach AI in this way? There are alarming reports about the untrammelled growth and potential subversive power of AI. Are we going to reach a point where humans cannot control AI? If Christ's love (re) moves barriers, will it break the barrier between the digitally privileged and the underprivileged? These questions demonstrate that there is a need to analyze AI from theological and ecclesial perspectives. This paper is an attempt to reflect on what it means to be human in the era of AI.

Defining AI

John McCarthy, known as the father of AI, coined the term *artificial intelligence* in 1956. There are different ways of defining AI: expanding on WordNet's definition, Peter Singh defines it as "'the branch of computer science that deals with writing

computer programs that can solve problems creatively' with the simulation of intelligent behaviour in computers."[1] Martin Ringle views AI from a philosophical perspective and calls for a logical and semantic analysis of intelligence, consciousness, and machine, rather than an empirical assessment of computer behaviour.[2] AI is the method of installing human intelligence in machines. There was a time humans thought that certain functions could only be performed by humans. But now certain operational functions are programmed into computers that imitate human brain function.

In the field of AI research, there are three main approaches: the behaviour-based approach, the cognitive approach, and the robotic approach. The behaviour-based approach analyzes how computers are programmed to behave in an intelligent way. The cognitive approach deals with mimicking human problem-solving and mental processing in a computerized model. The robotic approach explores how machines simulate the human cognitive system.[3]

Impact of AI

There is no doubt that AI is drastically changing how humans live their daily lives. There is a lack of clarity on how it will shape our future. Stuart Russell feels that we are offering "extraordinary promise and peril . . . [through] this single transformative technology."[4] Throughout history, human culture and knowledge have taken many forms and have often progressed—but human nature has not changed. Technological developments have obscured this truth enabling humans to achieve greater power. But unless we understand our purpose and weaknesses as humans, the advanced technologies will simply make us repeat the same mistakes. Cars can drive themselves, robots can perform surgeries, and computers can converse with people. But what exactly distinguishes AI from cars, robots, and computers? Calum Samuelson predicts three main impacts of AI on our world: "AI will eventually make its biggest impact as a completely autonomous and perhaps conscious entity which overtakes humanity; AI will prove to be most significant when it becomes seamlessly integrated with biological human bodies, vastly increasing

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1. Princeton University, WordNet, Princeton University, accessed 25 August 2023, http://wordnetweb .princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=artificial+intelligence&sub=Search+WordNet&o2=&o0=1&o8= 1&o1=1&o7=&o5=&o9=&o6=&o3=&o4=&h=; M. Peter Singh, "Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence," *Gurukul Journal of Theological Studies* 27, no. 1 (March 2021): 61.

2. Martin Ringle, *Philosophy and Artificial Intelligence* (Brighton: Humanities Press, 1979), 109.

3. Singh, "Being Human," 63–64.

4. Stuart J. Russell and Peter Norvig, *Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach* (London: Pearson, 2015), 129.

abilities and prolonging life; AI will continue to be harnessed by humans as all technological innovations in the past have been—a morally neutral tool that can be used to accomplish tasks with greater ease and efficiency."[5]

Challenges of AI

The use of AI has been increasing day by day for various reasons: the usage of AI can drastically improve productivity in the workplace, improve diagnostic capabilities, uncover criminal activities through facial recognition, and contribute many other advanced techniques. At the same time, there are apprehensions that AI is a threat to privacy, that it will replace human jobs with machines, and that it will pose many other challenges as well. AI can potentially perform all jobs where personal human contact is not essential. There is no clarity about whether there will be enough new jobs to compensate for the loss of old ones. There are people who believe that AI is more dangerous than nuclear weapons. Some have compared this situation to a time bomb waiting to explode any moment.[6]

Another problem is that even AI is sometimes biased. An algorithm defines the way AI functions. The person who developed the algorithm may be biased. Peter Singh cites a classic example in which an AI program was the juror in a beauty contest in September 2016. It eliminated most Black candidates as the data on which it had been trained to identify "beauty" did not contain enough dark-skinned people. Ethnic minorities and women are especially underrepresented in data used to train algorithms, and so AI works less accurately for these groups. Singh also notes that in 2019, a federal study of more than 100 facial recognition systems found that they falsely identified African-American and Asian faces several times.[7]

There are lot of initiatives in AI to facilitate social interactions between humans and robots.[8] This may lead to a tendency to dehumanize, whereby the personhood, individuality, and value of human beings is denied and replaced with a regard for humans only as things. Human emotions and love are missing in this interaction. The major problem is that in humanizing robots we dehumanize real people.

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5. Calum Samuelson, "Artificial Intelligence: A Theological Approach," *The Way* (July 2020), 42.

6. Ikedinachi Ayodele Wogu et al., "Artificial Intelligence, Other Minds, and Human Factor Development: The Fate of Man in the World of Machines," in *Handbook of Research on the Role of Human Factors in IT Project Management*, ed. Sanjay Mishra and Adewole Adewumi (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2020), 205.

7. Singh, "Being Human," 67.

8. See Luisa Damiano and Paul Dumouchel, "Anthropomorphism in Human-Robot Co-evolution," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (November 2018), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00468.

Another danger is that the weapons powered by AI, like independent drones and missiles, could lead to war escalation or other situations where the humans lose control over the weapon or device. If we attribute rationality to AI, who takes the responsibility when a self-driving car hits a person?

Human Intelligence and Artificial Intelligence

Machines can look similar to human bodies and can perform like human beings, but they are not real humans. Although AI exhibits human functions such as learning, problem-solving, and—to an extent—reasoning, can it be considered superior to the human brain? Machines can perform magnificent tasks, but when they deal with new situations, they fail. Communication experts raise pertinent questions: "Can artificial intelligence created by humans be superior to human intelligence created by God? Will machines become super intelligent and will humans eventually lose control?"[9] Feigenbaum writes, "When AI programs solve complex problems, the source of the power to do that complex problem solving is the knowledge that the problem solver has."[10]

It is common to compare the humans who do their work quickly to machines. Can the objectives of humans and machines be the same? Stuart Russell refutes that, arguing, "We say that machines are intelligent to the extent that their actions can be expected to achieve their objectives, but we have no reliable way to make sure that their objectives are the same as our objectives."[11] Groth and Nitzberg make an interesting point that AI will not replace physicians but it can help doctors to make better decisions.[12] We have reached a stage where we feel as though we are living in a post-human era. Peter Singh refers to Yuval Harari, who, in his book *Homo Deus*, mentions that we are fast approaching a post-human era where humans will increasingly be hybrids of organic and non-organic material. There are also views that AI will eventually allow us to digitally upload our brains and keep living even though our bodies perish.[13] How do we understand the concept of the image of God in this post-human era? Is it that humans can work better if

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9. Singh, "Being Human," 61–62.

10. Edward A. Feigenbaum, "The Art of Artificial Intelligence: Themes and Case Studies of Knowledge Engineering," paper delivered at the AFIPS National Computer Conference, 52.

11. Russell and Norvig, *Artificial Intelligence*, 130.

12. Olaf Groth and Mark Nitzberg, *Solomon's Code: Humanity in A World of Thinking Machines* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2018), 10.

13. Singh, "Being Human," 70. Here, Singh references Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: Harper, 2017).

they combine with machines? Is human intelligence without the addition of machines weak?

Defining Humanity

Humanity is an ocean, and it is a herculean task to define what it means to be human. The person who rescues someone in trouble is considered an angel or saint, not an ordinary human being. Even common proverbs portray the human in such a way: "To err is human; to forgive, divine."[14] Likewise, when someone behaves in a harsh or cruel way, they are called animals. If good behaviours are assumed to be divine and cruel behaviour beastly, then what does it mean to be human? Is there any particular characteristic that makes someone human? Do humans have anything special making them unique compared to other species? There are different understandings of humanity in different religions and traditions. For example, Christian tradition understands humanity in a birth-death-resurrection pattern, while Hindu tradition believes in a birth-death-rebirth pattern. This shows how complex the subject is: there is no single definition or ready-made answer for this. Defining humanity in the era of AI is still more complex.

Humans and the image of God

The creation narrative in the Hebrew scriptures states that humans are made in the image of God. Then the question arises, What is that image? There is often a tendency to look at God in an anthropomorphic way. Instead of viewing God's image in us, we project our physical image on God. Philosophers argue that rationality is the special feature that differentiates humans from other animals. But can anyone with rationality kill his fellow brothers and sisters just to expand their territory? Can someone with rationality throw bombs into hospitals and schools or commit genocide? Biblical scholars like Westermann understand the concept of humans as the image of God as their being God's counterparts or ambassadors in the world. Can God's counterpart destroy God's creation by means of deforestation and extinguish biodiversity in order to fulfil their greed? Can God's counterpart be callous even after knowing that the survival of the species is under threat by rising sea levels and climate change?

Another argument is that humans possess a "soul" differentiating them from other species. But Qoheleth in the Hebrew Bible questions this: "For the fate of

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14. The original source of this well-known aphorism is Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* (1711).

humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals. . . . Who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downwards to the earth?" (Eccles. 3:19–21). James Herriot says, "If having a soul means being able to feel love, loyalty, and gratitude, then animals are better off than a lot of humans."[15]

Creativity, reason, and morality are widely considered the primary dimensions of the *imago Dei*. Humans are created in the image of a relational God—the implication being that we are only fully human when in meaningful relationship with others. There are threats to human interactions and relations due to AI. Another implication of humans being created in the image of God is that they have responsibility. One can already perceive small ways in which humans are abdicating their responsibility for dominion through AI, whether by using autonomous weapons, foetus screening, or criminal facial recognition.[16] Humans may blindly obey the commands of AI even if they are unethical. Emotion, love, compassion, and family relationships are elements that separate humans from machines. God's purpose is that humans should control the technology rather than have technology enslave us.

Theological Aspects of AI

Human beings are God's handiwork; this makes one argue that God makes humans and humans make machines. Christian theology affirms that the image of God in human beings is only in the intellectual capability and not in their body. AI creates a new consciousness that triggers new questions. The world belongs to God; we are creatures made in God's image but what separates humans from machines? What is real in artificial intelligence? How do we navigate the privacy, transparency, and justice issues? How do we approach the job loss by which the existence of number of people is threatened? Is the world of AI the design of God?

It is impossible for AI to join the Christian discernment that human beings are made in the divine image, while AI and robots are made in humanity's image. AI has been viewed as a tower of Babel, an endeavour to reach zenith of humans' own accord. The threat lies in the potential for allowing the icon to become an

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15. Vipul Pande, "Animals Are Better than Humans at Expressing Gratitude, " *Hindustan Times* (July 2016), https://www.hindustantimes.com/comment-newspaper/animals-are-better-than-humans-at -expressing-gratitude/story-dL7Pxczwgop3K0z1Gqx0SJ.html.

16. Samuelson, "Artificial Intelligence," 42–44.

idol. Our attempt to reach technological immortality through AI, entire brain emulation, drastic life extension, and robotics could be viewed as humanity's latest creation. "As the image bearers of God, humans are a copy of the original, and AI will be a copy of a copy, because it is made in human image. In a post-human society, however, humanity may no longer see itself made in *imago Dei*, but in *imago roboticae*."[17] Peter Sing inquires: "Could God instil a soul into a robot at the moment it comes to life? What if God reveals God-self to the robot?"[18] There are several other questions: Can machines establish a relationship with God? If all the creatures praise and glorify the Almighty, then in what way does AI glorify God?

AI and Social Disparity

Digital inequalities in AI tend to mirror existing social inequalities in terms of socio-economic status, education, gender, age, and ethnicity. AI depends on huge amounts of data and how people's data will be managed to protect privacy and human rights is a real concern. Underprivileged people are further disadvantaged because of restricted usage opportunities and lack of digital skills. It has created a state of imbalance in education as well. There is a clear difference between those who are online and those who are offline. Peter Singh explains this as the 3Cs: "concepts—the best and latest knowledge and ideas; competence—the ability to operate at the higher standards of any place anywhere; and connections—more relationships which provide access to the resources of the other people and organizations around the world."[19] Some are deprived of these 3Cs.

    AI-powered surveillance is used against ethnic groups. As was reported in *The Times of India,* "Israel is increasingly relying on facial recognition in the occupied West Bank to track Palestinians and restrict their passage through key checkpoints. . . . As their faces are scanned, the software—known as Red Wolf—uses a color-coded system . . . to guide the soldiers on whether to let the person go, stop them for questioning, or arrest them. When the technology fails to identify someone, soldiers train the system by adding their personal information to the database."[20]

17. Takhesi Kimura, "Robotics and AI In the Sociology of Religion: A Human in Imago Roboticae," *Social Compass* 64, no. 1 (2017): 6–22.

18. Singh, "Being Human," 72.

19. Singh, "Being Human," 73.

20. "Report: Facial Recognition Powers Automated Apartheid in Israel," *Times of India*, 3 May 2023, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/middle-east/report-facial-recognition-powers -automated-apartheid-in-israel/articleshow/99947219.cms?from=mdr.

AI and Ecclesiology

In 2017, Anthony Levandowski started the first church based on the religion of AI, which he called Way of the Future. It focused on the worship of "a Godhead based on AI." Way of the Future members would "promote the use of a divine AI for the betterment of the society."[21] Peter Singh notes that in 2017, Saudi Arabia granted citizenship to the AI robot Sophia, while many of its flesh and blood female citizens do not get to enjoy the rights of full citizenship. Citing this, he questions if, in addition to rights and complete citizenship, the church will accept AI robots as members in the church? The arrival of AI will definitely question our perception of religion, prayer, and faith. The church will have to analyze whether a robot has a soul and is able to pray. Does God hear prayers from any intelligent being or only human intelligence?[22]

Another role for the church is to empower the digitally disadvantaged community so that its members can enjoy the benefits of digital technology. Jesus is the model for such a mission because Jesus identified with the excluded community in Galilee. The liberating, healing, and inclusive ministry of Jesus, which overturns hierarchical structures and invites the outcasts to the table, can be taken as a paradigm of AI theology. In God's *oikos* no one will be deprived and digitally divided.[23] We are also heading toward a period of AI occupying the church through robot pastors. The Protestant Church in Hess and Nassau created a robot called Bless U-2 for the World Reformation Exhibition in Wittenberg. It gave pre-programmed blessings to over 10,000 people. Bless U-2 spoke seven languages in either a male and female voice, depending on user preference, and offered four different types of blessings: traditional, companionship, encouragement, and renewal. About 20 percent of the people felt that they were missing human interaction.[24] This raises an important question: Is it possible for God to bless through a robot? Some observe that such measures would dismantle hierarchical structures and reduce politics in the churches. Others argue that church is not meant for giving information by oneself or performing ritual alone. It is, rather, a faith community where love needs to be shared.

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21. Mark Harris, "Inside the First Church of Artificial Intelligence," *Wired*, 15 November 2017, https://www.wired.com/story/anthony-levandowski-artificial-intelligence-religion.

22. Singh, "Being Human," 74.

23. Singh, "Being Human," 75.

24. "Robot Priest Unveiled in Germany to Mark 500 Years since Reformation," *The Guardian*, May 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/30/robot-priest-blessu-2-germany-reformation-exhibition.

Conclusion

Humanity faces an existential crisis due to various factors. This paper has high-lighted how AI is also contributing to an uncertain future. Although this paper discussed some of the effects and challenges of AI, there are many unanswered questions. But my firm belief is that the questions raised here and elsewhere will help further deliberations on this topic. In addition to the discussion here, churches should be concerned with the question that Samuelson raises: "Will AI help us save the environment and usher in a better age, free from fossil fuels, or will it be the only recourse available after we have destroyed the biosphere?"[25] AI tools should help people regain healthier notions about the purpose of life in general.

25. Samuelson, "Artificial Intelligence," 49.

Chapter 18

Feminist Theology, Body Politics, and Biblical Narratives

Karla Steilmann

Feminist Theology

Even though the concept of feminism corresponds to the name it has been given in recent history (as does the term *machismo*), the feminist movement (or practice) is not something new that is based on post-modern ways of thinking.

It is also not a movement that appeared on the scene of modern societies in the last 40 to 50 years. In many texts of antiquity, we can perceive some sort of feminist thought, interpretation, or approach to reality. This includes the biblical texts and other ancient sources from different cultures, connected to several traditions. This was not understood as feminism, at least not in the modern way.

However, the current generation is clearly more influenced by the events of the past century, and the more recent feminist movement is important in this regard. This movement emerged at the beginning of the 20th century and became stronger (or at least more visible) in the 1960s and 70s. It was a movement that paralleled the development of the concept of liberation and the desire for liberated identities, which were established inside societies and had a powerful influence on different fields, including the theological.[1]

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1. See Naomi Graetz, *Unlocking the Garden*: *A Feminist Jewish Look at the Bible, Midrash, and God* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press LLC, 2004), 99; Nancy Cardoso Pereira, "Pautas para una hermenéutica feminista de la liberación," *Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latinoamericana* 25 (1997): 9.

During this period, different theologies and hermeneutics were developed, such as Latin American liberation theology, which includes a strong branch of feminist theology and hermeneutics. Liberation theology proposes a new way to do theology in terms of how it can be presented and developed; it connected the theoretical framework of theology with the reality and the context of the people. It was revolutionary and extraordinary; looking back, I would add that it was opportune and even necessary. Nowadays, I can't imagine doing theology in any another way.

The feminist branch of theological studies is of particular interest. It is, according to Carla Ferreyra, a way to understand the message of God from a perspective of gender equality between women and men, while proclaiming a humanized message.[2]

Not only in Latin America but more broadly as well, feminist theology brought forth not only the perspective of women but also a strong critique of the way theology has been done throughout history, and how this influenced the development of Christianity and the idea of "being church" in a world that is in constant change.

From my point of view, one of the most solid and consistent contributions of feminist theology is related to the exegetical and hermeneutical approaches to the Bible. How have these contributed to new ways of reading, understanding, and interpreting the biblical texts and stories in order to rethink how we understand the narratives, and how we see and comprehend the different characters (both female and male) in context?[3]

Feminist theology (like many others, such as liberation theology, Black theology, and eco-theology) caused an irreversible revolution in the way in which the theological and biblical texts are observed, interpreted, and understood. Feminist theology is a liberating theology because it frees us from so many ties while removing so many borders. It set us (women, men, and other genders) free from different types of prisons and from imposed guilt. It allows us to relate to the divinity, to our own faith, and to the history of so many others.

The Politics of the Body

The concept of *body politics* is wide and can be analyzed in many different ways; therefore, trying to reduce it to a single definition is a difficult task. In academic

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2. Carla E Ferreyra et al., *Feminismo y teología cristiana: una oportunidad de encuentro* (La Plata: Ecclesia Joven), 11.

3. Pereira, "*Pautas*," 5. See also Graetz, *Unlocking the Garden*, 10.

settings, as well as in some informal spaces like the internet, it is possible to find material and research on this topic from varied perspectives, such as anthropological, historical, psychological, economic, and medical. These offer different ways to approach this topic. This diversity is understandable because the discussion about body politics can refer at the same time to abortion, violence, slavery, gender equity/equality, human rights, the body itself, life and death, and other issues. Simultaneously, the same term can be related to religion, the religious environment, faith, and the broad spectrum that is related to it. One can see from these brief notes how wide and complex this concept can be, and how distinct the approaches to it and the conclusions one draws can be.

However, it is not the intention of this short paper to provide a final definition of this concept, but rather to observe it from biblical and exegetical perspectives. I am using tools from feminist theology and hermeneutics to analyze the female body-concept in some biblical narratives and to connect it with current reality. That means that this text will be focused on the politics of the female body in relationship to biblical studies.

Some theologians from different parts of the world have already reflected on this issue and have presented interesting work linking theological reflection and investigation to the notion of body politics.

Professor HyeRan Kim-Cragg, for example, approaches the topic from a feminist-ecclesiastical point of view, presenting the struggles of women to access the ordained ministry in different churches.[4] Her description of the many difficulties women face in order to become ordained clergy members reflects the reality not just in Canada, but in many other countries and churches around the world. And sadly, today, many women are still struggling to gain access to ordained ministries and other leadership positions.

While Kim-Cragg brings to the light the reality of body politics in the religious-ecclesiastical context, Copeland introduces the reality of Black women and their bodies in religious and secular contexts.[5] The perspective presented by Copeland represents a different face of the reality of oppression of women. Both authors present the reality of women and their struggle inside the society to attain freedom and equal rights.

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4. HyeRan Kim-Cragg, "Probing the Pulpit: Postcolonial Feminist Perspectives," in *Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders: An Ecumenical Reader. GETI 2022*, ed. Kuzipa Nalwamba and Marietta Ruhland (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2022), 269–73, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/geti-2022-christs-love-removes-borders.

5. M. Shawn Copeland, "Body, Representation, and Black Religious Discourse," *Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders*, 260–68.

Considering both articles, one can understand how the notion of body politics in the church world is specially related to female bodies and women's ability to make decisions about their own bodies. This can be strongly criticized, since throughout history many decisions that had various implications for women's bodies and their liberty were made by male church authorities, based on patriarchal interpretations of the biblical texts. Secular society was often governed by the same logic.

This paper challenges us to think in a critical way and to ask questions of the biblical texts. It is designed to help us think clearly and consciously about the politics of the bodies present in the biblical texts and connected to female biblical figures.[6]

A Biblical Approach

How many women from the Bible—particularly from the Old Testament—can you name without looking them up? Do you know what happened to them? Were they presented as significant in and of themselves or only in relationship to men? Are they named? These are some questions that help us realize how women have been presented in the biblical stories that have been told to us over and over again, how we remember them, and in what way the body politics was presented.

Eve

Among all the women who are mentioned in the Bible, with or without a proper name, Eve is one of the most famous. She was the first woman, according to the canon. She was created by the divinity itself and received the *ruah* (the spirit of life) directly from the divinity. Eve was literally shaped by the divinity to be human alongside her husband. Even though she does not appear much in the narratives after the Genesis stories, and we don't know much about her or her daily life, she and the narrative of her creation are well known, particularly because of the second version of the creation myth (see Genesis 2). This text is often used to explain why women should be subject to men (because Eve was created from a man's rib). In the same vein, she is used as an example of how women should behave in relation to their husbands. The reader does not receive any information about her feelings or her reaction to the death of one of her sons, or even about her relationship with Adam.

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6. Tania Mara Vieira Sampaio, "Consideraciones para una hermenéutica de género del texto bíblico," *Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latinoamericana* 37 (2000): 11.

