



55 CURRENT DIALOGUE

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Editorial

Even as I thought that I had finished my editorial for this issue of *Current Dialogue* at the end of what had been a busy week, I was forced to revisit and revise it on account of what happened over the weekend. Two tragic incidents – the bombing of All Saints Church in Peshawar, Pakistan at the end of divine worship on Sunday, 22 September, and the hostage crisis in Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, which left about 59 dead over a bloody weekend – each with their explicitly religious undertones had left a gruesome trail of shock and grief, which meant that my editorial couldn't stay the way it was. At this point, like Abel's blood which cried out to God from the ground, the prayer "God of life, lead us to justice and peace" (the theme of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches), seemed almost to rise from the blood of the innocent and from the cries of the bereaved and injured.

Despite the traumatizing potential of such incidents, which pose the threat of rendering the phrase "God of life" redundant and have the potential to reduce "justice and peace" to mere tautologies, reflecting on the prayer "God of life, lead us to justice and peace" in light of such incidents nevertheless convinces me more that the prayer bespeaks hope. I am thinking here of the resilient hope which persists despite all odds and reposes its confidence in a humanity which is willing to follow the God of life into paths of justice and peace, by learning the ways of life and leaving the ways that make for death, and thereby giving no cause for people to kill and be killed in the name of religion. The prayer "God of life, lead us to justice and peace" seemed, yet again, strangely timely!

This particular issue of *Current Dialogue* seeks to engage with this theme "God of life, lead us to justice and peace". In a kaleidoscopic manner, a very diverse ecumenical group of authors have explored different aspects of the theme. Prof. Wesley Ariarajah reflects on "Challenges the Assembly Theme Poses for Interreligious Dialogue" from a personal point of view, taking into account his involvement with the ecumenical movement. Dr Edmund Kee Fook Chia probes the theme for its interreligious accountability in his article "Whose God of Life? Whose Justice and Peace?"

Various contextual and denominational perspectives are offered. Prof. Petros Vassiliadis offers reflections on "Orthodox Expectations from the 10th Assembly of WCC: The Importance of the Interfaith, Ecological, and Economic Witness", engaging with two recent ecumenical statements; namely, the new mission statement, entitled "Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes", and the 2012 AGAPE Call for Action, entitled "Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All: A Call for Action". Anglican Bishop Graham Kings brings in his experiences as a CMS mission partner, an academic, a priest and a bishop in his article "Life, Justice and Peace through Mission and Dialogue", which has a distinctively autobiographical element to it. Dr Jea Sophia Oh offers a fascinating post-colonial reflection on the theme, rooting it in the struggles of the people of Gangjeon village in Jeju, South Korea, against the construction of a naval base in her article "Delivering Peace Out of the Broken Womb: A Postcolonial Interreligious Perspective", while Ms Esther Parajauli brings insights from feminist theology to reflect on what living with Hindus may entail in the Nepali context in her article "Towards an Other-Shaped Paradigm for Interfaith Relations in Nepal". Dr Kate Wharton draws Christology, monasticism and interreligious dialogue together as she enters into conversation with Archbishop Rowan Williams' theology of engagement with Buddhists in her article entitled, "'Being found in human form...': Monastic Practices of Humility in Archbishop Rowan Williams' Dialogue with Buddhist Leaders".

Apart from these reflections from denominational, autobiographical and contextual perspectives, contributions have touched upon issues of relevance which are related to the theme of the Busan Assembly. Dr Martin Lukito Sinaga highlights how economic injustice can be the landscape for Buddhist-Christian Cooperation in his article "Engaging Economic

Injustice Today: Challenges for Interreligious Cooperation” highlighting the depersonalizing effects of Mammon in today’s globalized economy. The complex issue of theodicy is touched upon by Ms Viktória Kóczán in her article “Answers to Justice-Related Suffering in Rabbinic Judaism”. In a perceptive article entitled “‘Minorities’ and...”, my colleague at WCC Dr Clare Amos explores the consternations and complexities surrounding the use of the term “minorities” while referring to Christians, especially in contexts where Christians are perceived to be under threat. Rev. Dr A. W. Jebanesan offers an analysis of the interplay between nationalism and religious intolerance in his article “Hopes and Uncertainties: Sri Lanka’s Journey to Find Peace and Justice in the Midst of Religious Conflicts”. By being contextually grounded, inter-religiously accountable and theologically challenging, these articles enable us to deepen our reflections on the assembly theme.

The interreligious component of this issue is also enhanced by the contributions of two Buddhist authors: Mr. Vijaya Samarawickrama, an academic from Malaysia, and