Nothing is said about Eve's body or appearance (in fact there are very few mentions in the Bible about the physical appearance of the characters). She barely speaks, but on her shoulders is placed the guilt of having been expelled from paradise. The only mention of her body is linked to conception; the sole accepted function of a woman´s body is that she can become pregnant and must give birth with pain.

Eve's story confronts readers with the fact that without further explanation or even substantiation, women were to be blamed for the evils of the world; this language is still evident in some actual hermeneutics of Genesis.

Sarah and Hagar

Like Eve, Sarah and Hagar appear in the book of Genesis. All three are part of the same group of narratives: the story of the ancestors of Israel. Both Sarah and Hagar have names, which is not usually a priority for female characters in biblical narratives.

They are related throughout the narrative in many ways: both gave a son to Abraham, both are considered matriarchs, both were strong female figures. Some differences also appear between them; whereas Sarah was a "free" woman, Hagar was enslaved—to Sarah. And yet Hagar received a promise directly from the divinity, while Sarah received a divine promise only through her husband.

The fact is that both women were part of a strongly patriarchal society and therefore were exposed to different kinds of oppression and even danger. And even though they played an important role in the development of the narrative, both were subject to Abraham´s desire and power. They barely speak directly to each other or to other characters. And what do we know about their bodies? Almost nothing. Sarah was described as a beautiful woman at least two times but no further details about her beauty are given. She is also described as old. Hagar was presumably younger, but nothing is mentioned about her appearance.

Abraham´s behaviour is questionable in those texts, for he gave Sarah to foreign kings twice in order to preserve his own safety—as if she were an exchangeable object. It seemed that he didn't care about her life or her safety: a questionable attitude, especially coming from the so-called father of the faith. When Sarah wanted to banish Hagar and Ishmael from her house, the patriarch did not care about the safety of his concubine (or, perhaps, his second wife). The most interesting thing about this is that Abraham remained an example of faith and honour, even into the late 20th century, with hardly any criticism for his actions or decisions.

In these stories, women's opinions and bodies are not taken into account. The final decision always comes from a male figure; and the goal of the women is to bear children (especially sons) to the men.

Finally, it is relevant to point out that in many studies, Sarah and Hagar have been described as opposing characters, almost enemies. Certainly, according to the text, their relationship was not the best, particularly at the end, but the fact is that both the narrator and later scholars had a strong tendency to describe or see female figures as conflicting and jealous—as if the problems lie in the fact that they are women. It seems that, for many centuries, criticizing a certain type of man was unthinkable.

The challenge in this narrative is to present a new perspective on the texts and to recognize Sarah and Hagar as fellows and even victims of a system in which women did not have any rights.

The Levite's concubine

This story, from Judges 19, is one of the cruellest in the entire Old Testament in my point of view. It includes a rather precise description of the cruelty suffered by this woman. Probably this character is not as well-known as the other three. This may be partly because the book of Judges is not read as often as Genesis.[7]

This woman is presented differently than the others. The readers do not know much about her. She does not have a name or any description of her appearance or age. Actually, no one in the story receives a proper name. All characters are described in terms of their origin or relation to the others (such as father, concubine, servant, old man). Only her provenance, Bethlehem, is known, and that she was not "officially" married to the Levite. Her relationship with the Levite is the framework of the narrative. The development of the story ends not just with the death of the concubine, but with the fact that she was cut into pieces and her parts were sent to the twelve tribes: a horrible end for someone who never got a chance to speak a single word in the entire text. She was not alone; she had a family (at least a father), but no one claimed or defended her, and her partner delivered her to strange men in the city, knowing what could happen to her. She was exposed, vulnerable, and unprotected in a hostile environment.

Some authors argue that this is just a metaphor used to get the attention of the tribes because they were not following the law. From my point of view, this story is too strong, even as a metaphor.

This story does not appear anywhere else in the Bible and this woman is not mentioned again. As in other cases, the behaviour of the Levite has barely been criticized and this story was not used to talk about the situation of this woman.

We could speculate about this story: we could say, for example, that the woman went to her father's house to avoid the violence of the Levite. But the text

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7. This story has similarities to Genesis 19.

does not give us support for that. It is possible, though, to raise the question about how much violence against women existed and just does not appear or is camouflaged in other biblical narratives.

Feminist exegetes rescue this text and use it to reflect on violence in the Bible and especially about violence against the women and femicide. This character represents how vulnerable women were in that society, unable to claim respect or even compassion.

Rahab

The last example in this analysis is found in the book of Joshua. Rahab is one of the main characters in this narrative. Her actions and decisions are very important for the development of this story and for the history of the conquest of Jericho.

In contrast to the woman in Judges 19, Rahab has her own voice, she is given the capacity to decide what she wants to do, she has a proper name, and thanks to her, the spies were safe. The text gives Rahab a great deal of importance. In the 24 verses of the chapter only three persons receive a name: Joshua, his father Nun, and Rahab. Even the king´s name is not mentioned.

Rahab lived in Jericho, she was responsible for her own household, and she was well known—even the king knows her. She was relatively free in a society where women were always under the protection of men. Perhaps this is why she is called a *zonah* (prostitute).

Rahab´s good action benefits her: only she and the ones in her house were to be saved from the destruction of Jericho (Josh. 6:17). This woman is presented as a heroine, for she puts her own safety at risk in order to help the spies, and somehow, she recognizes the power of the Israelite divinity.

From our list of women, Rahab is the only one who has authority over her own body and has the power to make her own decision. She is called a *zonah* but is not criticized for that. Curiously she is respected as a person and even praised for her courage.

It is nonetheless important to mention that although Rahab is presented in a different way, she still is part of a society that saw women as inferior beings in comparison to men.

The five female figures presented here are strong characters, who in some ways give us a glimpse of how broad the study of body politics related to biblical studies and hermeneutics can be. Each of them was part of an environment that judged them and constantly tried to oppress and dominate them. Sadly, it is not possible to go deeper into each narrative here, but this paper can serve as a simplified introduction to this important topic.

Conclusion

The female body in the biblical narratives does not have the same significance as it does today. That is why it is possible to find so many texts in which women are treated like a product or used like an object.[8] In both the Old and New Testament, there are examples of violence against women, discrimination, and justification for the denigration of women. Women are always connected to men, who should protect them, but that doesn't always happen.

The narrators and commentators of the biblical stories even tried to pit women against other women, as in the stories of Sarah and Hagar, and Leah and Rachel. Describing them as conflictive or unstable, or setting them against each other as enemies, was a way to control their bodies and their life.

According to Irmtraud Fischer, the action of making women invisible in the stories was intentional, developed over time in a premeditated way.[9] It can be seen in the biblical texts; for example, the later texts have completely taken the prominence away from female figures and given it to men. The same has been done in the history of the church and continues to be done in different parts of society.

I have presented here only four biblical examples, which describe differences but also similarities regarding the politics of the female body. The shock about those examples is that those things still happen today. The violence, the rape, the disrespect, the abuse, the desire for control over women is a current reality. We are not over these situations; we are, sadly, still in the middle of them. That is why it is necessary to encourage people to read the Bible critically and with their eyes fixed on the context around them. That is the only possible way to do a contextual hermeneutic that serves to reflect on the current reality.

We are living in a world where modernism and neoconservatism exist together, and Alison Phipps confronts us with this reality in her book *The Politics of the Body*.[10] It is necessary to bring such topics into the light and let ourselves be challenged to think critically in order to build a safer future for women.

The concept of body politics links itself very well to Bible studies. It is, therefore, appropriate to emphasize its importance, especially in view of the frequency with which the Bible and religion are used to oppress, subordinate, and underestimate women. Approaching the biblical texts in relation to the analysis of body

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8. See also Graetz, *Unlocking the Garden*, 24.

9. Irmtraud Fischer, *Die Erzeltern Israels: Feministisch-theologische Studien zu Genesis 12–36* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 343.

10. Alison Phipps, *The Politics of the Body: Gender in a Neoliberal and Neoconservative Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 7–19.

politics and its influence within faith communities would, in my opinion, be an excellent contribution to both theology and feminist hermeneutics.[11]

As a final thought, I believe that it is important to redesign or update hermeneutical approaches that help us to read the Bible as an instrument of liberation of female bodies from oppression and subordination and to empower women across the world.

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11. Tania Sampaio Vieira approaches a similar by topic, talking about "the dynamic of the bodies and their movements in interpersonal-social relationships." Tania Maria Sampaio Vieira, "Consideraciones para una hermenéutica de género del texto bíblico," *RIBLA: Revista de Interpretación Biblica Latinoamericana*, no. 37, *El género en lo cotidiano* (San José, Costa Rica: Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, 2000), 12.

Chapter 19

A Political Diaconal Common Prayer:
Political *Diakonia*—Witness from the Margins

Kristine Lyng

During this prayer, we reflect on our common calling to serve the world in unity and solidarity. We acknowledge that our relationship with God, with each other, and with all of creation requires accountability of our social graces as we are one in this world.

Opening

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we gather to hear words of love, so that we may denounce structures of injustice that keep us from living by them. We sing to come together in unity, so that we may cross barriers of division. We pray to be reconciled with the triune God and with each other, so that we may be one humanity, as created in the image of God. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we gather, we sing, we pray. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25–37—The Parable of the Good Samaritan

[25] Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" [26] He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" [27] He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." [28] And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

[29] But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" [30] Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. [31] Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. [32] So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33] But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. [34] He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. [35] The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

[36] Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" [37] He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Homiletic Reflection

"Who is my neighbour?" We ask this question to remind ourselves of ways to exist in this world. When we listen to the reading of the parable of the good Samaritan, we put ourselves in the place of the victimized. We are reminded of how easily we all could fall to the margins of society in times of war, in times of inflation, in times of unemployment, in times of crises. At that time, who will aid us? Reflecting more deeply on the parable, we come to realize that the narrative also motivates us to shift the perspective from that of the self-centred, the "what must I do to inherit eternal life" person to the other. Jesus does not, in fact, answer the question posed by the lawyer. The concept of *neighbour* is instead redefined; our neighbour is ourselves as acting individuals, the subjects of the question. The real question thus becomes: "To whom do I choose to act as a neighbour?" The message becomes

apparent: We must act in solidarity, reminded that this is a question to which we continuously relate throughout our lives.

It is not by chance that we find the parable of the good Samaritan within the Gospel of Luke. The focus on the relationship between rich and poor, powerful and marginalized, is a central theme throughout the Gospel, and the strong emphasis on the status of the poor in the eyes of God is evident whenever these relations are portrayed. The rich in society include the powerful, and those who continuously try to elevate themselves. They are consistently portrayed as those who doubt Jesus and put him to the test. In contrast, the poor, the socially marginalized and underprivileged, are portrayed as the trustworthy. They, unlike the rich, are the ones who find acceptance with God. In these portrayals, the hierarchy of social status is reversed, and the marginalized become the elevated.[1] When the Gospel of Luke speaks of the rich and powerful, it does not equate this with righteousness. To be rich and powerful is a way of existing in this world, where self-aggrandizement and self-justification are seen as signs of elevated social status. However, administering power justly is to equalize the status hierarchy and turn the values structure on its head; in so doing, one accepts Jesus. To act in solidarity is therefore also to act on the structures that create need: to address the root causes of systems of injustice through a community of solidarity.

Circling around to where we began, "Who is my neighbour?" we ask ourselves again with thoughts of our structural reality. How do we continuously reflect on what it means to be a community of solidarity and to act on systems of injustice with a structural conditioned charity? In Jesus' response to the question "who is my neighbour?" the horizon of how we understand the concept of *neighbour* is broadened; it holds space for us to cross ethnic, racial, gendered, and social borders. It leaves us to respond to the needs of our neighbour and to reflect upon how we ourselves act as neighbours. This is our prophetic calling, our mandate, given to us collectively by God, so that we may be each other's neighbours.

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1. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 22.

Song[2]

Ubi caritas

U-bi ca-ri-tas et a — mor, u-bi ca-ri - tas De-us i - bi est.

♪ **Liv-ing char-i-ty**, and stead-fast love, liv-ing char-i-ty, shows the heart of God. / **Don-de hay a-mor** y ca-ri-dad, don-de hay a-mor Dios a-hí es-tá. / **Tam, gdzie mi-łość jest** i dob-roć, tam, gdzie mi-łość jest, tam— mie-szka Bóg. / **On-de_hou-ver a-mor** e ca-ri-da-de, on-de_hou-ver a-mor: a-í Deus es-tá. / **Sa pa-ghi-gug-ma**, a-naa ang Diyos; Sa pa-ghi-gug-ma, a-naa ang— Diyos. / **Kde je do-bro-ta** a lá-ska, kde je do-bro-ta, tam je ta-ké Bůh. / **Hvor end kær-lig-hed på jor-den er**, dér er Gud os nær, Gud er kær-lig-hed. / **Kus on ha-las-tus** ja ar-mas-tus, kus on ha-las-tus, seal on Ju-mal ka. / **Mis-sä rak-ka-us** ja lau-pe-us, mis-sä rak-ka-us, siel-lä Ju-ma-la. / **Fi-e ɖag-be-wi-wa** kpo wan-yi-yi kpo ɖe ɔ, fi-e ɖag-be ɖe ɔ Ma-wu nɔ wa. / **As der freon-skip** is en leaf-de, as der freon-skip is, dan is God by ús. / **Gdje je lju-bav** i prija-telj-stvo, gdje je lju-bav, on-dje je i Bog. / **A-hol sze-re-tet** és jó-ság, a-hol sze-re-tet: ott van Is-te-nünk. / **Di da-lam cin-ta dan ka-sih**, di da-lam cin-ta ha-dir-lah Tu-han. / **Ten, kur gai-les-tis** ir mei-lė, ten, kur gai-les-tis, Die-vas ten y-ra. / **Daar waar lief-de heerst**, en vre-de, daar waar lief-de heerst, daar is God met ons. / **Der barm-hjer-tig-het** og god-het er, se, der fin-nes Gud, se, der fin-nes Gud. / **Kjer do-bro-ta je**, lju-be-zen, kjer do-bro-ta je, tam pre-bi-va Bog. / **Źoż jo mi-ło-sći** a lu-bo-sći, źoż jo mi-ło-sći, tam jo Bó-ža móc. / **Där barm-här-tig-het och kär-lek bor**, där är ock-så Gud, där är ock-så Gud. / **Su-ñu sop-pan-tee** ak co—feel, su-ñu sop-pan-tee, Yàl-la ànd ak ñun.

(Où sont la charité et l'amour, Dieu est là. / Wo Güte und Liebe herrscht, da ist Gott. / Там, где милосердие и любовь – там есть Бог.)

Music: Jacques Berthier (1923-1994)
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Closing Prayer

Let us pray for those . . .

. . . living at the borders of society,

. . . suppressed by systems of injustice,

. . . fighting to attain their God-given rights,

. . . empowered by the will for freedom and peace,

that we may stand in solidarity with each other. Amen.

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2. A hymn in Latin is appropriate here because it is a language that crosses borders, representing the unity of the Christian community, a living ecumenism inspired by the Taizé community. The words as translated into English are "Where charity and love are, there God is." They affirm the overall message of the common prayer. This hymn was sung at the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2022, held in conjunction with the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 31 August–8 September 2022. The song is printed with the permission of the Taizé community.

A Socio-political Interpretation of the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, you who watch over us, the hallowing of your name echoes in our hearts. Your peaceful kingdom come, and your will be done in the name of righteousness on earth as it is in heaven. Give us strength to speak truth to power and forgive those of us who do not justly administer the power with which we have been entrusted. Lead us not by ways of temptation but deliver us from them, so that we may be liberated to do unto others as we wish that they do unto us. Amen.

Benediction

Inspired by the ways of Jesus and the prophets who spoke truth to power, we pray that God will continuously empower us to transform structures and practices that uphold injustice and exclusion, and to advocate for people affected deeply by these systems. By the blessing of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we are sent from here into the world in unity and solidarity through actions and words to bear this prophetic, life-affirming witness. Amen

Analytical Essay on a Political *Diaconal* Common Prayer

Within the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute's (GETI) Practical-Diaconal track for holding space for those at the border, this framework for a common prayer articulates a political *diakonia* based on the concept of prophetic theology as foundation for the global church's call to solidarity. The socio-political framing of the common prayer emphasizes the need to reassert the church's mandate to bear witness and to address the societal structures unjustly affecting people at the margins. This is a foundation of the socio-political and socio-critical aspects of theology. The framework for a common prayer takes shape within a secular societal context but is not limited to that context.

"They bind us on mouth and hand, but they cannot bind spirit."[3] The concept of prophetic theology is derived from the significance of social responsibility in the early biblical traditions. The prophetic tradition of social criticism understands prophecy as the God-given mandate to the prophet to be a defender of justice.[4] In

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3. Danish song from 1940 by Poul Henningsen and Kai Normann Andersen, written and performed at revues as a love letter for the country during times of occupation and censorship in Denmark. Translation by author.

4. Dietrich Werner and Matthew Ross, "Terminologies, Learning Processes and Recent Developments in Ecumenical *Diakonia* in the Ecumenical Movement," in *GETI 2022: Christ's Love (Re)moves*

the Old Testament, this authority is demonstrated by the prophet Amos. The book of Amos (chaps. 5–6) narrates a scene of a society in social imbalance. In Amos 5:10–13, the prophet engages in a fundamental critique of Israel oppressing the poor and not upholding justice because of the people's unwillingness to listen to God and to follow the law. This will lead to punishment of the people if they do not change paths. The call of the prophet is for them to seek the good, to seek God in the sense of restoring a social balance. This profound correlation between seeking God and seeking social balance is emphasized in Amos 6:1–8, a tirade against the idle rich. This Old Testament prophetic criticism of unjust conditions was relayed to all in positions of abusing power: the rich, the religious leadership, and even the king.[5]

This perspective is carried into the Christian tradition as the root of critical social thinking in the gospels, where social responsibility, criticism, and liberation for the marginalized are exemplified in narratives such as the parable of the good Samaritan. The universalization of this messianic tradition is the reflection of God's *diakonia*.[6] It means acting when our God-given law of service to our neighbour is broken. Consequently, in this there lies the important task of bearing prophetic witness to confront social values that cross or lead to the crossing of this law.[7] The call to serve our neighbour is a vocation for both the individual believer and for the church community. It leads the church into public advocacy concerning the effects of political decisions on those living on the borders of society, and it includes the affirmation of solidarity.[8] The common prayer presented here reiterates the relationship between action and word, *diakonia* and *kerygma*, both being practical expressions of the gospel and illustrating the inherent link between *leiturgia* and *diakonia*. Diaconal action is rooted in the teachings of the gospel and in the practice of Jesus. It is a consequence of faith as a visible manifestation and is in this way an integral part of the church's life and doing.[9] To reassert this relationship, a deeper focus on political *diakonia* and prophetic theology in the liturgical framework is essential.

Borders—An Ecumenical Reader, ed. Kuzipa Nalwamba and Marietta Ruhland (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2022), 161, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/geti-2022-christs-love-removes-borders; Lutheran World Federation (LWF), *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment,* ed. Kjell Nordstokke (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2009), 82.

5. LWF, *Diakonia in Context*, 83.

6. Werner and Ross, "Terminologies," 161.

7. LWF, *Diakonia in Context*, 82–83.

8. LWF, *The Church in the Public Space: A Study Document of the Lutheran World Federation*, ed. Department for Theology and Public Witness (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2016), 25.

9. World Council of Churches and ACT Alliance, *Called to Transformation: Ecumenical Diakonia* (Leipzig: WCC Publications, 2022), 48.

This need is especially apparent within the Western secular societal contexts where tendencies to limit the role of religion and church to the private sphere are strong. This makes it difficult for the church to balance the intersection of public and private, and ultimately results in less engagement in public issues. Religion no longer has a designated place in the public space and the church struggles to define its role there or even to maintain a role at all. This secular thinking implies that the progress of society equals the decline of religion in the public sphere.[10] Speaking from a Lutheran context, the church is, unintentionally or deliberately, keeping its communication limited to the spiritual realm. In Lutheran theology, however, the church is called to communicate God's love in words and deeds, which necessitate that the church act when confronted with injustice in the worldly realm.[11] This does ultimately mean that the church is called to engage in the public sphere, and that it is critical for the church to define, understand, and continuously reflect on its socio-political role. Critical prophetic questions are not just directed toward the societal structures we engage in as both individuals and church communities; these reflections are also oriented toward the religious leadership, as in the manner of the Old Testament prophets, and to the church itself. Is the church not provoked to its core by growing injustice? God's mission of *diakonia* has been confined to the walls of the church in the secular state, making the church as prophetic witness silent. Therefore, the mission today also entails addressing the church's role and mandate to speak out when necessary and to abstain from simply creating itself as an echo chamber.[12]

In conclusion, by composing a common prayer within a socio-political framework, this artistic project has attempted to articulate a political *diakonia* that enables the church to connect the practice within the church to the practice surrounding the church. The reflection is based in a Western secular societal context where the need to re-emphasize the mutual relationship between word and deed is pressing due to the tendency to push religion from the public sphere to the private. An argument for the church's mandate to enter and address socio-political structures and practices has been made on prophetic and political theological grounds that call the church to take upon itself its commitment as political and social actor in the world. The core of political *diakonia* is the action of speaking truth to power as a practical expression of the gospel.

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10. Kenneth Mtata, "Religion and Development: Friend or Foes?" in *Religion: Help or Hindrance to Development?* ed. Kenneth Mtata (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt GmbH, 2013), 26–28.

11. LWF, *Church in the Public Space*, 20.

12. LWF, *Diakonia in Context*, 83.

Ritual and Agriculture of the Indigenous Peoples of Sihaporas:

Eco-theology from the Experiences of the Indigenous Peoples of the Toba Batak, North Sumatra, Indonesia

Nurseli Manurung

Since the green revolution began in North Sumatra, traditional farming systems have completely changed to conventional farming systems.[1] The farmers have become dependent on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Furthermore, they depend on financiers or agents of fertilizers and seeds. People seem unable to start from scratch, restarting the traditional farming system using only labour capital and perseverance in connection with nature, the Creator, and their ancestors.

This paper explores one of the traditional agricultural systems in the Toba Batak that is not separated from their rituals, namely that of the Sihaporas Indigenous Peoples. The purpose of this paper is to rediscover the traditional agriculture system that illustrates the spirit of social spirituality, economic spirituality, and ecological spirituality possessed by Indigenous Peoples. Their rituals and agricultural traditions can inspire us in building relationships between humans and non-humans, and God.

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1. Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology, and Politics* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 98.

These traditions play an important role in promoting social, economic, and ecological justice, which contributes to building justice, peace, and integrity of creation.

The Sihaporas Indigenous Community had a traditional farming system in the pre-1990s era. Rituals are the important and integral part of their agricultural life. Unfortunately, these agricultural traditions have been abandoned since the emergence of crops whose main purpose is no longer the fulfilment of their daily food needs. The emergence of these crops was followed by the emergence of agricultural technology. Farmers are led to depend on agricultural technology that depends on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Land-grabbing by corporations has made these farmers go through a long journey of fighting to regain ancestral lands that have given them life for more than 200 years. As in many parts of the world, Indigenous Peoples in Sihaporas also have been experiencing discrimination, stigmatization, violence, intimidation, and criminalization from the state, corporations, and from society in general, as part of the impact of colonization and religious missions in Indonesia. That is what weakens their agriculture and their important role in protecting nature.

The Sihaporas Indigenous Peoples

In the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Articles 18B (2) and 28I (3), the state recognizes that it consists of a collection of Indigenous Peoples.[2] Indigenous Peoples are defined as groups of people who have a history of origin and have occupied customary territories for generations. Indigenous Peoples have sovereignty over land and natural resources, a socio-cultural life governed by customary *adat* that maintains the sustainability of Indigenous Communities. There are four elements of ancestral heritage or origin: namely, a common cultural identity, including the language of spirituality, values, and attitudes and behaviours that distinguish one social group from another; value and knowledge systems, including traditional knowledge which can be in the form of traditional medicine, traditional farming, traditional games, traditional schools, and other traditional innovations; customary territories (living space), including land, forests, seas, and other natural resources that are not solely seen as producing economic goods, but also involve religious and socio-cultural systems; and customary (*adat*) institutions, rules, and governing to organize and manage themselves as a social, cultural, economic, and political group.[3]

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2. *The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia*, 1989, trans. Department of Information, https://wipolex-res.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/id/id048en.html.

3. Nurdiyansah Dalidjo, "Mengenal Siapa Itu Masyarakat Adat," 30 August 2021, https://aman.or.id/news.

The Sihaporas Indigenous Peoples have been living in the land of Batak long before the arrival of colonists, the state, and industry. At first, the name of their community was referred to as *pinompar*, or descendants of Ompu Mamontang Laut Ambarita, their ancestor, to distinguish them from other communities in the Toba Batak land. They have now reached the 13th generation, totaling around 200 families for whom Sihaporas village has been their traditional territory for generations. As descendants of Ompu Mamontang Laut Ambarita, they are united by historical heritage, rituals, and land. The Sihaporas Indigenous People are one of the Toba Batak Indigenous Communities in Simalungun Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Most of them live in Sihaporas village, which consists of four hamlets: Sihaporas Aek Batu, Sihaporas Lumban Ambarita, Sihaporas Bolon, and Sihaporas Bayu. The rituals they do are in accordance with messages from their ancestor.

They have seven rituals inherited from their ancestors that are always performed together, which distinguishes them from other Toba Batak Indigenous Peoples. The rituals regulate the values system, attitudes, and behaviours that apply in their community. The seven rituals are also very closely related to their agriculture. From these rituals they have a system of values and traditional medicine, traditional farming, traditional games, and traditional schools. In the past, traditional schooling took place through their mutual involvement from the young to the old in the process of ritual preparation, ritual events, working together, and the narration of parents and the ancestors through the shamans.

In addition, their traditional territory is 2049 hectares of land consisting of forests, gardens, rivers, ponds, and villages. There they perform the rituals, find the ritual materials, meet God and their ancestors with whom they communicate through rituals, and farm to secure their livelihood.

They also have an *adat* institution. Previously, they referred to themselves as the descendants of Ompu Mamontang Laut Ambarita. Their governing is temporary for rituals, traditional events, such as marriage, and death rituals. In addition, they also live in the *Dalihan Natolu* (three furnace),[4] the relationship system of the Toba Batak people in general. In *Dalihan Natolu*, their positions can change according to the family relationship in which a person is located. Everyone will experience the three existing positions of *hulahula* (uncle), *boru* (daughter) and dongan *tubu* (brother/sister) one after another. After the emergence of the pulp and paper industry, the Inti Indorayon Utama Company (IIU), renamed the Toba Pulp Lestari Company (TPL) in the 1980s, destroyed their forests by converting

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4. Bungaran Antonius Simanjuntak, *Struktur Sosial dan Sistem Politik Batak Toba hingga 1945: Suatu Pendekatan Sejarah, Antropologi Budaya Politik* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2006), 99–107.

them to eucalyptus monoculture plantations for the pulp and paper industry. In 1998, the Toba Batak people named their community Palito Malam (*Panitia Pengembalian Tanah Milik Ompu Mamontang Laut Ambarita*, "Committee for the return of land belonging to Ompu Mamontang Laut Ambarita"), born out of the struggle for the return of ancestral land that was seized by the TPL. The governing bodies meet once every three years. It was composed of a chairman, secretary, and treasurer, but was not at first a legal entity. However, because some of them betrayed their struggle, in 2012 they changed their name to Lamtoras, which stands for *Lembaga Keturunan Ompu Mamontang Laut Ambarita Sihaporas*. Their new organization is a legal entity with a governing body consisting of a chairman, secretary, treasurer, reclaiming section, *partogi* section, and ritual section. With the Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara-AMAN (Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of Indonesia) in the Toba Batak providing support for their struggle for their ancestor land, Lamtoras also initiated the inclusion of Indigenous women and Indigenous youth into the Indonesian National AMAN organization.

They have *adat* law that are governed by their ritual traditions that still exist until now. There are seven rituals that they do together and rotate from village to village around Sihaporas, namely in their *Ruma Bolon* (big houses) in Sihaporas Lumban Ambarita and Sihaporas Aek Batu. In the rituals, there are rules and ritual procedures. There are also rules for farming, from clearing the forest and planting to harvesting and eating the harvest. Their lives have been peaceful, prosperous, cooperative, and helpful for more than 200 years. Unfortunately, everything has changed since the advent of industries that have replaced their natural forests with industrial plantations. They have lost the spirit of cooperation, the spirit of subsistence economy, and the spirit of agriculture that was 100 percent dependent on nature. Slowly their forests and then their farms have been destroyed by corporations.[5]

Rituals and Agriculture of the Indigenous Peoples of Sihaporas

For the Sihaporas Indigenous People, ritual is a message from their ancestors that must be carried out from generation to generation as a means of communicating with their descendants, with their ancestors, with God (Mulajadi Nabolon), their neighbours, and with nature. The four components are an inseparable unity in every ritual. Through the ritual they glorify Almighty Creator (Mulajadi Nabolon), honour the spirits of the ancestors, ask for protection, respect, and excuse the

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5. M. Ridha Saleh, *Ecocide: Politik Kejahatan Lingkungan dan Pelanggaran Hak Asasi Manusia* (WALHI: Jakarta, 2005) iii.

nature of the garden, request and thank the harvest in the fields, and ask to uphold the truth. In addition to accompanying and supporting them in their prayers and supplications to God, the ancestors deliver messages that protect them from disaster, and convey advice or warnings about events that may befall them because of their negligence in upholding the traditional rules that guard their lives.[6]

The Sihaporas Indigenous People have seven rituals. The first is *pattar pardebataan-Patarias Debata*. This ritual is to honour Mulajadi Nabolon and is a thanksgiving and request for God to bless them. The second, *raga raga na bolak parsilaonan*, is a ritual to the spirit of the ancestors (*sahala ni ompung*). The third, *habonaran*, is the ritual of planting *beringin* (banyan) trees and building a meeting place (*pajongjong partungkoan*) as a place of truth. The fourth, *pangulubalang parorot*, is a ritual to prevent war between villages. The fifth, *manjuluk*, is a ritual to start planting. The sixth, *manganjap*, is the ritual of *mangelek tondi ni eme dohot boraspati ni tano* or asking the spirit of rice and the spirit of fertility to provide a good harvest. The seventh, *mombang Boru Sipitu Sundut*, is a ritual to ask for a bountiful harvest and to ward off bad luck and disease. The fifth to seventh are the rituals directly related to agriculture.

The land and ritual traditions are the most important legacy bequeathed by their ancestor Ompu Mamontang Laut Ambarita, which he received from Mulajadi Nabolon when he meditated at Pusuk Buhit,[7] accompanied by the *sahala* (spirit) of Sisingamangaraja, Raja Uti, and Namboru Nantinjo. They had to protect the land whose boundaries were agreed upon by Ompu Mamontang Laut Ambarita and the surrounding people at that time,[8] which they later measured at 2049 hectares. The seven rituals of their ancestral message serve as a reminder to them of their land. It connects them as inseparable from the Creator, their ancestors, the land, their descendants, and their neighbours.

The land in the Sihaporas area is divided into several parts: forest, where the ritual of *manansang robu* is performed after the ritual *manganjab*; *juma*, a place to cultivate rice, chili, corn, cassava, sweet potatoes, and vegetables; and ponds, for fish. In the past, the forest was the main source for them to get materials for the rituals, building houses, and firewood, such as bamboo, rattan, and frankincense.

6. Oppu Moris Ambarita and Ama Meldita Ambarita (the ritual leader of Sihaporas Indigenous People, descendants of Ompu Mamontang Laut Ambarita), interviewed by Nurseli Manurung, 10 December 2022; Nai Meldita Sinaga, Boru Napitu, and Boru Gultom (the Indigenous women), interviewed by Nurseli Manurung, 15 December 2022.

7. Pusuk Buhit is a mountain in Samosir Island. The Indigenous Peoples believe that God created humans there.

8. Hengky Manalu, Roganda Simanjuntak, and Wilson Nainggolan, *Ritual Adat di Tengah Perampasan Ruang Hidup* (Medan: Pelana, 2021), 15–22.

Types of trees that are very strong for houses include *meranti* (shorea). There are also paddocks for buffalo, goats, and cattle.

Since the Sihaporas Indigenous Community forest was planted with eucalyptus monoculture by IIU/TPL, Sihaporas villagers have faced many problems. The presence of the pulp and paper fabric industry has destroyed their forests, social order, nature, agricultural system, drinking water, and their ritual and social relations system. Divisions have occurred between brothers and sisters. They are one of the hundreds of villages in the Toba Batak, in which 269,000 hectares of natural forests became industrial forests in 1992.[9]

In performing rituals, they now have to bear very high costs for their needs. The limited forest where the ritual ingredients grow means that people have to look for ritual ingredients, such as forest plants and clean water, from very far away. The remaining trees in the natural forest grow for only about five metres along the river, and some have even disappeared into the river. The little remaining forest is no longer able to supply drinking water for all 200 households in the village. Water quality is also very poor due to chemical fertilizers and pesticides from industrial plants that surround the valley. The drinking water that flows into the houses is polluted and sometimes murky in colour, especially when their land is newly planted with industrial seedlings and during the rainy season. The poor quality of the water causes a variety of health problems, such as shortness of breath and susceptibility to other diseases. Water discharge is so low that it is often unable to flow to homes.

In the past, the ponds on their land provided a variety of fish for their daily and ritual needs. These were Batak fish and such as a variety of the local fish, like: catfis and crab. Now, the ponds are no longer inhabited by various kinds of fish, especially for ritual needs. The ponds, which are more than 200 years old, are polluted. For ritual purposes, the people are forced to buy expensive Batak fish and *porapora* from faraway villages. It is hard to find some offerings for the ritual from the forest, such as a variety of plants and clean water. They have to search for it three kilometres away. Rituals that used to be performed in the forest, such as *manoto*, are no longer performed as in the past because they have lost much of their forest. Now they perform rituals only at home, in their gardens, and in small forest remnants. Rituals are endangered due to the destruction of forests, springs, forest plants, and fish ponds. Fortunately, they are still able to perform the seven rituals at once in the *patarias Debata* ritual, so the legacy of the ritual remains in their memory. But it is still imperfect because the forest and its nature have been destroyed.

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9. Admin KSPPM, Indorayon-Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL) Sumber Bencana bagi Masyarakat Kitaran Kaldera Toba, 6 August 2021.

They used to farm on the move with the availability of 2049 hectares of land and forest. Before the agricultural industry entered the land of Batak in around 1990, the Sihaporas Indigenous People lived with a system of shifting cultivation, moving from one place to another around the Sihaporas forest. They usually cleared ten hectares of forest. Then they divided it according to the number of families in the village. They worked on it individually and together (*marsiadapari*), for clearing and burning, planting, weeding, and harvesting. Before clearing the forest to become agricultural fields, they always perform the *manoto* ritual. This ritual is performed together by all descendants. Then they proceed with *mangima*s, which is clearing. Usually, they complete clearing ten hectares in about two months. They divide it into one hectare per family. The wood cut down on the land is brought to the village to be used as firewood. The rest is left to dry and then burned to make the soil ripe and ready for planting. Once dry, they hoe the land without ploughing. Then they cut a hole in the ground (*mangordang*) to plant rice and chili. They plant rice between chilies and corn, two to three metres apart. They also plant cassava at the edge of the field. Before the rice harvest, they harvest the chili and corn—so during *mamuro* (protecting from birds) they can sit around and enjoy corn. They don't need much time and energy to weed the rice and corn plants, as there are not many weeds. As fertilizer, they simply take humus and leaves from the forest for their gardens, without using chemical fertilizers or pesticides. Soil fertility, food availability, and the habit of living together are maintained and sustainable. They farmed only one to two crops a year in one place. Then they returned to that place ten years later. In ten years, they could work in many places one after another, because their forests were still vast.

The agriculture in Sihaporas has changed. After the advent of ginger farming, which was thought to increase agricultural production, they changed their farming system. They still maintained the ownership system as traditional land, an ancestral heritage. They generally planted ginger and chili peppers. After that, they planted rice and then corn. The results they got were very good. In later years, for compost, they used chicken droppings that came from traders from cities such as Lubuk Pakam, Tebing Tinggi, and Pematang Siantar in North Sumatra. Since the advent of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, they no longer use the traditional shifting cultivation system or compost.

Now they can only farm on about 500 hectares of land. Meanwhile, the company's eucalyptus plants cover around 1500 hectares. Even then, the plants in the community gardens around the industrial plants become arid and unable to produce. They now rely heavily on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which are very expensive. To obtain them, they generally go into debt first to fertilizer agents. Then they have to sell their crops back to the fertilizer dealer. An additional source

of income for them is collecting pine tree sap from their remaining forests. However, the pine trees, which are not native to the forest, also disrupt their ecosystem.

Going back to the old farming system now is not possible for them, as the forests that provided humus and leaves have been replaced by monoculture crops that birds don't like to nest in because they are often sprayed with chemicals. Although they still garden in a shifting cultivation system because they believe that land can only be planted once or twice and then should be left to grow wild plants to restore soil quality, they have no choice but to use chemical fertilizers or compost from industries, all of which are bought. They have no materials for making compost because there is very little forest and so there are no more leaves available. Many parents struggle to pay for their children's schooling up to the university level in the hope that they will be able to find jobs in the city, because they think that villages and farming can no longer provide a future. According to them, it takes a lot of capital to farm, while the results are very small. They are even in debt, "digging holes to cover holes" every month or year, which greatly disturbs their peace of mind and sleep. The destruction of the community's land and farms by industry has impoverished the community in every way.[10]

The demands of education force children from Sihaporas Indigenous villages to the city to continue their junior high school education to university. They are increasingly distant from nature, rituals, ancestors, and Mulajadi Nabolon. Instead, they are more influenced by modernization and technology. As a result, Sihaporas Indigenous Peoples are losing young people who understand rituals and their meaning. They are losing young people who should be able to play the Batak music (gondang), which can connect them with their ancestors and Mulajadi Nabolon, who accompany them throughout their lives. Some of them have rejected the rituals and beliefs because of new churches, such as charismatic churches. They are also losing their connection to the land, nature, agriculture, rituals, and traditional laws in their villages, so many of them are not fighting for their ancestral lands.

Eco-theology from Indigenous Peoples

For Indigenous Peoples, ecological theology is a theology of life. For the Sihaporas Indigenous People, there is an inseparable unity of everything that lives. All lives depend on one another. Humans, in particular, depend on nature for food and water, the Creator as the giver of life, and spirits of ancestors as friends who guide and guard. Nature or non-humans are not considered inferior to humans. They

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10. Vandana Shiva, "The Impoverishment Environment: Women and Children Last," Chapter 5, in *Ecofeminism*, by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2014), 70–88.

respect nature as they respect the spirits of all the living, such as the spirit of earth or soil, the spirit of water, the spirit of wind, and the spirit of their ancestors. Mula-jadi Nabolon is the creator of everything. The spirits who are called in the rituals are as friends, advising, guiding, and directing them to respect their fellow humans and nature. Non-humans (namely land, forests, plants, ponds) humans, the Creator, and the spirits of the ancestors are connected. Their image of God is one of mutually shared responsibility, reciprocity, and love.[11]

Rituals are the medium of communication between humans and the Creator, ancestors, and the universe. Through rituals and the presence of the spirits of the ancestors, they gain knowledge of traditional laws that organize their lives so that they can avoid danger, chaos, and crime. Through rituals they are reminded to always be humble, honest, not to lie, and not to be envious or spiteful. Ritual tradition and land—in this case, forests, and agriculture—are two inseparable entities for Indigenous Peoples in eco-theology. God is present in all creation, both visible and invisible, in body and spirit.

Eco-theology is only possible when humans have relation with non-humans. Conversely, the more we live apart from land, forests, and agriculture, the more we will lose our social spirituality, economic spirituality, and ecological spirituality. We should understand that the Toba Batak ecology problems is not only a local problem, because we live in the one earth or house, in one body, the earth as the body of God. The more we destroy our cosmos, the more we biocide, ecocide, geocide the next generations of humans and non-humans in the world by the murder of nature. In other words, to care cosmology of the Indigenous People means to care eco-theology. The church should support the cosmology and eco-theology of the Indigenous Peoples, fighting together for ancestral lands of the Toba Batak. In addition, the church should stand firm against companies that destroy the environment. It should encourage the government to protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and ancestral lands.

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11. Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 19.

Chapter 21

Creation Justice:
Addressing the Ecological Woes
of Our Dying World

Peculiar Umesi

> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the
> earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over
> every living creature that moves on the ground."
> —Genesis 1:28 (NIV)

> The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and
> take care of it.
> —Genesis 2:15 (NIV)

Creation justice is a refreshing and compelling concept that captures the power
and essence of Christian ministry today, especially when considered in light of
Genesis 2:15—which sheds more light on Genesis 1:28—and Genesis 9:15—
which reminds us that God's covenant is for all creation and not humanity alone.
These scriptures are fundamental in discourses on environmental activism. But
before we take a deep dive into the interconnectedness of the natural and human
world and the dominion (or work-care) mandate expressed in the scriptures above,
one may wish to have a clearer understanding of the concept of creation justice.

The question that comes to mind is, why *creation justice* instead of *eco-justice*
or *environmental justice*? A straightforward answer would have been simply word

preference, but there is more to it than that. This is not about the choice of words but against a narrow definition of the term *environment,* as referring to natural outdoor landscapes full of undomesticated plants and animals. Some contend that *environment* reinforces false opposites, in which the natural world and the human world are seen as two separate spheres. Others argue that how one defines the term is often shaped by experiences related to one's race, class, and geographical location.[1] Be that as it may, these divergent opinions reveal that environmental activism is characterized by subconscious biases. In the words of Dorceta Taylor, a professor at the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment, "White people bring their experience to the discussion—that's why they focus on the birds, trees, plants, and animals because they don't have the experience of being barred from parks and beaches." Therefore, while some assert that there is too much focus on a narrowly conceived natural environment and not enough on the social-justice impacts of environmental degradation, others feel there is too much focus on humans in general. These two views do not need to be considered opposites. Notably, in his encyclical on climate change, Pope Francis connected climate change to economic inequality, while also criticizing modern anthropocentrism that views "nature" as an object to be exploited for human ends.[2] The view expressed in the papal encyclical reflects a historic and evolving current that regards environmental consciousness and social justice as intimately intertwined.

Environment Pollution: A Global Menace

Due to human activity, life on earth is in serious danger of extermination. Since the dawn of modernity, human beings have sequentially polluted, degraded, and destroyed the very environment which sustains our lives and those of other living organisms. Not only have they succeeded in making the environment hostile to life, they have turned it into a breeding ground for disease and sickness. For instance, the air is polluted. For scientists, the entire atmosphere is engulfed in a nebulous mass of pollution formed by tons of poisonous substances and gasses

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1. Shantha Ready Alonso and Brooks Berndt, "What Is Creation Justice and Why Does It Rock?" United Church of Christ, n.d., accessed 20 August 2022, https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice -local-church-ministries/justice/faithful-action-ministries/environmental-justice/what-is-creation -justice-and-why-does-it-rock.

2.Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, "Encyclical letter on care for our common home," 24 May 2015, https:// www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica -laudato-si.html.

emitted from garbage and abattoir dumps, vehicles, and industries, and from agricultural as well as household use of pesticides, insecticides, and herbicides. There exists a heavy stock of atomic radiation in the atomic and nuclear power plants all over the world, which will survive all future generations, and which needs only human mistake or viciousness to be turned into a ready weapon for mass destruction. As if this is not threatening enough, there have been periodic and accidental releases of toxic waste from nuclear plants into the atmosphere; these in turn have combined with the other dangerous emissions mentioned above to attack the ozone layer—that part of the atmosphere that filters the ultraviolet rays from the sun and protects humans from dangerous radiation. The danger of the greenhouse effect is all too evident today. As humans breathe in polluted air and are, unbeknownst to themselves, exposed to deadly ultraviolet rays, they contract respiratory diseases, eye irritation, skin cancer, and other airborne diseases.[3]

There is as well an increase in water pollution nowadays. Tons of contaminants from industries, pesticides, herbicides, and nitrates from modern farming leach into ground water, streams, and rivers on a daily and hourly basis. Massive use of septic tanks also contributes to the contamination of groundwater and boreholes in residential areas. Drinking water reserves are continually being polluted, not just through senseless pouring out of petroleum products in mechanics' workshops, but also through reckless spillage in oil-producing areas. As water pollution increases in our time, cases of waterborne diseases like cholera, diarrhoea, dysentery, and typhoid multiply. Worse still, water pollution seriously affects aquatic life.

The Interconnectedness of Nature and Humans

Environment is a collective term embracing all the conditions in which an organism lives. It is the combination of all external influences and conditions affecting the life, development, and ultimately the survival of organisms, including humankind.[4] This interconnectedness is best captured by the word *ecosystem*. The natural world and the human world are connected by an intricate web of relationships and their interdependence is what sustains the ecosystem. Michael Roberts, the former head of the Biology Department at Marlborough College, Wiltshire, England, defined an ecological system (ecosystem) as "a natural unit composed of living and

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3. Greg Amuluche Nnamani, "Ethics of the Environment," in *AKpim of Morality Ethics: General, Special and Professional,* ed. Pantaleon Iroegbu and Anthony Echekwube, Nigeria: Heineman Educational Books, 2005), 391-92.

4. R. W. Burchell and D. Listokin, *The Environmental Impact Handbook* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 1975), 196.

non-living components whose interactions result in a stable, self-perpetuating system."[5] Roberts' definition of the ecosystem is brief and comprehensive. It would have been a perfect definition, as he carefully underscored stability and self-perpetuation, but for its unqualified absolutism. The shortfall of this definition is the unequivocal statement that interactions of the components of an ecological system result in a stable, self-perpetuating system. This is not correct, because if it were, we would not be talking about climate change and its mitigation today. Anthropogenic activities have shifted the balance. A redefinition should capture the actual state of the interactions between the natural world and the human world, summed up in the word *degradation*. This shows the need to advocate for creation justice.

"Advocacy is an activity by an individual or group that aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social institutions. It includes activities and publications to influence public policy, laws, and budgets by using facts, their relationships, the media, and messaging to educate government officials and the public. Advocacy can include many activities that a person or organization undertakes, including media campaigns, public speaking, commissioning, and publishing research." Cohen, de la Vega, and Watson stated that this definition does not encompass the notions of power relations, people's participation, and a vision of a just society as promoted by social justice advocates. For them, advocacy represents the series of actions taken and issues highlighted to change the "what is" into a "what should be," considering that this "what should be" is more decent and just.[6]

"What is"

"What is" in the global ecological system is characterized by consumerism, decadence, degradation, and exploitation. Boutros Boutros Ghali, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, told the world at the Earth Summit of 1992 that "we are under house arrest . . . the time of the finite world has come," and "progress is no longer—necessarily—compatible with life."[7] In his book *Earth Community Earth Ethics*, Larry L. Rasmussen observed that when the Secretary-General made these statements, "not a soul shouted him down, called for his resignation, or tried to book him for heresy. Neither did anyone venture to say how we secure a modicum

5. M. B. V. Roberts, *Biology: A Functional Approach* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson, 1975), 521.

6. David Cohen, Rosa De la Vega, and Gabrielle Watson, *Advocacy for Social Justice: A Global Action and Reflection Guide* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2001), n.p.

7. Boutros Boutros Ghali, quoted in Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *Redeeming the Creation: The Rio Earth Summit—Challenge for the Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992), 7.

of peace and justice if progress and life are compatible."[8] This clearly indicates that as humans, we have lost our moorings and are unsure of what "behoves us."[9] The relationship of the human world to the rest of the earth changed fundamentally and dramatically from the onset of the 20th century to its close. Techno-economic power sufficient to destroy the material condition of humans and other life is the hallmark of that change, together with the explosion of both population and consumption. The expectation is that somewhere around 2030, the global population will stabilize at about ten billion people, five times the number living in 1950.[10] When the century began, neither human technology nor human beings were powerful enough to alter planetary life systems, or at least had not done so. Hawken, quoting the words of the 20th-century US poet E. E. Cummings (1894–1962), states that "the world of the born" was not yet on a collision course with "the world of the made." Nor was it the case "that every natural system on the planet [was] disintegrating."[11] Or at least the rate and extent did not register. Soil erosion was not exceeding soil formation at the onset of the 20th century (or the problem was unnoticed). Species extinction was not exceeding species evolution. Carbon emission was not exceeding carbon sequestration. Fish catches were not exceeding fish reproduction. Forest destruction was not exceeding forest regeneration. Fresh water use was not exceeding aquifer replenishment.[12] Half of the world's coastlines, the most densely populated human areas, of which Nigeria is one, were not imperilled. An ominous word thus appeared at the century's close: *unsustainability*.

"What should be"

According to Odum, "This complex structure, the ecosystem, is artfully combined to be a web which should be stable, self-sustaining, and self-perpetuating. The natural world and the human world are inseparable, interrelated, and interact with and upon each other."[13] According to Ernst Haeckel, "ecology is the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature—the investigation of the total relations of the animal both to its inorganic and to its organic environment, including, above all, its friendly and inimical relations with those animals and plants

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8. Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 93.

9. Adrienne Rich, *An Atlas of the Difficult World: Poems 1988–1991* (New York: Norton, 1992), 23.

10. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Random House, 1994), 9.

11. Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce: A Declaration of Sustainability* (San Francisco: Harper Business, 1993), 22.

12. Lester R. Brown, Hal Kane, and David Malin Roodman, *Vital Signs 1994: The Trends That Are Shaping Our Future* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1994), n.p.

13. Eugene P. Odum, *Fundamentals of Ecology* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1971), 8.

with which it comes directly or indirectly into contact." [14]It means knowing from the inside the interrelated dynamics that make up the total life of the household and the requirements to live together. This is to respect creation's integrity and live in accord with it.[15] According to Rasmussen, "Integrity of creation is a strict adherence to moral values and principles; uprightness in humanity's dealings with creation." This posture recognizes and affirms the interdependence and intrinsic worth of all beings. It takes seriously the well-being of all creation individually and within healthy ecosystems and proposes a biblical sensibility. Therefore, the emphasis is on "what should be" and not "what is."

Work-Care Mandate

In his play *Uncle Vanya,* Russian playwright Anton Chekhov observed that "man has been endowed with reason, with the power to create, so that he can add to what he's been given. But up to now, he hasn't been a creator, only a destroyer."[16] Forests keep disappearing, rivers dry up, wildlife becomes extinct, the climate is ruined, and the land grows poorer and uglier every day. This is totally contrary to the mandate given to humans by the Creator: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." An exegesis of this verse follows.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden

Man (humankind) is not here of his own making and authority. The same omnipotent hand that made him still held him "and put him into the garden." The original word means "caused him to rest," or dwell in the garden as an abode of peace and recreation.[17] This state of peace and recreation cannot be separated from the intentions of God in putting man there. Therefore, it is necessary to consider these intentions. But before that, according to the testimony of Genesis 1:28, humans—through their progenitor Adam—were given the mandate to exercise dominion over the rest of creation. And the first action call was to name every living creature which God had made (Genesis 2:19).[18] This singular task automatically placed the responsibility of creation's welfare in the care of humanity.

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14. Charles C. Birch and John B. Cobb Jr, *The Liberation of Life* (Denton, TX: Environmental Ethics Books, 1990), 27.

15. Rasmussen, *Earth Community*, 93.

16. Anton Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya* (Moscow, 1897).

17. Albert Barnes, Barnes' Notes on the Bible, *Bahan Elektronik e-Sword* (2000)

18. John F. MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning: The Bible on Creation and Fall of Adam* (Nashville: W Publishing, 2001), 74.

To work and take care of it

Following this task of naming every living creature was the work-care mandate. This mandate called not for indolence, but for labour. "To work it" is to cultivate the soil and tend and prune the trees. "To take care of it" is to defend it from depredation by animals, or from the evils arising from unchecked luxuriance. This implies that, even if no unpropitious weather nor blight nor mildew spoiled the crop, it had to be guarded against the incursion of wild animals and birds, and protected even against the violence of winds and the burning heat of the sun.[19] In other words, he is given, from the first, his work to do: 1) to improve his surroundings; 2) to provide for the necessities of life; 3) to protect from waste or loss that which is committed to his care. This work will require physical effort and it will exercise his powers of observation and judgment; it will also furnish him with food for his body and thought for his mind.[20] Notice that the garden must be cared for: it is not a place of spontaneous perfection. Man in the garden is to work, to take the trouble, to practice forethought, to exercise solicitude and sympathy for the objects of his toil. "Paradise" is not a place for indolence and self-indulgence. Poole opines that this mandate demands man to keep the garden from the annoyance of beasts, which being unreasonable creatures might easily spoil its beauty. That is a "what should be" because "what is" is that man was kept in the garden to take care of it and to protect it from being destroyed by the beast of the field, but man rather turned to become the beast, destroying what he should have taken care of by not taking care of it as he should.[21] Hence, the environmental degradation such as we experience today. This is a violation of a trust committed to humankind by the Creator.

A Call for Action

A careful observation of Christianity and Judaism reveals that morality is one of their responsibilities as communities of faith in God. The general expectation of God from them can scarcely be separated from culture. This probably stems from the experience of God as one who generates community and one who is experienced in community. Therefore, morality's purpose is to aid in living "a life worthy of God who calls—a theocentric morality." On the other hand, a more extended

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19. Charles John Ellicott, ed., *An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers, by Various Writers*, vol. 1 (London: Cassell, Petter and Galpin, 1882), n.p.

20. Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*, np.

21. Poole, Matthew. *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* Vol 3: Matthew to Revelation (Macdonald Publishing, 1963).

look at Christian ethics in its origin reveals that it portrays in simple terms a "way of life."[22] Recall that the followers of Jesus were called "people of the Way" even before they were called Christians (Acts 9:2). From a theological perspective, environmental ethics and creation justice capture "the way of life" which can be extended to include the way humans are to relate to their environment. This is where the ethics and morality come in. This understanding fosters constructive human responses that serve environmental health and social equity and build just and sustainable community.[23]

Agbaeze highlighted some important elements of what he called an "ethic of solidarity."[24]

1. Christians should follow Christ's example by acknowledging the worth of creation as he did in expressing his profound love for the cosmos and in restoring earth's wholeness through his incarnation and his death on the cross of Calvary.

2. Robbing the earth's capital should be avoided. This is an act which is mostly perpetuated through humanity's consumption of resources faster than the earth can replace them and by exhausting non-renewable resources without concern for the needs of future generations.

3. There should be due acknowledgment of the connection between the environment and development. Hence, any suitable earth ethic will integrate strategies for economic development with those for ensuring ecological balance.

4. Adequate recognition should be given to humanity's responsibility to the "other," as expressed in the ecological covenant that God made with Noah and the jubilee law and lifestyle found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. This includes relationships such as those between human and humans, humankind and "other kind," and present and future generations.[25]

5. There should be an awareness that almost every other ethic is relative to its context—except for environmental ethics, which transcends local and national boundaries.

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22. Birch and Cobb, *Liberation of Life*, 27.

23. Dieter T. Hessel, *Ecumenical Christianity and the Earth Charter*. 27 April 2016. 3.

24. Agbaeze, Chijioke Elekwa. "Humans and Ecosystem in the Light of Genesis 2;15 (Implications for Environmental Degradation in Aba Metropolitan City)." Hugh Goldie Lay/Theological Institution, Arochukwu. 4 June 2016. An offline project.

25. Hessel, *Ecumenical Christianity,* 3.

6. There should be population stabilization, reduction of consumption, more renewable energy, and full cost accountings. This would be an integrated approach to maintaining earth's carrying capacity and contributing to the well-being of human communities.

7. Overcoming poverty and achieving economic equity is also necessary, especially considering that the majority of the injustices meted on the earth "subconsciously" are by those who may not afford alternative lifestyles.

At this juncture, it is relevant to observe that there are two broad categories of ecology worthy of careful and thorough study if we are to prevail over the uncertainty that is besetting the earth and its inhabitants: restorative ecology and conservation ecology. Restorative ecology is the scientific study of repairing disturbed ecosystems through human intervention. This would surely contribute greatly to regaining our lost moorings. Restorative ecology should be blended with conservation ecology, which focuses on assessing and preventing ongoing degradation. Restorative ecology seeks to actively reverse such degradation and conservation ecology prevents further perpetuations. While the former is curative, the latter is preventive. The shift of the ecological balance is so obvious now that it calls for serious attention, and until a conscious conservative-cum-restorative approach is taken, things may not change. Raven and Johnson recommend five components towards addressing these challenges: assessment, risk analysis, public education, public action, and follow-through.[26]

8. Assessment: The gathering of information, collection of data, and experimentation to construct a model that describes the situation. This model can be used to make predictions about the future course of events.

9. Risk analysis: Using the results of the assessment as a tool, analysis of what is expected to happen if a particular course of action is followed. Both the potential for resolution of the environmental problem and possible adverse effects are evaluated.

10. Public education: When a clear choice can be made among alternative courses of action, the public must be informed. This involves explaining the problem in terms the public can understand, presenting the available alternatives, and explaining the probable cost and result of the different choices. Environmental education is needed to alert people not only to

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26. Peter H. Raven and George B. Johnson, *Biology*. 6th Edition. (Columbus: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2001.)

the circumstances that threaten the planet, but also to make them aware of the mystery that underlies its very existence. A deepened understanding of creation justice and ecological issues should be encouraged.

11. Public action: The public, through its elected officials, selects the course of action and implements it. The government, through relevant educational bodies, should adopt environmental education in the school curricula. The government should also put measures in place to deter people from violating environmental standards indiscriminately; this could be through the formulation of a legal framework. Faith communities can model ways of conserving resources, as their commitment to a communal lifestyle gives a unique opportunity to lead the way in conservation and restoration. And there should be change in lifestyles on a daily basis: what Pope John Paul II called ecological conversion.[27] Contacts can be established with local environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and where possible, there should be more participation in their projects and campaigns. Note that choices are particularly difficult to implement when environmental challenges transcend national boundaries.

12. Follow-through: The results of any action should be carefully monitored to see whether the environmental problem is being solved, and to evaluate and improve the initial modelling of the problem. Every environmental intervention is an experiment, and we need the knowledge gained from each one to better address future problems. In order to encourage proper dissemination of information and to yield the desired feedback, people's otherness should be accommodated through local language translation and interpretation. This will enhance information flow.

This call for action places a huge responsibility on the shoulders of everyone, especially Christians. To be credible, an effective theology needs to be grounded in scientific knowledge about the immense and complex journey of the universe. Christ left his footprint after he left the earth for his followers to keep in step with. His concern—through his suffering, death, and resurrection—was for both humankind and "other kind." He left his imprint on all, for all to remember. All creation has integrity. Therefore, to purposely destroy any aspect of creation is to deface the image of Christ present in all creation: rivers, seas, forests, mountains, animals, humans, and every other part of the world. Worship is the act of showing reverence, honour, and respect for God. These occur when we are confronted by God's glorious and overwhelming power and presence. God reveals God-self through creation

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27. Pope John Paul II, "God Made Man the Steward of Creation," general audience, 17 January 2001.

and we respond in worship. Both the revelation and response are elements of worship. When creation is perceived as sacramental, leading us to God, our relationship with others is also challenged to move from one of dominance and power (dominion mandate) to one of reverence and respect (work-care mandate).

Conclusion

This work has acknowledged the predicament of the ecosystem in relation to humans. The characteristic dominant, consumerist, and exploitative ideology that has eaten deep into the subconscious minds of the inhabitants of the garden (Earth), especially Christians, has been to a great extent inspired by the dominion mandate (Genesis 1:28). The work-care mandate (Genesis 2:15) further explains the dominion mandate. It is necessary for human beings to consider the rightness and wrongness of their actions and make efforts to redeem the trust that has been violated. There is every need for us to have a moral system or set of principles relating—first and foremost—to their duty, and second, to justice in their execution of this duty. The relationship between humans and the ecosystem should be evaluated to forbid certain conduct that is unfair or unjust. Therefore, creation justice in this regard expresses a spiritually grounded and biblically informed moral posture of respect and fairness towards all creation, humans and nonhumans alike. In this view, all beings on earth make up one household (*oikos*), which benefits from an economy (*oikonomia*) and pattern of community life that takes ecological and social stewardship (*oikonomos*) seriously.[28]

As part of this prophetic current, the language of creation justice has emerged. The word *creation* evokes meanings that transcend artificial divides between "human" and "nature." *Creation* signals the truth of our interconnected reality. Using the term *justice* rather than *care* indicates our commitment not only to heal, tend, and restore God's creation, but to protect God's planet and God's people from exploitation, and to remediate the damage that has already been done.[29] With this understanding, lopsided engagements will best be addressed by assessing them from the perspective of the Creator God who oversees both the natural world and the human world. This discourse, then, considers creation justice in the light of the scriptures and from a Christian theologian's worldview.

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28. Hessel, "Ecumenical Christianity."

29. Alonso and Berndt, "What Is Creation Justice?"

Chapter 22

Taizé and "Third-Way" Ecumenism

Ross M. Allen

Today, ecumenical unity seems impossible to many. In a world that is fragmented and fragmenting, an assumed "us" that could be drawn together seems implausible, and the reasons for this seem evident. The utopian ambitions and universalizing claims of Western Christians that underwrote the earliest moments of the modern ecumenical movement have fallen short of the promised just and peaceful world. Added to that, continued geopolitical developments have made it harder to believe that a putative Christian faith does, in fact, promote mutual flourishing. One need look no further than Russia's war on Ukraine, Christian violence against Muslims in the Central African Republic, or the expansion of sometimes deadly Christian nationalism in the Americas (most notably the United States and Brazil) to find cause for this scepticism.

Yet, now more than ever, the collective challenges that human beings face push an "us" into existence by reference to common threats. Humanity is pressed to reach for "we" language because *we* are living in an environment that is being made inhospitable to human life, *we* again face the threat of global nuclear war, and *we* are poised to suffer from political instability and maladaptive economic regimes. The possibility of naming our mutual embeddedness is paramount: "we" has re-emerged as a stable concept based on the fact that *we* need each other to survive. If the world has been stripped bare of all value but human will, how do we learn to take responsibility for one another? How do we come to recognize what

is already true about our interdependence as and with living things? If the wisdom traditions are to be believed, the way forward is something like prayer. Practices of ritual formation and transformation have the capacity to shape agents who recognize goodness in each other and in the world. They do so not as technologies of propaganda or pacification, but because they lay claim to a source of value that lies beyond human economies of power.

This is not a new set of claims or aims, and it has been recognized by many in the ecumenical movement for at least a generation. Nevertheless, as has been widely recognized, the ecumenical movement exists in a state of decline and concomitant fracture and has, in many respects, struggled to connect prayer to solidarity. This divide has been acknowledged by the World Council of Churches (WCC) for nearly 40 years. A succinct statement of this challenge was posed in the body's official 1983 report which said:

> For some, the search for a unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship seems, at best secondary, at worst irrelevant to the struggles for peace, justice, and human dignity; for others, the Church's political involvement against the evils of history seems, at best, secondary, at worst detrimental to its role as eucharistic community and witness to the Gospel.[1]

To frame the situation with an admittedly reductive heuristic, then, the field of ecumenists has for some time been split between those who are interested in liturgical reform and institutional cooperation among churches primarily out of a desire to advance social justice aims and those who are interested in social justice cooperation primarily out of a desire to advance the aims of their respective ecclesiastical institutions. We might call the first group *life and work ecumenists* and the latter *faith and order ecumenists*.

The central claim I pursue in this paper is that there is a third-way style of ecumenism. Considering the Taizé community of France, at least provisionally, as an example of this third way, I explore here how Taizé might be recognized as a site of spiritual communion, out of which flows expressions of both the visible and sacramental unity that is the goal of the first mode of ecumenism and the justice-oriented witness that is the goal of the second. After setting the backdrop with a brief assessment of the contemporary state of (primarily American) institutional ecumenism, and briefly clarifying a few methodological considerations, I will present a practical theological assessment of the community at Taizé in four stages. In

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1. David Gill, ed., *Gathered for Life: Official Report of the 6th Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1983), 49, 58.

doing so, I draw on the practical theological methodology developed by theologian Richard Osmer.

In the process of doing this, I hope to highlight three salient insights about the kind of ecumenism that is practised at Taizé. First, it begins from an appeal to a shared experience of inner life rather than emphasizing shared ideology. Second, it mobilizes from this to justice-building rooted in spiritual and material solidarity. Third, it insists on communion and refuses impulses toward assimilation in its engagements with difference.

While I will maintain that there are lessons from Taizé that are of significance to all Christians, in the interest of not replicating the historical tendency of white Western European and North American confessional communities to treat their perspective as normatively Christian, I will make explicit here that my desired intervention in this essay is primarily aimed at historically white churches in the United States and secondarily in Western Europe and Canada. While I acknowledge ways in which Taizé must continue to grow into the vision that it professes, in the end, I hope to also demonstrate how this monastic community exists as a "parable of communion" from which the Western European/North American ecumenical movement might learn. This is meant neither to pretend a blithe optimism about the future of this movement nor to promote the Taizé model as prescriptive. In the end, rather, I hope to make a broadly theological argument that this movement might look to the community of Taizé as an icon pointing to a future, as yet impossible ecumenism which may yet be imagined into being.

Third-Way Ecumenism

Theologian and ecumenist Michael Kinnamon served as the executive secretary of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission and general secretary of the US National Council of Churches (NCC). As Kinnamon argues, neither a progressive political agenda on the one hand, nor doctrinal agreement on the other, meets the full measure of Christian faithfulness to the gospel in and of itself. A third way is needed: unity and justice must go together. He writes, "The search for unity can bolster ingrained forms of domination unless intentionally coupled with a commitment to just relationships." Quoting feminist theologian Letty Russell, he continues, "the authenticity of any [Christian] unity proposal is whether it contributes to the wholeness and well-being of marginalized people." Unity that reiterates oppression is not Christian, he says, and "the justice we seek is not merely the co-existence of separated communities . . . a united church should be a witness for justice . . . through the way its diverse members live with one another." Kinnamon gestures toward a third way which is distinct from either end of that binary and

challenges the implication that they need to be framed as mutually exclusive, alternatively terming it "costly unity" and "unity in tension."[2]

A third-way ecumenism is difficult to conceive of in the abstract. Thus, the questions which follow will focus on the concrete: What would a community that embodies a third way of ecumenical partnership look like? Which of the contemporary challenges to ecumenism might it overcome and how? What insights might it offer to the broader community of those who are still invested in the joint pursuit of faith grounded in justice-building and inter-confessional Christian fellowship? To address these questions, I will now turn to one such example of faith as it is found at the Taizé monastic community in the Saône-et-Loire region of Burgundy in France.

Methodological Considerations: Practical Theology

Before proceeding further, it is important to note that the present work is concerned with the task of practical theology, understood as the academic study of lived religious practice and the use of that study for reflection on more theoretical theological claims toward the end of aligning theory and practice. As Richard Osmer usefully summarizes, "Practical theology carries out four mutually related intellectual operations: the descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic."[3] In other words, it begins by describing the specific situation "on the ground" in as much detail as possible before moving to reflection on those observations. These two phases can roughly be thought of as describing the "what" and the "why" of the practices under consideration. It then moves on to the task of what *should* be happening in those situations, with reference to either the internal standards of a relevant tradition or some other moral claim. Finally, it draws together the insights from the previous three stages and generates observations and new questions that are directed toward an active response on the part of the community in question or some other reflective party. "This," he continues, "distinguishes practical theology from other forms of theology and from the social sciences, even as it overlaps these fields in certain ways."[4]

Accordingly, this paper proceeds in sections that roughly track with the four phases of practical theology. It begins with a brief descriptive-empirical section

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2. Michael Kinnamon, *Can a Renewal Movement Be Renewed? Questions for the Future of Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 59.

3. Richard Osmer, quoted by Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "Systematic Theology," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 363.

4. Osmer, quoted by McClintock Fulkerson, "Systematic Theology," 363.

where I undertake a thick description of the permeable community that is centred around and extends from the monastic fraternity near Taizé.[5] As will be seen, the community at Taizé has become an important site of pilgrimage for contemporary European youth. The subjects under consideration (brothers, pilgrims, etc.) in this description identify with the community to varying extents and are physically present on the community's campus for different durations. I situate these current observations alongside historical context.[6] Next, I interpret and assess these empirical observations using something like the practical/systematic methodology of theology as articulated by theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson.[7] I draw on sources from theology and the social sciences to attempt a holistic interpretation and assessment of the lived theology of the community. I also reflect on the ways in which Taizé succeeds at embodying the third-way ecumenism envisaged by Kinnamon in dialogue with the aforementioned sources. Finally, I close this paper with a consideration of how Taizé might resonate with those aiming to be part of a future ecumenism and what insights it might offer in that endeavour.

Background and participant observations

Taizé is a Christian monastic fraternity founded in 1940 by Brother Roger Schütz, a French Reformed Protestant layman, as a haven for Jews fleeing Nazi persecution and displaced war refugees on the border between Vichy France and the Nazi-occupied zone in east central France. From the beginning, Brother Roger hoped the community would serve as a "parable of communion—not just spiritual communion, but material communion as well," as he wrote in an early letter. Thus, an early and durable slogan for the community emerged: "Inner life and solidarity." Taizé has aptly remained noteworthy for its commitment to spiritual ecumenism, reconciliation between persons who see themselves as geopolitically divided, and justice-building work.

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5. The sense in which I undertake a thick description is influenced by anthropologist Clifford Geertz in that it explicitly embraces the constructed nature of observation. Including a narrative texture more than a "factual" account, a thick description embraces the layering of context and affective response for and between the actors being described. It aims at understanding the meaning of events for the people involved in them. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

6. In doing this descriptive work, I will draw on participatory research I undertook during a field visit to the community during the summer of 2021, as well as descriptions by other researchers.

7. In advancing the concept of theology, McClintock Fulkerson advocates for a move "beyond that characteristic of separate historical, biblical, and theological divisions that allow theology to be 'impractical' theory." What this amounts to, she says, is a method whereby one is able "to read situations rather than texts . . . to discern the theonomy, or God-sustained character of a situation, and to respond faithfully." McClintock Fulkerson, "Systematic Theology," 360–63.

Over the years, the brothers have been involved in a variety of projects that include material communion. Early on, they established a regenerative agricultural farm and taught regenerative farming practices to local farmers. In the 1950s, they sent a delegation of brothers to live as "signs of Christ's presence" by taking jobs as coal miners in a mining village 25 miles from Taizé. These brothers went on to organize with a local union to help win better working conditions and remuneration for the miners. Similar efforts have been undertaken by the brothers in Calcutta, the Philippines, Algeria, Brazil, and New York City.[8]

Like other monastics, the brothers take vows of celibacy, poverty, and community. At least two things make them unique, however. First, although the 100 current members of the religious order hail from more than 30 countries around the world and represent a variety of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox traditions, they all share a common eucharistic fellowship. Second, since its founding, Taizé has become an important site of pilgrimage, particularly for the approximately 100,000 mostly secular European youth who travel there every year, mostly aged 17 to 29. The community creates belonging by an appeal to a shared, yet personal experience of inner life via contemplative practice rather than to a shared doctrinal or political commitment. The community then builds from this shared pilgrimage and prayer experience toward justice-building rooted in spiritual and material solidarity.[9]

This is accomplished partially by having these young people embrace a season of simple living, ranging anywhere from a week to a year, doing everything from cleaning toilets together and sharing simple meals to praying simple chant-like songs in large groups. Another part is accomplished by explicitly mobilizing these same young people to live in solidarity with the poor and marginalized as they return home. The community thus undertakes political engagement around issues like environmental protection, labour rights, and fair trade. All of this is possible because the community takes a receptive posture of communion rather than assimilation with respect to human difference. That is to say, Taizé maintains liminal spaces where a common life can be acknowledged amidst persistent difference.

This celebration of common life amidst persistent difference translates into the sacramental life of the community as well. The eucharist is celebrated regularly

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8. Gottfried Hammann, "Did Brother Roger Have a Theology?" in *Brother Roger's Contribution to Theological Thought: Acts of the International Colloquium* (Taizé: Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 2015), 15.

9. "About Taizé: The Community Today," Taizé, version of 8 March 2008, https://www.taize.fr/en_article6525.html.

for Catholic pilgrims by one of the ordained Catholic brothers, and for Orthodox pilgrims by an ordained Orthodox brother in a grotto a few metres from the campus's main church. Ecumenical eucharistic services also take place, during which an ordained Catholic brother offers the host to Catholic pilgrims, an ordained Protestant brother blesses bread and wine for communion by intinction for any other baptized Christian who wishes to partake, and an ordained Orthodox brother offers blessed bread to anyone who would like it. Interestingly, all the brothers receive Catholic communion.[10] As researcher Fokke Wouda notes, "Although a formal dispensation is absent, informally this practice has the approval of the local Bishop, ever since mgr. Armand Le Bourgeois, the then Bishop of Autun, gave communion first to brother Roger and later to all members of the community."[11]

Theological interpretation

In 1997, Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément, who had a longstanding relationship with Taizé, wrote a theological account of the community, which was endorsed by Brother Roger prior to his death and has been kept in print by the brothers' publishing house to this day. Regarded as a more or less official account of the community's theology, it is titled *Taizé: A Meaning to Life*.[12] The text is a collection of essays, many of which were written to be delivered as workshops for pilgrims at the community. While he does not name them as such, there are three observations about the kind of ecumenism that is at work in the Taizé community. These can be drawn together from the different strands that he lays out in the collected essays.

First, Taizé advocates for belonging by an appeal to a shared yet personal experience of inner life via contemplative practice, rather than to shared doctrinal or political commitment. Second, it moves from this shared experience toward justice-building rooted in spiritual and material solidarity. Third, it takes a receptive posture of communion, rather than a posture of assimilation with respect to human difference and cultural forces of secularity: that is to say, it maintains liminal spaces where a common life can be maintained amidst persistent difference.

10. Jean-Marie Guenois, "Interview with Brother Alois: Something That Was Without Precedent," Taizé, version of 12 April 2008, http://www.taize.fr/en_article6739.html.

11. Fokke Wouda, "Communion in Taizé: Theological Interpretation of a Eucharistic Practice in an Ecumenical Context" (MA thesis, Tilburg University School of Catholic Theology, 2014), 22, https://www.academia.edu/10796186/Communion_in_Taiz%C3%A9._Theological_interpretation_of_a_Eucharistic_practice_in_an_ecumenical_context.

12. Olivier Clément, *Taizé: A Meaning to Life* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 1997).

Inner Life: Contemplation in Community

Clément views contemplative prayer as the centre of the pilgrim's experience of life at Taizé. "Some young people," he writes, "who know almost nothing of mystery, are introduced to it here, and they begin to learn how to pray." He takes this to be a deeply personal and transformative experience, writing that "it opens them onto the 'heart' which is the centre of our life." He makes explicit here that when he is thinking of prayer, he means the community's "formula of calming repetition," which he likens to the chant-like forms of the Eastern Orthodox Jesus Prayer or the Roman Catholic Rosary. In it, he believes, one finds "the place where the whole person opens up and goes beyond itself. . . . Humanity discovers itself there." For that reason, while insisting on the deeply personal nature of the prayer practice at Taizé, Clément does not also take it to involve isolation of the self from the community. "It is not used only in personal prayer," he says, "but also in prayer together or common prayer time. . . . [Those praying] sing a song as prayer, and take it up, everyone in their own language," and with it "comes . . . a sort of collective inner peace."[13]

He notes a similar effect in the "silence that is inhabited" and contributes "to the discovery and development of an inner life." Amidst a continually noisy world, taken up with busyness and a constant straining for accomplishment, at Taizé, pilgrims learn to rest in a silence where they encounter God. "There are times of silence during the prayers at Taizé," he writes, wherein "the silence becomes prayer, and in that prayerful silence, the deep forces that exist in everyone, but which are normally dormant, begin to wake up."[14] In this, he says, everyday experiences of beauty in the world, "in a work of art, while playing the guitar one evening, or in the coming to birth of love" all can be seen as manifestations of God in the world. Those who come to Taizé, "discover that these experiences are not isolated or dislocated or meaningless, but that they are rooted in depth."[15] "In this way," he says, "it becomes possible for them to live out a deep spiritual experience."[16] "People are welcomed as they are, without being judged; no one is asked for their doctrinal passport; but nevertheless no secret is made of the fact that everyone is gathered around Christ, and that with him . . . a way forward begins for those who want it."[17]

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13. Clément, *Taizé,* 52.

14. Clément, *Taizé,* 53.

15. Clément, *Taizé,* 54.

16. Clément, *Taizé,* 53.

17. Clément, *Taizé,* 12.

Toward justice-building responsibility

Lest this be misunderstood as a quietist removal from the world, Clément insists that prayer "is not a diversion; it is not a sort of drug for Sunday morning" and that "the kind of Christianity we should be aiming at" is one centred in "inner life and human solidarity." He takes the two to be intertwined and insists that "the more someone becomes a person of prayer, the more they become a person who is responsible [for] the tasks of this world." His sense of responsibility here has over-tones of Levinas' ethics: he has in mind a direct sense of accountability to an other to which the prayerful person is called. "Prayer," he continues, "involves us in the mystery of the Father, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, around a Face that reveals every other face for us, and which in the end makes us servants of every human face." Articulated thus in terms of a trinitarian *perichoresis* that takes up the one praying in the process of contemplation and demands from them an active response, Clément takes a movement from prayer to justice building to be necessary. "Prayer does not set us free from the tasks of this world," he writes, "it makes us even more responsible. In fact, nothing shows more responsibility than to pray." This responsibility, he continues, "takes the concrete form of being present with those who are suffering from being abandoned by others, or from poverty."[18]

Clément seems uncommitted in terms of the specific political implications of this responsibility, although he cites with restrained approval the Marxist influence on liberation theologies of the global South, recognizing that "contemporary Christianity has been strongly influenced by a type of Marxist thought," and that this has proven "extremely useful in the Third World [sic]."[19] At the same time, he advocates explicitly for (and takes Taizé to be representative of) a kind of Christianity which he calls "post-ideological."[20] The distinction that seems to be crucial for him in this regard is that political involvement in the world is not, in and of itself, the primary objective of Christian faithfulness but that it flows necessarily from the primary objective, which is unity with Christ. With reference to the founding of the community, Clément takes this idea to be paradigmatically evident in the kind of ecumenism practised at Taizé. "In the face of [the Holocaust's] horror and death," he writes, "it was not possible for [Christians] to lie to themselves anymore." Thus, "Taizé was founded in the same spirit as the ecumenism of the prison camps: an ecumenism put into practice as mutual service and as a hope that could not be separated from prayer and love."[21]

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18. Clément, *Taizé,* 46.

19. Clément, *Taizé,* 44.

20. Clément, *Taizé,* 12.

21. Clément, *Taizé,* 11.

Pursuing communion, not assimilation

Clément addresses an anxiety that exists in the contemporary world, an atomizing reaction to globalization in which people have become "more and more compartmentalized and homogenized by collective hatreds." Up against the homogenizing influence of modernity, "each person or group becomes somewhat afraid when faced by [a] unification which seems to be about to drown everything in the same technological greyness." In reaction, people feel pressure to "strongly assert their own identity; and in general, they assert it in opposition to other people." Against this cultural tide, "young people at Taizé enter into an experience of unity in diversity, and that answers once again to their deepest needs."[22] They are attracted to the community because "while the sense of the universal is there, at the same time the identity of each person is preserved. Nobody," he writes, "is asked to renounce their nationality or church; on the contrary, by these differences people are expected to enrich each other and learn to accept each other, and so young Christians are able to experience unity in diversity."[23] This commitment to a communion that does not require or desire assimilation stems from a Christological commitment. For the community of Taizé, Christ "is the reality at the same time of the most complete unity and of the most complete distinction. . . . It is in this communion that humanity too is called to live, in this unity and this difference."[24]

Clément's attitude toward modernity is not straightforwardly negative, however. He makes the striking point that the capacity for Christian unity has been brought about, paradoxically, by the advent of secularism, which he takes to have salutary effects on Christian faith. "We have been freed from a kind of Christianity that is seen as the ideology of a community, a nation, or a state, we are free of the inquisitions and from the need to have great influence or an important position." He goes on to argue that thus, "the role of Christians is not to struggle against the secularization which is now a fact of life; it is rather to make this secularization into something positive." By abandoning concern with cultural power and the other trappings of Christendom, contemporary Christians can refocus on the essentials of inner life and solidarity in "a Church which is personally and consciously wanted by its members," and this is "the great advantage of our age."[25]

Beyond the pragmatic consideration of how to engage with the fact of secularity, Clément identifies a deep theological motivation that underwrites Christian

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22. Clement, *Taizé,* 22.

23. Clement, *Taizé,* 23.

24. Clement, *Taizé,* 42.

25. Clement, *Taizé,* 66.

engagement with secularity. "Christianity," he writes, "needs to take on board the contribution, the questioning, and the criticism coming from that kind of modern atheism, which is a destruction of idols, for Christ is like a diamond with a thousand facets." Because Christ embodies the full embrace of all that is divine and all that is human, "all the explorations of the divine in all the religions and all the explorations of the human in all kinds of humanism—including the humanisms that call themselves atheistic—can reveal to us something of the mystery of Christ."[26] To ignore the insights of other traditions, even atheistic ones, would be a disservice to Christian theology, he seems to say, since to do so would be, in effect, to ignore some portion of the revelation which Christ manifests as the fulness of divinized humanity. "In this divine-humanity," he concludes, "there is a place for all the searching into the divine undertaken by all the wisdom and mysticism of the non-Christian religions, in opening them onto the human."[27]

Practical implications

So what, one might ask, does this all amount to for ecumenists looking to learn from Taizé? Rather than suggesting that ecumenists should go about planting neo-monastic orders *en masse*, I highlight here some of the themes that have proven to be of lasting significance for the Taizé community and how they might prove transformational to the ecumenical movement, primarily in the United States, but also in Canada and Western Europe.

Visible sacramental unity is an imperative for the faith and order wing of the ecumenical movement which has tended to begin with theological conferences as a starting point for formal dialogue. Starting from a very different position, the "third-way" approach of Taizé has not, for that reason, proved ineffective at achieving visible sacramental unity. Indeed, Taizé has moved more quickly toward that goal than several generations of dialogue about the nature of the eucharist. Despite the fact that there is no formal ecclesiological mandate to justify it, all the brothers are able to share in the Roman Catholic eucharistic celebration without all of them being Catholic. Similarly, advocacy is an imperative for the life and work wing of ecumenists, who regularly host events like political demonstrations and maintain formal political advocacy offices. Despite the community of Taizé lacking such formal infrastructure, it has nevertheless mobilized many more thousands of young people around issues like humanitarian aid and fighting climate change than have comparable efforts undertaken by ecumenical bodies. The

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26. Clement, *Taizé,* 43.

27. Clement, *Taizé,* 44.

community can boast of outcomes which both sides of the "ecumenical divide" might find desirable, even while it calls into question many of the assumed starting points of each side.

As Kinnamon noted, the North American ecumenical movement struggles with the fact that its proponents are often narrowly concerned with either social justice efforts or visible expressions of Christian unity and are rarely committed to both. If the two factions share a premise, it is that articulable agreement is a first step in making progress (either an articulated political stance or an articulated theological stance). Taizé inverts this starting point and begins from establishing shared moments of spiritual encounter through embodied contemplative practices that do not depend on doctrinal or political agreement. Beginning from prayer, the community maintains a space where individual persons can come together around the inner life which blossoms in singing, silence, and common life. From that point, they build toward advocating for change in the world and offering theological reflection on a visible unity that has already emerged in practice. A salient takeaway might be that American ecumenists focus first on establishing points of shared spiritual encounter and then secondarily look to dialogue and advocacy efforts that flow from those encounters.

Another salient value is universal solidarity, which is taken to include material solidarity with the poor. In their desire to establish both doctrinal agreement and shared articulated political commitments, the two wings of the American ecumenical movement have often directed their efforts in and through the activity of specific institutions. While valuable in certain respects, there is a danger that the maintenance of these complicated institutions, designed in a different epoch of Church history, may compete for time, resources, and energy that would otherwise be directed toward mobilizing Christians toward a more immediate solidarity with the poor. Learning from Taizé, North American ecumenists might be quicker to divest from institutional maintenance and re-imagine themselves as existing to resource more local, organic movements for solidarity building. They might also help churches in the US move away from charity-based engagement with disempowered communities, instead addressing the structural ways in which their membership and institutions may be at a remove from poor people and actually contribute to the circumstances that entrench cycles of poverty (for example, maintaining denominational investment portfolios that profit from exploitation of people and the environment). Thus, a final corrective might come in a recognition that a commitment to solidarity, most tangibly in terms of living in a communion-based rather than charity-based relation to poor people, ought to be a shared priority for all Christians.

Conclusions

Taizé is marked by the hope of a communion which, while not grounded in the particularity of historical dogmatic articulation, is nevertheless faithful to an expansive understanding of Christ's presence in the world and the possibility of loving one's neighbour as oneself. It shows the way in which ritual formation makes solidarity possible and reveals a unity of interdependence that is already and always true of the human situation. In this light is revealed the possibility of a communion which points toward a horizon of solidarity.

The community has been described as a parable, and this description is apt. It does not offer a quick fix to the problems endemic to Christian divisiveness, religious violence, or bigotry. Nevertheless, at Taizé, Christians can find a picture of human life lived in response to the gospel, which gives a reason to hope for a different future. While it is at best a parable, in that it can only point to a reality that it manifests partially, the community still offers an example that makes hope possible. It suggests a different starting point than ideological agreement or doctrinal assent, reaching instead for a robustly prayerful Christian faith, grounded in contemplative practice, which spurs on peace, truth, and justice.

The I-Thou Relationship as a Model of Christ's Love When Geographical Borders Have Become Social Ones

Sofie Maria Carolina Halvarsson

The theme of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2023 was "Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders." This was related to the theme of the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, "Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity." The theme of GETI has encouraged me to reflect on borders in many settings. It has become vital to consider what Christ (and all of us) may use as tools to (re)move borders. Something that has become clear in all the ecumenical gatherings I attended in GETI and in my own context is what happens when we engage in real encounters with each other. For example, through GETI, I was introduced to *Talanoa*, a method from the Pacific for engaging in a real encounter. This is about taking the time to understand where the other person comes from through storytelling.[1] At the assembly there were a lot of these encounters, developing into new friendships and deeper understandings of each other. We met through embracing each other in our entirety; we shared laughs and created relationships. This became an invitation to me to reflect on where and how real

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1. "An Invitation to a Method of Telling and Sharing Stories from the Pacific Region—Talanoa," *GETI 2022 Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders* (not published).

encounters are being made in my own context and how real encounters can contribute to removing borders within the Swedish context.

Swedish Culture

Independent and individual—perhaps these are suitable words to describe a Swedish person. We have built a society that in many ways has given us the possibility to be independent, based upon a good welfare system. Integrated into the culture, however, is also a sense that it is bad to be dependent on or need another person. Maybe one of the biggest taboos in Sweden is talking to another person on the bus. Even though this may sound absurd, I would argue that from this independence and individualism there follow many larger things. We have our own personal freedom in how we want to live our lives and we do not need to take a bigger collective into account, as is the case in some other cultures where family intervenes in whom we should marry or how and with whom we should live our lives. It is great in the way that our grandma or child can be taken care of through the state by means of our taxes. I myself am a product of this society and appreciate it in many ways. However, Swedish culture also contains a destructive thought: "to be strong" is to handle things alone, which can be the downside of individualism.

Of course, we can also argue from many different perspectives that we actually do belong together and need each other. In the ecumenical setting, for example, we can speak about unity through the metaphor of the body of Christ that we are different parts of. It is a truth that we are already united and belong together even though it is not always visible.[2] It is also possible to argue from a more biological or sociological standpoint that human beings are created to be in a flock, and over the course of our evolution, we have had different tasks to serve the purpose of the collective.

A Society Built on an Avoidant Attachment Style

Journalist Dan Josefsson and psychotherapist Egil Linge write about another way of expressing this tendency of independence in the Swedish book *Hemligheten* (The Secret). They examine the different attachment styles we have subconsciously created in growing up and how they affect us throughout our lives when it comes to engaging in encounters and relationships with other people. We can either have been raised with receiving all the love that we needed or have developed different unsafe attachment styles—behaviours we adopt to get the love we need. They

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2. Ephesians 1:22–23; *Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity: Report of the WCC 11th Assembly*, Karlsruhe, Germany, 2022 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2022), 5.

mean that in a way it is possible to see the whole of Swedish society today as an avoidant attachment style when it comes to relationships.[3] They mean that within Swedish culture there is a common subconscious agreement that relationships do well if the closeness/intimacy is limited.

An example of this is the idea that relationships lose their excitement if the partners meet too often. This is very wrong according to the authors. The issue regarding making relationships last is not that the persons need more time apart, but that they need more time with each other. They mean that behaviours within this attachment style are seen in Swedish culture as ideals rather than problematic. The need for closeness is seen as a weakness, instead of a valuable and necessary thing. In movies, television programs, magazines, and commercials, we often watch people who do not need anyone other than themselves to be happy. If a person is in a bar and genuinely wants to meet someone, they should look like they do not care. No longing for closeness should shine through. If we meet someone we like, we learn that we should let a long time lapse before contacting the person again.

According to Josefsson and Linge, the whole culture is built on a misunderstanding of freedom and independence. Even a person who is born with a safe attachment style learns from the culture to do things that are unnatural for them. This is sad because closeness between people is not a problem but a solution. The one who does not dare to get close to someone can pretend to be free and independent, but the feeling of freedom will not be there. There is only one way to true independence and freedom, and it goes through intimacy with other people.[4]

Swedish Fear of Engaging in Real Encounters and Its Relationship to Social Borders

The following is an investigation of how this tendency in Swedish society relates to the theme of GETI in terms of borders. Does this fear of closeness and real encounters contribute in a negative sense to any specific borders?

I focus here on the specific border within Swedish society having to do with migration and integration. People migrate to Sweden from different parts of the world but this is being questioned more and more by an increasingly racist attitude, an attitude built on borders and division. Through migration, a geographical border is being crossed from one country to another. I am asking the question, though: Is there a risk that one border still can exist through a transformation into

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3. Dan Josefsson and Egil Linde, *Hemligheten—från ögonkast till varaktig relation* (Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 2008) 78–79.

4. Josefsson and Linge, *Hemligheten*, 78–79.

another shape? Is the border really (re)moved or crossed, or can it at least partly transform into another shape?

The word *border* can be defined as something that draws a line or divides something from something else. It is often a geographical borderline created by human beings in order to divide one country from another. In the sense I am using it here, it is also a symbolic barrier, a social border dividing people from each other. Or, as written in one of the footnotes of *Christ's Love (Re)moves Border—An Ecumenical Reader,* the term *border* can be used "in a metaphorical sense that signifies hostilities of every kind that cause alienation. It does not signify nationalistic or geographical boundaries, although it implies nationalistic rifts and wounds too."[5]

Therefore, it could be fruitful to consider in which shape the border—as in hostilities and division—still exists when it comes to people from other countries crossing geographical borders. Is there still a barrier, a border, even though the geographical border has been crossed? I argue that integration has to do with the social border. As a friend of mine stated, integration is from both sides. It is the responsibility of a person from another country to integrate into the new society, but it is equally the original inhabitant's responsibility to make room for the newcomer.

Hence, I would say that real encounters play an important role. To overcome the social borders that maintain distance, a "you and I" and not "us," we need to be able to engage in real encounters. To engage in a real encounter is to be seen for who we are, to get another person's eye on us and to learn something from the other about ourselves. It is to be vulnerable and to be open to embrace the other person in their entirety.

I would say that the social border, segregation within society, has to do with a lack of comprehension and understanding about each other. As experienced within the ecumenical world from ecumenism, a lot of division is created by misunderstandings and misperceptions about the other. The division is also built on what differentiates us instead of finding a common joy or concern where we realize we are united and find our similarities. To cross or (re)move these social barriers there is work for both you and me, a real encounter that should be made. It is not built on a version where we look at the other one as an object, but where we meet in a relationship as two subjects.

A theology and philosophy that can support and contribute to such an encounter was developed by the philosopher Martin Buber in his book *I and Thou*.[6]

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5. *Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders: An Ecumenical Reader. GETI 2022*, ed. Kuzipa Nalwamba and Marietta Ruhland (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2022), 12n1, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/geti-2022-christs-love-removes-borders.

6. Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (1923; Martino Publishing, rpt. of 1937 American ed., 2010).

Martin Buber: I and Thou

The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965) developed a philosophy about human encounters and dialogue that has also been influential in many ways, both theologically and psychologically.

His main idea was that the most essential part of a person's life is the real encounter, the real dialogue. He meant that every person is in an interpersonal relationship with God as the "eternal Thou."[7] He meant that human beings in this world are conditioned by the fact of "being over against," structured in two different attitudes depending on who the "over against" is—another person or an object.[8] The I-It relationship is an encounter between a person and an object, an objectified relationship between an I and an It.

The I-Thou relationship is between two people, between an I and a Thou. An interpersonal relationship like this calls for the reciprocal penetration of the perspective that those involved direct toward each other, such that each participant is capable of adopting the perspective of the other. Those in encounter "do not spy or eavesdrop upon each other as objects," for then the I-Thou relationship would become an I-It relationship. Instead, they "open themselves up *for* one another." The encounter assumes the form of making the other present in his or her entirety. To make the other present is to focus on the features that are essential to the individual person, rather than shifting from one detail to the next, as in the case of the observation of an object.[9] It is to attend to the other person as if that person were from nowhere: to detach oneself from one's own anchoring in social space and historical time. It is also that one must allow the other person to confront oneself.[10] The addressed person must take a stance on what the other one says, most simply with a yes or no. In being willing to be called to account by the other person and to be answerable to the other, the addressed person is being exposed to the non-objectifiable presence of the other person. The essential character of an I-Thou relationship is the abandonment of the world of sensation, the melting of the between, so that the relationship with another "I" is foremost. The twofold nature of the world means that our being in the world has two aspects: the aspect of the experience, which is perceived as I–It, and the aspect of relation, which is perceived as I–Thou.

7. Jürgen Habermas, "A Philosophy of Dialogue," in *Dialogue as a Trans-disciplinary Concept: Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue and Its Contemporary Reception*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 11.

8. Habermas, "Philosophy of Dialogue," 11.

9. Habermas, "Philosophy of Dialogue," 11.

10. Habermas, "Philosophy of Dialogue," 13.

Buber believed that we humans also have shielded egos; there is a risk that we can screen ourselves off and treat the other person not as a second person but as an object—like a doctor instrumentally operating on the body of a patient instead of as a partner in dialogue.[11] The I-Thou relationship has turned into an I-It relationship even though there are two persons present. Buber also takes the perspective of cultural criticism—these monological modes of action can even become the dominant mode of interaction in society as a whole. In this way he is sceptical about the social domains of strategic and purposive-rational action in the course of social modernization.[12]

The I-Thou and Breaking the Social Borders of Segregation

I now connect the thoughts about the Swedish context and culture and Buber's thoughts about the I-Thou and I-It relationships to the social borders of segregation.

As stated earlier, even though geographical borders may be crossed, there is a risk that borders will still exist by transforming into another shape. The social borders that exist between people may continue for different reasons. Based upon the approach of Swedish culture to real encounters, I offer some reflections here on how this can relate to social borders. Even though these reflections are drawn from my own context, I am sure some of them are relevant to many other contexts and situations.

- The person that is crossing the geographical border could be a refugee or be in a situation where they need help. This is in opposition to the idea within Swedish culture that we can handle situations on our own, and therefore may be an unpleasant reminder that we all need help. It may remind us of our own helplessness—something that we prefer to push away.

- The person who is crossing the geographical border may come from a culture that does not place the same value on being avoidant or have problems engaging in encounters. This might feel unusual or like a threat to a Swedish person who is uncomfortable with being vulnerable and opening up to another person. In the worst case, this healthy behavior may be seen as odd, treated as "other," and result in bricks constructing a social border.

- The person who is crossing the geographical border is a person who can teach us something. Through an I-Thou relationship, both persons can

11. Habermas, "Philosophy of Dialogue," 12.

12. Habermas, "Philosophy of Dialogue," 12.

meet in a genuine encounter. This requires us to allow ourselves to be seen for who we are and to not let ourselves or the other one be an object. This may be unusual and scary and make us feel too vulnerable. It may also lead to change and being challenged for our perceptions about ourselves and others. If fear drives us, it is easier to stay comfortable and not change, which will perpetuate the borders.

It is quite clear how the I-Thou model can contribute to removing or resolving social borders. As long as we view the other one within the framework of an I-It relationship, the border will still exist. An I-It relationship sees the other one attached to social space and historical time. When it comes to a person who is crossing the geographical border, a focus on that person's history, culture, ethnicity, and so forth, may change the *Thou* to an *It*. If we objectify the other, shifting from detail to detail we do not engage in a real I-Thou relationship where we abandon the world of sensations.

I would therefore say that it would be helpful for a Swedish person who is affected by the culture of an avoidant attachment style to dare to challenge this view. Through the I-It relationships, the social borders are still being maintained. It is through an I-Thou relationship that we can make the social borders vanish as we meet the other person detached from social space and historical time. A person who has crossed the geographical border can offer an invitation to such a relationship.

A Concluding Reflection

Christ's love (re)moves the borders. Initially, I asked what kind of tool Christ uses to do this. I presented real encounters as a way to apply this to social borders in the Swedish context.

If God is the "eternal Thou," as Buber states, then God is in oneself in relationship with us. A relationship driven by God's (Christ's) love is what (re)moves the borders. "Christ's boundless, cosmic love is therefore what provides orientation for our Christian calling to reconciliation and unity. Christ—without us, in spite of us and with us and the cosmos—continues to (re)move borders so that, in Christ, all may have full life as God intends (John 10:10)."[13]

Christ's love works "without us, in spite of us and with us." To let ourselves be included in the "with us," I would suggest that we build relationships upon the same I-Thou as in God-self. We can let ourselves be inspired by the words that God

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13. *Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders*, 12.

is who God is (I am who I am) detached from other things.[14] We can open up to meet each other like that. If we would be courageous, vulnerable, and realize we need each other—that our *I* needs a *Thou*—then Christ's love can move the world to reconciliation and unity through (re)moving the borders, including the social borders between all of us.

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14. Exodus 3:14.

Chapter 24

Walking While Black:
A Collection of Poetry*

Tavis Donta Tinsley

The Black Locksmith (Healing Collective Memory)

How beautiful is a city within its walls?
When graffiti covers the surface of the slabs.
Words that read "Them" & "Us."
The rain that renews the grass of the field
does not affect the colourful messages artfully placed in stone.

How beautiful is a city within its walls?
When there are very few windows in high places,
and a gate that stays locked.
I've learned to pick the locks with my ears.
Oh, the locks made from the words of those with trauma and closed hearts.
Oh, the locks . . .
that forbade me from understanding a different point of view.

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*The author of this collection of poems is an aspiring therapist and scholar of social sciences. Tavis is intimately involved in the work of acknowledging the need to understand the relationship between psychology and theology. Tavis is a theologian and poet who uses dialogue, writing, and storytelling to empathize with human experience and inspire reflection and conversation on difficult topics.

I climbed a ladder to see through one of the windows the other day.
Spray-painted on the window it read, "Stay in your place."
So, I shattered through the stained glass so I could go and see the outside
for myself.

On my travels I found a mirror.
A mirror that taught me the beauty of my black skin,
Yet, pain that swirls within.
Then, I picked the locks to a castle. Etched in white stone was the name
"America"
Inside I met with the queen.
She was stumbling holding scales and sword.

"Do you hear me," I said. "Yes," she replied.
I slowly removed her blindfold.
Now come! Gather your best historians, theologians, and politicians . . .
. . . and let us discuss in the middle of the street.

Analysis of "The Black Locksmith"

The piece "The Black Locksmith" highlights the borders that exist between Caucasian-Americans and people of colour in the USA. A question is posed: "How beautiful is a city within its walls?" This question is to inspire thought about what may appear to be a thriving country on the outside, but which may have a very flawed infrastructure. The poem paints two very different versions of America. The only description that is given of the city that the protagonist is leaving is the mention of colourful graffiti. Graffiti is a popular form of art commonly seen in black and brown communities. Graffiti has been used to mark territory or convey provocative messages through words and murals of influential civil figures. In the poem the graffiti reads the words "Them" and "Us." These words reflect the very dichotomous relationship of how people of colour can view themselves (or how society views them) in relation to their Caucasian counterparts. The vast uniqueness of ethnicity then fades into harsh silos of Them and Us. Rain is a renewing and nourishing natural agent yet has little effect on these messages that have been "placed in stone." The words "in stone" were intentionally used here to convey the longevity and persistence of this ideology of the divide between people of colour and Caucasian people. Also, it is important to note, this ideology can't just be washed away—like a wall, this ideology must be deconstructed.

In the second stanza, there is a list of barriers to understanding. Understanding is a key social skill to have when doing reconciliation. Within the walls are "windows in high places" and "locks made from the words of those with trauma and closed hearts." The height of the window represents the way certain pieces of information are kept away from people of colour. For example, history is taught from a very Eurocentric lens in the US; it often refers to only a few iconic African and/or African American people as points of reference. So, the ladder could represent education allowing people of colour to view the epistemological contribution of people who look like them. Furthermore, the words "Stay in your place" and the shattering of the stained glass are important because stained glass was a mode of Christian education often used to educate people who could not read. Often, the individuals depicted in stained glass were of white complexion, which can affect the way people of colour see themselves in Christendom and in the world. The "stained glass" mentioned here is a play on words: the stain is the obstruction of the window's true purpose, to be seen through, rather than being considered an artform. As for "locks made from the words of those with trauma and closed hearts," African and African-descended people in the US have faced many atrocities—from slavery and Jim Crow to systemic racism. These historical atrocities and lack of conciliatory effort have caused African American people to be very apprehensive when engaging with Caucasian people.

The discoveries of the protagonist in the poem are very important. The way African-descended people were acculturated into the US involved plenty of self-deprecation in the form of liturgy and commonly circulated rhetoric. The mirror, another glass work that is meant to be peered into, shows the beauty of black skin. The mirror also may be a reminder of the rape of African ancestors.

Finding America in the form of a castle is a way to express the US as an empire. The queen is a personification of Lady Justice (statues derived from Greco-Roman mythology and often found in US courtrooms). It is unclear whether she is stumbling because of intoxication or because she cannot see. This personified version of Lady Justice is asked if she can hear because African American voices feel very unheard in the USA. The queen is then given new perspective, just like the protagonist, and invited to gather historians, theologians, and politicians to discuss epistemologies and justice with this Black Locksmith in a mutual space outside their walls.

The Souls of Black Young Adult Folk (Witnessing from the Margins and Ecclesial Borders)

Son! Come here! We need young people to carry this box into the sanctuary.
Daughter! Come here! Greet the people when they come into the sanctuary.
Do the announcements, take up the offering, and . . .
Would you read the Gospel text for us baby?
"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe and trust in Me to
    stumble [that is, to sin or lose faith], it would be better for him if a heavy
    millstone [one requiring a donkey's strength to turn it] were hung around his
    neck and he were thrown into the sea." Mark 9:42.[1]
"Amen, Amen, Amen."

Words of present-day Pharisees circulate in this so-called safe space.
Whispers fill the room like a rushing wind:
"Why does he not have a collared shirt on" and "her dress is too tight."
Thirsty people judging living water in an unknown bottle.

The doors of the church are open!
But young lady, keep your mouth closed when I make declaration.
Young man! Watch your mouth in here because there is life and death in the
    power of the tongue.
We can use your life but don't speak death over my tradition.
By the way . . .
How is school? That is the place where you should be using your mind.
How is your grandmother?
You've gotten so tall! I remember when you . . .
Could not use words at all.
Those were good times.

O Young people with unacknowledged voices, vibrant thoughts, fluctuating
    emotions
You are not "the future" you are an actuality of the present.
I had a dream . . . that you found your sanctuary and stop being sanctioned.
For baring your soul.

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1. The scripture verse is taken from the Amplified Version of the Bible.

Analysis of "The Souls of Black Young Adult Folk"

W. E. B. Du Bois wrote a significant piece of literature called *The Souls of Black Folk*, which explores the ontology of marginalized African Americans in the US.[2] The poem "The Souls of Black Young Adult Folk" explores the strained intrapersonal relationship the African American church has with its own youth and young adults. The poem opens with the familiar patronizing dialogue that young people in the African American church context receive. Young adults are often called "son" or "daughter" instead of their given names. This has a compassionate element but also helps to perpetuate an implicit hierarchy. This hierarchy promotes the dominance of older generations of people in ecclesial settings. The poem continues with a series of instructions. Young people in the African American church context are often used in the church to help with manual labour and elements of the worship. The first stanza is conveying the use of the body of the young person without true space being made for that person's inclusion.

Mark 9:42 is a verse in which Jesus Christ, the Messiah and a young adult, warns of the danger of misleading youth. This passage shows the value that Christ places on the souls of young people. The imaginary congregation then responds with a threefold amen. This points to the occasional hypocrisy that is sometimes present in the African American church context when it comes to the inclusion of young people.

The second stanza points to the pharisaical behaviour of older church generations. One of the most prominent points of contention among younger and older generations in the African American church concerns dress. Men are instructed to wear business casual (collared shirt, slacks, and dress shoes). Women are instructed to wear business casual (dress, stockings, and heeled shoes). Young adults, though, have been raised in a society where urban wear is normalized. Style for the younger generations caters to comfort. The backdoor conversation that occurs among older generations problematizes streetwear in ecclesial settings. The implicit rules around dress are akin to the legal gatekeeping by the Pharisees during Jesus' time. The rushing wind of whispers included in the poem is a metaphor for the entering of the Holy Spirit into the disciples on the day of Pentecost. Instead of the Holy Spirit entering the disciples, gossip is circulating among hypocrites. The presence of the Holy Spirit is at times described as living water. So, the line "Thirsty people judging living water in an unknown bottle" is saying that the comments and focus of the congregation on young people's attire fails to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit within young people.

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2. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005).

The third stanza starts with words that are commonly said in benediction ("The doors of the church are open"). This is an invitation to join the church. This stanza highlights the problem that some of the younger generations have with the African American church. You are invited to come in but not to voice your true thoughts or feelings around church polity. Instead, young people are berated; the clichéd questions and nostalgic references allude to how older generations see them as ignorant and immature.

The last stanza is an affirmation of young people and an acknowledgment of some of the dilemmas of their souls (mind, will, and emotions). The poem moves toward changing the clichéd phrase "Young people are the future" by saying young people are an "actuality of the present." Finally, the poem ends by including the words "I had a dream," alluding to another young adult who was a leader in the Christian faith community, Martin Luther King Jr. The dream that follows speaks of young people finding a place to be welcomed, respected, and fully themselves.

The Theologian and Open Water (Syncretism and Pluralism)

Ah yes! Did you find what you were looking for?
I remember when I threw you in the water.
I was hoping you learned how to swim.
I was hoping you learned to construct boats . . .
 from the drifting remains of whipping post.

When you're floating did you hear the voices of ancestors?
Which lifeguard's hand did you take in an attempt to save you?
Jesus . . . Buddha . . . Muhammad?

Did your boat run ashore upon beautiful stones,
On your journey who did you speak to.
Did you grasp for a weight in the storm to anchor your soul?
As for me . . .
I found God but I'm still at sea.

Analysis of "The Theologian and Open Water"

African Americans in the US have been trying to construct spirituality and theology in a way that affirms their heritage as African-descended people, while also encapsulating a philosophy of life. In the US, the common historical starting place for African-descended/Black Christendom is colonization and the transatlantic slave trade. The historical aspect of theological education is not popularly promoted to African Americans in the US. So, Black communities can rarely do the necessary deconstruction of colonialism that is embedded in Christian theologies. The knowledge and affirmations of liberation theologies are slowly being promoted but in a large number of communities, these theologies still go unexplored. The poem "The Theologian and Open Water" highlights the plethora of spiritual and theological perspectives that circulate around Black people in the US. Black people are in search of liberating perspectives and because Western Christianity has been complicit with institutions like slavery, some Black people have reached out to other spiritual perspectives in search of truth. The poem does not deem this as right or wrong. But it does frame the journey as an oceanic expedition.

Constructing boats from whipping post alludes to black people constructing liberative theologies from the theologies that have once oppressed their people. As the journey continues, the protagonist is asked if they heard their ancestors. During the transatlantic slave trade the Igbo people chose to drown themselves rather than remain in captivity to European colonizers. Also, in this imagery there is a reference to the African theological belief in the veneration of ancestors. These statements point to Black people in the US beginning to incorporate African spirituality in their theology. Black people in the US have begun exploring Native African religions in order to get away from racist theological expressions. The concept of pluralism is raised by asking whose hand was taken to save them and then mentioning central figures in three of the most prominent religions: Jesus (Christianity), Buddha (Buddhism), and Muhammad (Islam) as lifeguards. The word "save" here also refers to more of a soteriological saving amidst the shifting waters.

The line "did your boat run upon beautiful stones" points to the syncretism of some Black people in the use of crystal healing within their spiritual practice. In the US, there are a vast number of ways in which Christians are expressing spirituality outside the boundaries of Western Christian expression. It is the job of the theologian to be in communion with God and to explore the validity of these perspectives. The last line expresses the mystery of God in that God can be found but God is vaster than the largest body of water.

Canvas (Relationship to the Environment)

My hands will one day work the soil.
I will grind the darkness and create vibrant colours.
I'll blend these colours into my black skin.
I'll experience the nourishment and flavour that lay within.

But for now, it is difficult to make masterpieces.
The colours aren't as bright.
I can longer work with the darkness and make my products of light.
I only walk through finely lit walkways filled with artificial colours,
Poisons of every kind.
On this new canvas there is no telling what you will find.

Some new artists have come in town,
who know how to properly fill a canvas and really work the ground.
Although masterpieces are created and the imitations are decreased,
we still must teach our people to truly appreciate a piece.

Analysis of "Canvas"

The poem "Canvas" is a look into how food deserts and respect for the earth are viewed in African American church communities. A food desert is a place where it is difficult to buy affordable fresh food. In the US, these food deserts are common among African American communities. The poem starts with the longing of the protagonist to work the dark nutrient-rich soil to cultivate "colours" or produce (fruits and vegetables). The "blending of the colours" is a poetic way of experiencing/eating fresh food in order to benefit from the vitamins and nutrients.

The second stanza speaks of "finely lit" convenience stores, gas stations, and liquor stores usually present in food deserts. The quality of food found in these spaces is usually low. The food provided is filled with harmful additives such as artificial colours and food dyes. The Black church communities have entered urban communities and have been teaching agricultural practices. Community gardens and organic food vendors have become more common in Black communities. These changes have reduced harmful pesticides and have promoted a greener culture. Materials are becoming more recyclable. At the same time, there are still problems with pollution and overconsumption around which the Black church community could use more education in order to truly do justice to the Earth or "canvas."

Chapter 25

Remarkable Witness from a Marginalized Group:

The Case of the Naga Mothers' Association

Jamir Tiakala

Indian Christian women from different regions are actively participating and contributing in mission in various ways. Because of the diversity of the Indian context, no one group can represent the experience of all the Christian women in India. However, the Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) has been selected as a case study to show how Indian women are equally capable participants and contributors in the mission. The rationale for choosing this particular group of women rests on the writer's familiarity with the group and the belief that their aspirations and their contributions toward the creation of a peaceful and just society have been ignored or dismissed by the Christian community. I will examine the contours of women's experiences and their witness by tracing how they negotiated the gender challenges that they faced throughout their work and overcame them. Out of their marginalized milieu and their involvement in the *missio Dei*, the Naga women are shown to be agents of mission.

Marginality and Naga Women

Naga society is thought to be characterized by egalitarianism based on community interdependence for economic and political survival.[1] This has led to the assumption of the relatively high status of Naga women in the context of South Asia.[2] Naga women, like the women in the rest of the states in the northeastern part of India, are looked upon as enjoying freedom when compared to women in other Indian states. Generally, it is assumed by many that Naga women have equal status and position alongside their men.[3] However, this is a superficial conclusion. The position of Naga women is more complicated than the simplistic perception that they are free because there is no written cultural code that limits or restricts them. They participate in the modern economy and employment structures within the state. Within the church and the political structures, however, they are denied full recognition and participation.[4] Naga women have struggles and obstacles as they live in a highly patriarchal, male-dominated, traditional socio-cultural environment. In most families, women are treated as vehicles for keeping the patrilineal genealogy alive.[5] It is a sad reality that Naga women still do not enjoy equal rights to the fullest extent in their social lives. In fact, participation in public affairs was long considered taboo for women.[6] An example of the

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1. Today, there is some awareness of the Nagas in both academic and media circles; nevertheless, a brief description may be helpful. The people generally known as the Nagas are a confederation of Indigenous People who inhabit the mountainous regions in the northeastern part of India. The Indian Constitution categorizes them as Scheduled Tribes.

2. Rita Manchanda, *Naga Women Making a Difference: Peace Building in North-eastern India* (n.p.: Hunt Alternative Fund, 2005), 12.

3. In his study of the Ao Nagas, J. P. Mills wrote, "An Ao woman is very far from being a slave and a drudge. Her position is no whit inferior to that of a man. . . . All her life a woman enjoys considerable freedom." J. P. Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 211–12. Likewise, M. Horam states that women have the same status as the men and suffer no discrimination on account of sex. See M. Horam, *Nagas: Old Ways New Trends* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1988), 41.

4. According to Atola Longkumer, this seems to be a continuation of the traditional position mixed with the 19th and early 20th century's Christian mission ethos toward women. Susan Hill Lindley, *"You Have Stept Out of Your Place": A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), cited in Atola Longkumer, "Tetsur Tesayula: Christian Mission and Gender Among the Ao Naga of Northeast India," in *Putting Names with Faces: Women's Impact in Mission History*, ed. Christine Lienemann-Perrin, Atola Longkumer, and Afrie Songco Joye (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 199.

5. Aphuno Chase Roy, "Gospel and Culture: Women's Empowerment," in *Side by Side: Naga Women Doing Theology in Search of Justice and Partnership*, ed. Limatula Longkumer and Talijungla Longkumer (Jorhat: CCA-EGY Unit and Naga Women Theological Forum, 2004), 11.

6. Samir Kumar Das and Janel B. Galvanek, *Learning from Governance Initiatives for Conflict Resolution: Local Agency, Inclusive Dialogue and Developmentality* (n.p.: Berghof Foundation Operations, 2014), 9.

disqualification of a Naga woman on several grounds is laid out in the Ao Naga Customary Law.[7]

Given all these circumstances, Naga women have been made to believe that they have little or no role in the history-making process of their people. This becomes clear when one looks at the Naga inheritance laws—where a woman has no share—or in the Village Council law—where she has no voice, according to the tribal customary law. Thus, a woman is seen to have no power to take a stand. But women are beginning to be increasingly critical about the biased interpretations of Naga Customary Law.[8] Each Naga tribe has a common set of laws that binds the whole community. The laws are the Rules for Administration of Justice and Police Act, 1937, Article 371A(1) of the Indian Constitution, and the Nagaland Village and Area Council Act, 1978.[9] While the laws are considered worthwhile in keeping the tribal community intact and in condemning wrongs and upholding truth, justice, and public utility, these laws to a large extent perpetuate discrimination against women in society.[10]

In contemporary Nagaland, women continue to be excluded from representation in the Village Tribal Council, the basic unit of traditional political authority, and consequently from the Naga Hoho.[11] Although they are invited to attend, they are not a part of the leadership structures. Women's rights are ridiculed in decision-making and in voicing opinions. It is an entirely male domain. It is no surprise, therefore, to know that to this day, the phrase *tetsur tanur* (women-children) is used extensively whenever there is a need to curtail involvement of women in matters that men are "meant" to deal with. The implication is that women and children are

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7. According to Ao Naga Customary Law, an Ao woman can be disqualified on the following grounds: A woman cannot be appointed as member of the Tatar/Putu Menden (Village Council); a woman cannot become a Putir or an Ungr in the khel (village). She cannot perform religious rites and sacrifices, but she can assist her husband in their family worship. A woman is not entitled to get honour, title, and fame in spite of her good performance, but she can be honoured with her husband in songs that are being sung at a feast of merit given by her husband. A woman cannot inherit land and other immovable property. She may, however, inherit a share of her husband's debt on behalf of her son if the son is living with her. If a property is owned by the wife, it should be made known to the heirs of her husband before he dies. In Ao custom a wife cannot sell any land without the knowledge of the heirs. An Ao woman cannot participate in a general public discussion or mass meeting of the village citizens. She has no place in the village administration. Sosang Jamir, *Ao Naga Customary Law and Practice* (Dimapur: Heritage Publishing House, 2012), 47–48.

8. Dolly Kikon, "Political Mobilization of Women in Nagaland: A Sociological Background," in *Changing Women's Status in India: Focus on the Northeast*, ed. Walter Fernandes and Sanjay Borbara (Guwahati: Northeastern Social Research Center, 2002), 117.

9. Akang Ao, *Practicing Naga Customary* Law (Dimapur: Modern Press, 1999), 3.

10. Taochila Marwein Jamir, "Understanding and Application of 'Forgiveness' in the Context of Violence against Women in Nagaland" (master's thesis, Senate of Serampore College, 2007), 26.

11. Naga Hoho is the apex organization of all the tribes in Nagaland.

not capable of wisdom, and their thoughts, words, and deeds do not make much sense and are of little value.[12] This is done by the men and even some women, which clearly shows the subordination and marginalization of women in Naga society.

Elisabeth S. Fiorenza clearly explained the functions of patriarchy in the church when she wrote, "It reflects women's freedom of choice, behaviour, action, and thought. It is a pyramidal system of domination, subordination, and exploitation of women."[13] Patriarchy employs structural and institutional methods of domination. This patriarchal domination is no less rampant in church ministry than it is in secular organizations. The churches in Nagaland have developed their ministry along the hierarchical patterns of the traditional society. The traditional understanding of "women's work" still runs naturally in the church setup.

Despite the rigid patriarchal structure in the church as well as in society at large, Naga women have contributed to the socio-religious life of the Nagas. Even after having been relegated to a subordinate position, Naga women have refused to submit to the patriarchal Naga society in both subtle and overt ways. Women have long been the mainstay in the mission of the church and are heavily involved in social initiatives in various guises. They are the most active participants in the developmental work of the church. The only thing that is missing is the recognition of their active contributions to church and society, both historically and in the present. This paradoxical "emancipation" is characterized by the question: Is it possible for women located within a patriarchal structure to transcend traditional boundaries and contribute from their position of marginality?

The Naga Mothers' Association

The Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) was founded on 14 February 1984 in Kohima, the capital of Nagaland. The preamble to its constitution states, "Naga Mothers of Nagaland shall express the need of raising awareness for citizens toward more responsible living and human development through the voluntary organization of the Naga Mothers' Association."[14] It was designed to create a common platform to raise issues of concern to Naga women in particular and to Naga society in general. Its mandate is for its members to fulfil their role as mothers to heal and make society whole and healthy.[15]

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12. N Talitemjen Jamir, *Naga Society and Culture* (Nagaland: Nagaland University Tribal Research Center, 2005).

13. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 116.

14. Constitution of the Naga Mothers' Association, cited in Paula Banerjee and Ishita Dey, *Women, Conflict, and Governance in Nagaland* (Kolkata: Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, 2012), 16.

15. Manchanda, *Naga Women Making a Difference*, 13.

The motto of the NMA, "human integrity," stresses the connections between all humans, holding that every life is sacred. NMA's operational style is decentralized. It works through local tribal women's associations, calling upon them to send representatives to mass rallies and programs, and supporting the activities of local women's groups.[16] All Naga women are automatically members of this association. Another observation is that the Nagas are predominantly Christian and therefore, the women representing different tribes in the NMA bring with them their identity as Christians.

The NMA has articulated its philosophy for the reconstruction of the community within the framework of motherhood. Critiques of this nomenclature have arisen, and some wish for a name other than *mother* because it seems to limit membership in the association to mothers, while all Naga women are participants in it. To such critiques, NMA responds that "the definition of a Mother in this organization is not confined to the biological mother, but is any woman who can identify with the normative qualities associated with motherhood (love, self-sacrifice, care, nurturance, etc.) and can thus relate to the experiences, thereof." The Constitution of the NMA mentions the following regarding the individual membership: "The term 'mother' herein shall connote the state of adult womanhood where one technically attains "the status of motherhood" by virtue of the Naga tradition, whereby one eventually bears the possibility of adulthood or motherhood, irrespective of marriage or childrearing."[17]

A historical survey reveals that NMA's early focus was on countering social evils such as alcohol abuse, drug addiction, and the spread of HIV and AIDS. NMA provides facilities for de-addiction. Its campaigns have mobilized mass awareness in urban and rural areas.[18] It collaborates with the Kripa foundation of Mumbai on rehabilitation of drug users. NMA has also started anonymous HIV testing. It is probably the first women's organization in the northeast to test pregnant women for HIV.

One of the most laudable efforts made by NMA in recent times is its tireless and bold pragmatism in being a catalyst for peacebuilding in Nagaland. Grounded in their position as mothers, NMA's peacebuilding activities include intervening to prevent violence, raising awareness of the importance of the peace process, and promoting reconciliation at the community level. They have bluntly criticized

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16. Meneno Vamuzo, "Narratives of Peace: Naga Women in the Self Determination Struggle," *Tensions Journal* 6 (Fall/Winter 2012), 15.

17. Article 5, Constitution of the Naga Mothers' Association, Nagaland 2009, quoted by Triveni Goswami Vernal, "Motherhood as a Space of Protest Women and Armed Conflict in North East India," (thesis, Gauhati University, 2013), 92.

18. Vamuzo, "Narratives of Peace,'' 15.

violence and corruption of all parties, and thus their shift in emphasis from social reform to peacebuilding has not been problem-free. With the formation of the Peace Team in October 1994 to confront the deteriorating political situation under the theme "Shed No More Blood," the NMA spoke out against killings not only by the army,[19] but also by the Naga militants. In a pamphlet released on 25 May 1995, the representatives of NMA wrote that "the way in which our society is being run whether by the over ground government (the state) or the underground government (insurgents), have (sic) become simply intolerable."[20] Appealing to militants, the army, security forces, and ordinary citizens alike, the NMA has been in the forefront of negotiations for peace.

The motivation for women's peacebuilding activities is succinctly stated by its former president, Neidonuo Angami: "We do more because we can."[21] That NMA has assumed enormous influence in Naga politics is borne out by the fact that it is the only women's group in South Asia that has participated in a ceasefire negotiation. It mediates between the Indian government and the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland NSCN factions.[22] It also facilitates ceasefires (though they have been broken by both groups time and again).[23] One of the most recent interventions of the NMA is with respect to the Oting incident where 14 civilians were killed in a botched ambush by the Indian Army on 4 December 2021. NMA

19. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1958, granted special powers to the Indian Armed Forces and gave army jawans and officers legal immunity for their actions in disturbed areas. The AFSPA was enacted in northeast India to bring under control what the government of India considered "disturbed areas." Besides the states in northeast India, the act has been in force in Jammu and Kashmir since 1990. Many criticize it because it provides de jure impunity in that members of the armed forces are not prosecuted in civilian courts, and under the provisions of the act, violence against women is not deemed criminal. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958. https://www .mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/armed_forces_special_powers_act1958.pdf. The Act institutes *de facto* martial law and affects relations between soldiers and civilians, central and state governments, industrial estates and its employees, civil society and government, and India and her neighbours. After independence, the politics of assimilation and integration, most notably in the Naga Hills and Manipur, provoked a violent response with separatist tendencies and led to the perceived need to amend the AFSPA with special provisions for ensuring complete immunity to the armed forces in their dealings with civil society and armed opposition groups. K. S. Subramanian, *State, Policy, and Conflicts in Northeast India* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 153–54.

20. Banerjee, *Women, Conflict, and Governance in Nagaland*, 17.

21. Manchanda, *Naga Women Making a Difference,* 14.

22. The Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), consisting of the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (k) factions, aims to establish a sovereign Christian state by unifying all the Naga-inhabited areas in northeast India and northern Myanmar/Burma under the name Nagalim.

23. In a letter to the Prime Minister of India, the NMA condemned "the dual policy of the Government of India," wherein the Assam Rifles carried out an ambush on unarmed cadres of the NSCN (K), killing innocent civilians, including women in the Pangsha area of the Tuensang District, despite the ongoing peace initiatives. "Naga Mothers Association to PM Modi," *The Morung Express* (Nagaland), 17 September 2015, https://issuu.com/morung_express/docs/september_17th__2015.

remains in the forefront of the negotiations with the Indian government to repeal the AFSPA in the entire Naga area.

NMA has always shown its commitment to peace by participating in all kinds of community dialogues on peace within and outside the region.[24] Through informal intervention, women mediate between state actors and non-state groups, and mediate inter-factional disputes and intercommunity conflicts. "In a situation of anger when men cannot talk to men without violence, it is mothers who can talk to the men, who can deal with anger and pacify them," said Neidonuo Angami—a sentiment voiced by scores of Naga women.[25]

In fact, it is expected that women are needed to reach the warring factions, diffuse intercommunity tension, open channels of communication, and build a dialogue of understanding and trust. Yet, because this is a part of the traditional role that women play as peacebuilders in Naga society, their interventions are often categorized as "women's work," taken for granted, and rendered invisible. This is exactly why Rosemary Dzuvichu, advisor to NMA, pointed out that "the Naga experience in the Northeast indicates that contributions made by women in resolving conflicts and bringing peace has been immense but it is not publicized nor written about."[26] After several years of tireless efforts, the NMA was awarded the Times of India Social Impact Award for life contribution in 2013.[27]

Another effort of the NMA is the fight in the Supreme Court to demand the implementation of a 33 percent reservation for women in all local bodies. This is opposed by the state government and different local organizations, who argue that it would infringe on Article 371(A), which "protects" the traditional and customary practices of the Nagas.[28] Naga scholar Menenuo Vamuzo opines that the Naga customary laws are protected and upheld by the Indian Constitution's

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24. Banerjee, *Women, Conflict, and Governance in Nagaland*, 17.

25. Quoted in Manchanda, *Naga Women Making a Difference*, 14.

26. Rosemary Dzuvichu, "Peacebuilding and Gender Perspectives in Northeast India—The Naga Experience," in *Conflicts and Peacebuilding in Northeast India: Challenges and Prospects*, ed. Takatemjen (Aolijen, Mokokchung: Clark Centre for Peace Research and Action, 2013), 41.

27. Rukmini Shrinivasan, "TOI Social Impact Awards: Lifetime Contribution—Naga Mothers Association," *Times of India,* updated 21 June 2013, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/TOI-Social-Impact-Awards-Lifetime-contribution-Naga-Mothers-Association/articleshow/17963150.cms.

28. Article 371A states: "(1) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, (a) no Act of Parliament in respect of (i) religious or social practices of the Nagas, (ii) Naga customary law and procedure, (iii) administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law, (iv) ownership and transfer of land and its resources, shall apply to the State of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides," Constitution of India, Part XXI, "Temporary, Transitional, and Special Provisions," https://necouncil.gov.in/sites/default/files/uploadfiles/371A.pdf.

Article 371A, which has worked both to the advantage and disadvantage of Naga society. It has helped in protecting the traditional life of the Nagas; but more importantly, it has led to discrimination in many areas, particularly against women.[29] As reported by the *Morung Express*, "while the apex tribal organizations in the state were against women reservation the state cabinet after thorough deliberations decided that elections would be conducted to the urban local bodies with 33 percent women."[30]

Theological Contours of Women Witnessing from the Margins

Mission at home and elsewhere is never devoid of ambiguities and complications; at the same time it is constitutive of our call as followers of Jesus and gives material shape to our life in the Spirit. According to Mary Schaller, "A study of women-in-mission and of women's issues does not constitute an autonomous branch of missiology, but adds a necessary perspective to understanding the whole of the discipline."[31] Women have always influenced the shape of mission. In this section, "witness from the margins" is shown to be a plausible methodology in exploring the role of women in mission in India. Women's mission can be seen as having the traits summarized below.

Recognition of agency among the marginalized

Mission in the past, and even today, has often been understood as that which is directed *at* people on the margins of societies. Missions "have generally viewed those on the margins as mere recipients and not as active agents of missionary activity."[32] Looking at the history of how women were placed in the mission fields

29. Vamuzo, *Narratives of Peace*, 5.

30. "Nagaland to Conduct Polls to ULBs with 33 percent Women Reservation," *Morung Express* (Nagaland), 11 August 2016, https://morungexpress.com/nagaland-conduct-polls-ulbs-33-percent-women-reservation. According to reports, NMA's demand was opposed by organizations such as Naga Hoho, Eastern Naga People's Organisation (ENPO), and Ao Senden. All these groups are influential in different pockets of the state.

31. Mary Schaller Blaufuss, "Relationships Rather than Frontiers: Contributions of Women-in-Mission and of Women's Issues to the Field of Missiology," in *Ecumenical Missiology Contemporary Trends, Issues and Themes*, ed. Lalsangkima Pachuau (Bangalore: United Theological College, 2002), 176.

32. *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, ed. Jooseop Keum (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 16, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes.

as well as the status of women today, it is seen that women have been relegated to the margins—their engagements and contribution in the mission field being reduced to a secondary or subsidiary part of the "bigger" or "more important" mission work carried out by men.

According to the affirmation of mission and evangelism by the World Council of Churches (WCC), mission from the margins recognizes mission as an alternative missional movement taking place against the long-sustained perception that mission can be carried out only "from the centre to the periphery," from the rich to the poor, or "from the privileged to the marginalized."[33] It, therefore, recognizes that the marginalized are agents of mission and exercise a prophetic role, which echoes the biblical foundation that "God chose the poor, the foolish and the powerless (1 Cor. 1:18–31) to further God's mission of justice and peace on earth."[34] What makes mission from the margins distinctive is its emphasis on the agency of the marginalized and their visions as crucial for authentic mission in the world today.

Margins as a space emanating with authentic and alternative visions

Mission from the margins "is not simply to move people from the margins to centres of power but to confront those who remain the centre by keeping people on the margins."[35] "Through their struggles in life and for life, marginalized people are reservoirs of the active hope, collective resistance, and perseverance that are needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God."[36] Though marginalized people do not have the material and financial resources for witnessing in the way many in power are capable of doing, they engage in witnessing "through their lives and everyday resistance."[37] The many movements and initiatives of marginalized people, including women, testify to their determination to resist and expose the forces that deprive them of their rights and dignity. Their mission is not only to destroy the myth of the manipulative centre but to be agents bringing about alternative visions arising from their resistance to injustice and subjugation.[38]

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33. Keum, *Together towards Life*, 15.

34. Keum, *Together towards Life*, 5.

35. Keum, *Together towards Life*, 16.

36. Keum, *Together towards Life*, 16.

37. "Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in 21st Century," in *Christ's Love (Re)Moves Borders: An Ecumenical Reader,* ed. Kuzipa Nalwamba and Marietta Ruhland (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2022), 174, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/geti-2022-christs-love-removes-borders.

38. Deenabandhu Manchala, "Margins," in *Ecumenical Missiology: Changing Landscapes and New Conceptions of Mission,* ed. Kenneth R. Ross et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2016), 315.

The permeable boundaries of witnessing from the margins

A report of a study on mission in the experience of the Dalits states that mission does not become the monopoly of ecclesiastical Christianity. Rather, understanding mission as creating the conditions for liberation helps us to understand it as a process that opens itself to further the liberative agendas of other organizations, groups, and bodies. These may have their base outside the church but yet are involved in the issues of justice.[39]

In being engaged in witnessing from the margins, women embody a missiology with permeable boundaries that encourages the multi-directional movement of ideas, actions, and influences. The ways women have interpreted their actions within those roles, however, do not strictly correspond to the traditional categorization of mission as either evangelizing people through preaching and church planting or creating a particular shape of society. Women involved in mission necessitate that mission of the past and future be considered a holistic exercise, integrating personal piety and physical and cultural spiritualities. Mission, therefore, addresses issues in realms such as economy and violence, as well as the Christian gospel's relationship with culture, recognizing the interrelationship of all these realms. In an editorial in the 1992 *International Review of Mission* issue dedicated to women-in-mission and women's issues, Mercy Amba Oduyoye of Ghana illustrated this broad scope of mission. She wrote: "The passion for justice is most evident in women's mission; women working for the dignity of human beings, the rights of the people whom society marginalises or exploits. . . . Women struggle against racism by mounting boycotts. They stand in picket lines and biting cold to protest against militarism; to cast out the demons that create debt and dependence, prostitution, and pillaging; and to demonstrate a motherhood strong enough to save the earth and all who dwell in it."[40]

In this integrated perspective, a spirituality of justice and abundant life for all humanity and for all of creation become goals of mission.

Shared responsibility: Locating witness from the margins

Witnessing from the margins is guided by the vision of a world based on mutuality and interdependence. It hopes for a polity of justice and freedom that allows the

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39. Deenabandhu Manchala, Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, and Peniel Rajkumar, "When Margins Inform and Reform Mission: Dalit Experiences as Foundations for Mission Theology," in *Foundations for Mission,* Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, vol. 13, ed. Emma Wildwood and Peniel Rajkumar (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), 41.

40. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The Pact of Love Across all Borders," *International Review of Mission* 81, no. 322 (April 1992): 174.

space and possibility for all to celebrate God's gift of life.[41] Mary Grey sees the true significance of Christian co-mission as entering into a shared commitment to seeking and communicating divine truth and as taking shared responsibility for witnessing to and working for God's justice and peace. She further sees mission as participating and communicating in God's ceaseless energy of cosmic healing and whole-making—an activity of listening to the many contradictory voices claiming to speak in the name of truth; an activity of compassion with or even suffering with the victims of the oppressive powers. Yet it is also an activity of "withstanding," of protest, of standing-with those who speak out for truth—naming the demons, resisting false definitions of truth—both from within Christianity as well as beyond its structures.[42] Oduyoye says that "women-in-mission embody an approach to mission that is not just giving and receiving, but relationships of sharing and mutual edification, partnership, interdependence, and solidarity."[43] A women's approach to mission is characterized by mutuality, sharing a relationship of responsibility in the realization of God's holistic mission.

Conclusion

Through their lives and witness, the Naga women striving from within their marginalized situations are attempting a transformation in their lives as well as in the Naga society. What NMA offers us are valuable insights into the contribution of women to the work of mission, seen as the communication of love-in-action. It breaks the stereotypes that strenuous, pioneering missionary work is suitable only for men and that women cannot excel in so-called male occupations of agriculture, building, and administration. It also stands as a proof against the stereotypical judgment that women are rooted to the particular, the affection of the moment, the relationships of the family circle, as they are capable of a deep affection, which includes a large number of people with whom they are in constant communication. The contributions of NMA stand as a way to undo the stereotyping of women as wives, focusing only on their biological reproductive capacity and classifying them simply as economic dependents who make no significant contributions to society and church outside the domestic domain. This form of gender-blindness ignores interpersonal dynamics across gender; it fails to consider women's multiple contributions to society and the church. From the victimhood perspective, women

41. Manchala, "Margins," 316.

42. Mary Grey, "She Is a Great Man! Missiology from a Christian Feminist Perspective," *International Review of Mission,* 81, no. 322 (April 1992): 204.

43. Oduyoye, "Pact of Love," 174.

were viewed sympathetically as victims, which led to a few action plans made by men. However, the victimhood perspective is a capitalist-patriarchal attitude toward women who are at the mercy of men.

Today, by claiming their resourcefulness, Indian women are using women's resources as the basis for doing theology. Likewise, standing amidst conditions of victimhood, the Naga women are nevertheless on the threshold of seeing themselves as agents of mission. Though their works are not recognized by the church and their activities do not come under the traditional church mission construct, it is undeniable that they are serving as agents of transformation in the *missio Dei*. This is evident in the nature of their works in Naga society. In this regard, they provide an alternate paradigm of undoing victimization and exposing resourcefulness.

Chapter 26

Online Dialogue:
Building the Ecumenical Family
with Innovations in Technology

Tijana Petković

New technologies such as the printing press, radio, telephone, television, and computer networks have enabled rapid communication with larger audiences. The internet has become an integral part of our daily lives, organizing both our social and professional tasks. It is increasingly difficult to distinguish between online and offline experiences as they are often intertwined spheres of interaction. Luciano Floridi has referred to this "a matter of *onlife* experience,"[1] where the boundaries between online and offline environments are blurred, creating safer spaces for self-expression.[2]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the global population shifted from traditional offline communication to virtual means of interaction. Individuals worked from home, students attended online lectures, and meetings were held through video conferencing. This change in communication allowed individuals to continue working and have face-to-face interactions from the safety of their homes. The pandemic also impacted religious practices, particularly within Christianity.

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1. Luciano Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere Is Reshaping Human Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 79.

2. Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution,* 88.

While church attendance is a cornerstone of spiritual life for many faith groups,[3] most churches and clergy lacked experience in streaming or recording their services. As a result, while some churches began offering online services that included singing, reading, preaching, and communion, others found such practices to be impractical. Overall, COVID-19 highlighted the need for the church to become more flexible.[4]

The Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) is an international ecumenical short-term study programme.[5] GETI 2022 was composed of two phases: online and in person. During the four-week online phase, participants interacted and familiarized themselves with fundamental study materials and the learning environment. The intention was to prepare the participants for the two-week in-person phase, which accompanied the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), held from 31 August to 8 September 2022, in Karlsruhe, Germany.[6]

This paper presents the findings of a study on how online dialogue can aid ecumenical conversations. The primary objective of this research was to determine the level of satisfaction among participants with the online phase of the GETI 2022 programme and to discover whether they consider the online phase to have enhanced the productivity of the subsequent in-person phase in Karlsruhe.

This study also explored the extent to which the online dialogue facilitated the establishment of connection among participants. The final segment of the survey inquired about participants' views on the viability of conducting the entire programme solely in online or in-person format and their willingness to participate in similar online programmes in the future.

What Are the Elements of Effective Online Ecumenical Dialogue?

Effective communication plays a crucial role in promoting ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. There are various definitions of dialogue and within the Christian

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3. John R. Bryson, Lauren Andrews, and Andrew Davies, "COVID-19, Virtual Church Services and a New Temporary Geography of Home," *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 111, no. 3 (2020): 360.

4. Jerry Pillay, "COVID-19 Shows the Need to Make Church More Flexible," *Transformation* 37, no. 4 (2020), 266–75.

5. See "Ecumenical Theological Education," World Council of Churches, 2022, https://www .oikoumene.org/what-we-do/ecumenical-theological-education-ete#global-ecumenical-theological -institute.

6. For more information on the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), see "The Assembly," World Council of Churches, 2022, https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc /organizational-structure/assembly.

context, it is also understood as "bilateral and multilateral conversation between formal church representatives concerning church-dividing issues, such as disagreement on doctrine, morals, public prayer, and the celebration of the sacraments, biblical interpretation, structures of ministry and governance."[7] These topics have always been discussed, but what is significant now is that we have "technological advances [that] enable new means of pastoral care that do not require physical proximity."[8] The COVID-19 pandemic has expedited the adoption of modern communication technologies, enabling instant communication with people worldwide, and creating numerous opportunities for interfaith or interreligious dialogue. While this mode of communication presents several challenges to interpersonal interaction, it also provides an excellent platform to engage and maintain connections with people.

Digital media, often referred to as "new media" in comparison with traditional media like radio and television, are changing the dynamics of communication in all aspects of our lives, including how we engage in interfaith dialogue. Although online communication presents certain challenges, it is essential to keep in mind that the basic principles and guidelines for in-person dialogue apply to online communication as well. It is important to maintain the same level of respect and consideration in online interactions as one would in face-to-face conversations, even if the distance created by online communication may sometimes feel impersonal.

Throughout the centuries, Christians who were divided needed to engage in discussions regarding their differences and similarities. Establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948 as "a fellowship of Churches which accept Jesus Christ our Lord as God and Saviour"[9] offered a great dialogue platform, bringing together numerous churches in a conscious effort for unity. The aim of the ecumenical dialogue is "the official engagement in the search for visible unity."[10] This does not imply condescension with the aim of flattering other confessions but is

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7. *Called to Dialogue: Interreligious and Intra-Christian Dialogue in Ecumenical Conversation; A Practical Guide* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2016), 7.

8. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), "Ecumenism in the Time of Pandemic: From Crisis to Opportunity"; A Working Paper Synthesis of Responses of the Bishops' Conferences and Eastern Catholic Synods to the 2021 PCPCU Survey on COVID-19 (Vatican City State: Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, 2022), 20, http://www.christianunity.va/content /unitacristiani/en/documenti/altri-testi/-ecumenism-in-a-time-of-pandemic--from-crisis-to -opportunity----.html.

9. T. K. Thomas, "WCC, Basis of," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement,* ed. Nicholas Lossky et al. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 1238–39.

10. Brian Farrell and Jeanine W. Turner, "Thoughts on Ecumenical Dialogue in the Digital Age," *The Ecumenical Review* 73, no. 2 (2021): 254.

rather an honest recognition of diversity and the joint discovery of a more complete truth. It is insufficient for ecumenical dialogues to be limited to individual participation; instead, the individual should act as a means of promoting and securing acceptance of such dialogues by the wider ecclesiastical body.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Communication

Videoconferencing has replaced in-person meetings and tries to create social presence, providing a good platform for dialogue that is more personal than email or telephone calls. This new way of communicating has impacted every aspect of ecclesial life, including ecumenism, and it has both pros and cons.

One of the main advantages of videoconferences is their cost-effectiveness, as they can save money for organizations by eliminating the need for travel and lodging.[11] Additionally, videoconferences can overcome geographical barriers and distances between peripheries and centres. However, a downside is the lack of transition time and spontaneous interaction. Traditional ecumenical meetings typically involve travel, several days of meetings, and opportunities for informal communication.[12] Online dialogues begin at a scheduled time with all participants joining the videoconference simultaneously to begin the agenda. Once the meeting ends, the videoconference is finished, leaving no opportunity for the impromptu bonding that typically occurs during face-to-face meetings. This absence of personal interaction has impacted theological dialogue. In some cases, depending on the subject matter and sensitivity, certain dialogues have been postponed until it was possible to meet in person again.[13]

The second advantage frequently mentioned is the ease of connectivity from any location worldwide. Thanks to significant advancements in online communication, there are numerous applications available for videoconferencing. Statistics indicate that use of digital tools has led to increased participation in ecumenical initiatives. Online programmes organized by churches have seen higher attendance compared to physical initiatives.[14] Livestreamed ecumenical services have also reached more people than could have attended in person. This has led to an improved understanding among different Christian communions.[15] However,

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11. "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Communication," ezTalks, 2022, https://eztalks .com/unified-communications/the-advantages-and-disadvantages-of-online-communication.html.

12. Farrell and Turner, "Thoughts on Ecumenical Dialogue," 257.

13. PCPCU, "Ecumenism in the Time of Pandemic," 21.

14. PCPCU, "Ecumenism in the Time of Pandemic," 21.

15. PCPCU, "Ecumenism in the Time of Pandemic," 22.

inequality remains a challenge as some people face issues such as poor internet connectivity in certain countries, difficulty in scheduling meetings across different time zones, and lack of access to digital tools due to cultural or economic reasons.[16]

The third argument for online communication is its productivity.[17] It is generally faster to make decisions during online meetings, and projects can be executed on time. However, there are some limitations to online communication that stem from the lack of physical presence. For example, participants may not be able to observe each other's body language, which can be important for effective communication. In large videoconferences, it can also be difficult to determine when one person has finished speaking and another can begin, which can disrupt the flow of conversation.

The advantages and disadvantages are heavily influenced by the nature of the discourse and the subject matter being discussed. Very sensitive and personal topics may require face-to-face interaction, while certain aspects of dialogue can be carried out effectively via videoconferencing. The next section explores the pros and cons of the online phase of GETI 2022, as indicated by the responses to the Online Ecumenical Dialogue survey.

Online Ecumenical Dialogue Survey

Introduction and goals of the survey

The online phase of GETI 2022 followed the topics of the WCC assembly. It was divided into six thematic tracks that were prepared individually as well as in the study groups.[18] The weekly assignments followed the methodology and could be easily uploaded onto the online platform. During the in-person learning in Karlsruhe, the programme included lectures, spiritual life, participation in some of the assembly programmes, group work, and organized tours.

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16. PCPCU, "Ecumenism in the Time of Pandemic," 22–23.

17. Mark Lindquist, "Let's Talk: The Pros and Cons of Online and Offline Communication," 2 October 2019, https://www.ringcentral.com/gb/en/blog/the-pros-and-cons-of-online-and-offline-communication/.

18. The six tracks were Healing Memories: Remembering and Transforming Past and Present Wounds at the Border (Historic-Theological Track); Kairos for Creation: Transcending Boundaries of Anthropocentrism to Affirm the Whole Community of Life (Eco-theological Track); Witness from the Margins: Connecting with, and Holding Space for those at the Border (Practical-Diaconal Track); Engaging with Plurality: Dialoguing with Communities Across Borders (Intercultural-Interreligious Track); Body Politics: Body, Health, and Healing: Uprooting Systems that Degrade Bodies at the Border (Just Relations Track); and 4th Industrial Revolution and AI: Human Identity in the Context of Global Digitization (special plenary). See GETI 2022 "Thematic and Methodological Focus: An Overview," World Council of Churches, 28 March 2022, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/geti-2022-thematic-and-methodological-focus-an-overview.

Previously, only the WCC evaluations were available to assess the overall quality of the GETI 2022 programme and participant satisfaction. This study concentrated solely on the online phase, with the following aims:

- To evaluate the degree of satisfaction among students regarding the online phase;
- To determine the number of participants who believe that the online phase contributed to increased productivity during the in-person phase;
- To establish whether students believe that the entire GETI 2022 programme would achieve comparable success if it were conducted exclusively online;
- To ascertain the number of fellow students with whom they still maintain contact;
- To assess participants' willingness to engage in another ecumenical programme conducted online.

Instruments

This study employed a custom-designed Google questionnaire to gather data from respondents. It included information about their gender, age, continent, study group assignment, and prior experience with online learning. The questionnaire was composed of fifteen questions created by the author, including nine statements with closed-ended responses ranging from "totally disagree" to "totally agree," two open-ended questions, and four questions with multiple-choice answers.

Data collection procedure

Due to geographical constraints, data collection for this study was conducted online using Google Forms questionnaires, which were distributed to the participants in the online phase of the GETI 2022 programme. Although official permission from the WCC or GETI 2022 team was not required, I collaborated with the team to obtain a mailing list of all online-phase participants. Prior to distribution, participants were notified about the questionnaire and given the opportunity to opt out if they had any objections or did not wish to participate.

As no objections were raised, a list of email addresses for all participants in the online phase of GETI 2022 was provided to me, along with the instruction to use the bcc option when sending email in order to protect the privacy of participants.[19]

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19. When a recipient's address is placed in an email message's bcc (blind carbon copy) line, the message is sent to that recipient, but that person's address is not visible to the message's other recipients.

All participants were informed of the fundamental research objectives and were made aware that the data collected would be used solely for research purposes, with the guarantee of anonymity in responding to the questionnaire. Data collection took place in November 2022.[20]

Characteristics and results of the sample

The study included 35 participants: 22 females and 13 males. The participants represented various regions:12 from Africa, 10 from Europe, 9 from Asia, 2 from North America, 1 from Central America, and 1 from South America.

The findings revealed that 54.3 percent of the participants were 31-40 years old; 45.7 percent were 20-30 years old. Additionally, responses were collected from participants across all 10 study groups.

To gauge the students' opinions of the online phase of the GETI 2022 programme, I sought to determine how many of them had had prior experience with online learning. The results showed that a vast majority, 97.1 percent, had previously engaged in online learning. Only one participant encountered online learning for the first time during the GETI 2022 programme's online phase.

The first set of closed-type scale questions asked the participants about their satisfaction with the online phase of GETI 2022 programme. The majority of participants (25 out of 35, or 71.4 percent) responded that they were either "very satisfied" or "completely satisfied" with the online phase. An even higher number of participants (28 out of 35, or 80 percent) responded positively to the next question, choosing "agree" or "totally agree" that the online phase helped them become more open to ecumenical dialogue during the in-person phase in Karlsruhe. This indicates that the four-week online programme provided an opportunity for participants to interact, discuss, and prepare themselves for the second phase.

Similar results were obtained from the question, "Do you think that the online phase increased the productivity of the following phase?" Twenty-five participants agreed or totally agreed that the online phase improved the productivity of the subsequent phase in Karlsruhe. In this context, productivity referred to the participants' readiness to engage in deep theological discussions at the beginning of the in-person phase due to the good preparation during the online phase.

Regarding the possibility of building friendships during the online phase, participants had mixed opinions. Chart 1 displays the responses to the question, "Do you think that during the online phase you had already chance to build friendships?"

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20. For the complete results of the questionnaire, see "Online Ecumenical Dialogue," accessed 5 March 2023, https://docs.google.com/forms/d/121Y1r4rMxO9zhQsfoT1LWiCyx8gCMzAEWg -dP3weeMk/viewanalytics.
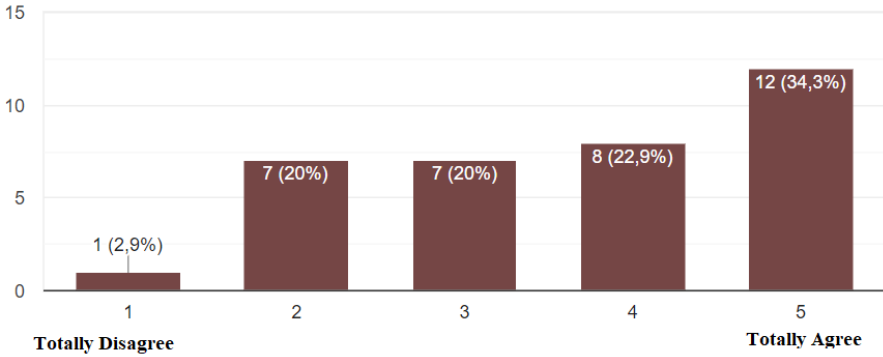
Chart 1. Do you think that during the online phase you had already a chance to build friendships?

The differing responses to the question regarding building friendships during the online phase may be attributed to varying experiences among the study groups. Additionally, it is worth noting that during the online phase, participants were consistently in the same videoconference with facilitators.

As part of the questionnaire, participants were asked whether they thought the GETI 2022 programme would be successful with only an online or only an in-person phase.

The results showed that 48.6 percent, or 17 participants, totally disagreed that the programme would be successful with only an online phase, while only 5.7 percent, or 2 participants, totally agreed. These results were expected.

The next question asked whether the participants believed that the GETI 2022 programme would be equally successful with only an in-person phase. Chart 2 shows that only 5.7 percent, or 2 participants, totally agreed with this statement.
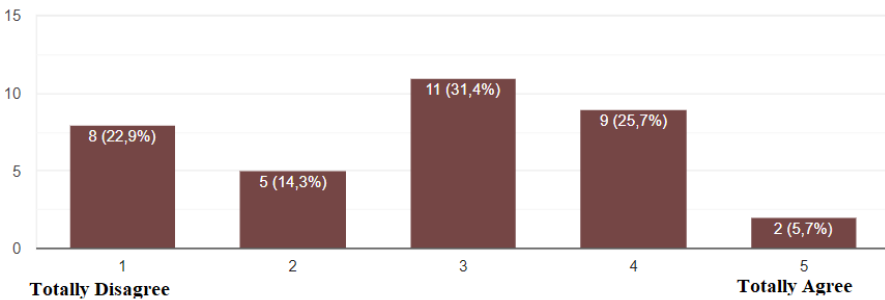

Chart 2. Do you think that GETI 2022 programme would be equally successful only with an offline phase?

Given that our generation has experienced both "offline" and online conferences, I had anticipated that more participants would believe that a successful GETI 2022 programme could be achieved with only the in-person phase.

As a concluding question, participants were asked whether they believed that the perfect combination for the GETI 2022 programme was a mix of online and in-person phases. A majority (85.7 percent or 30 participants) responded with agreement or total agreement.

In the final section of the questionnaire, the focus was on the connections among the participants after the GETI 2022 programme. The results showed that most participants are still in contact with other participants, with 14.3 percent staying in touch with 10 to 20 people.

Toward the end of the questionnaire, we received positive feedback to the question: "How likely are you to participate in online ecumenical dialogues in the future?" A significant number of participants, 77.1 percent (27 individuals), agreed, stating that they are likely to participate in such dialogues.

Conclusion

Previously, face-to-face communication was the only means of communication, but that has changed with the advent of technology. However, human beings remain social creatures who require real-life connections. Online ecumenical dialogue has facilitated communication when alternatives were not feasible. The COVID-19 pandemic expedited this trend, and although it is not satisfactory to everyone, we cannot ignore the valuable role that online communication has played in recent years.

According to Farrell and Turner, face-to-face engagement is still important for complex conversations such as ecumenical dialogue. They argue that churches and ecumenical bodies should acknowledge the significance of transition time and shared physical space in facilitating and sustaining such dialogues.[21]

This research indicates that GETI 2022 participants have a more favourable view of online dialogue than the authors mentioned earlier. This may be attributable to factors such as age and prior experience with online learning, as each generation has its own preferences. Another factor could be the positive impact of the online phase on the in-person phase. Through four online meetings in August 2022, participants became acquainted with each other, shared their stories and experiences, and provided background details about their churches, allowing for deeper discussions during the physical meetings in Karlsruhe.

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21. Farrell and Turner, "Thoughts on Ecumenical Dialogue," 260.

The anticipated outcome of the research was that the participants would not consider an exclusively online phase to be sufficient for the success of GETI. The in-person phase was deemed crucial as it allowed for more in-depth discussions, spontaneous interactions, and the development of personal connections. Surprisingly, only two participants believed that the online phase was the only key to success. This finding can be viewed from various angles. Firstly, it highlights that programmes like GETI are complex and necessitate thorough preparation to attain favourable results. Secondly, the large number of participants in GETI require ample time during the online phase to express themselves and establish relationships, which is essential for the dynamics of group and personal interactions during the second, in-person phase.

According to my research, the combination of online and in-person phases is deemed the ideal approach for conferences and programmes like GETI. As a participant in GETI 2022, I can attest to this. WCC assemblies typically involve many participants, delegates, advisors, observers, and overlapping programmes, providing a plethora of information. For young researchers or students without any previous assembly experience, it would be incredibly challenging to keep up with the programme without a preparatory online phase.

We had the opportunity to meet fellow students, make connections, and discuss the topics during the online phase. This was helpful preparation for the in-person phase. However, building friendships solely through the online phase proved to be difficult. This could be due to the group videoconference setup that did not have breakout rooms, as well as the constant presence of the facilitators. Nonetheless, the positive outcome is that participants have kept in touch with each other after the programme, and most are likely to participate again in future online ecumenical dialogues.

It would be beneficial to conduct a comparative analysis of the results of GETI 2022 with those of previous GETI programmes to understand the impact of the pandemic on the outcomes.

The pandemic has familiarized us with the idea of longer online meetings and videoconferences, preparing us for the possibility of conducting productive online dialogues. However, it is crucial to recognize the situations where in-person meetings are necessary and effective versus those where online dialogue suffices. By making this distinction, we can better determine the appropriate medium for ecumenical dialogues in the future.

CHRIST'S LOVE (RE)MOVES BORDERS…

The Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) of 2022 was an intercultural, short-term, academic study and exposure programme. It was a six-week blended learning experience - four weeks online and two weeks in residence alongside the 11th WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, from 28 August to 8 September 2022. The programme was designed to explore the theme, "Christ's Love (Re)moves Borders".

The tapestry that ensues in this volume brings together the keynote contributions of plenary speakers with the interventions and perspectives of GETI 2022 students in an intergenerational and interdisciplinary theological discussion grounded in scripture and in Christ's love.

The volume editors are deeply involved in Global Ecumenical Theological Institutes (GETI): Kuzipa Nalwamba and her team, as programme staff for Ecumenical Theological Education at the World Council of Churches, organized GETI2022. Benjamin Simon took over the responsibilities for that programme after the 11th Assembly of WCC.

The editors pray that God's Spirit makes the words in this book a gift towards breaking borders so that all of creation 'may have life to the fullest' John 10:10.

World Council of Churches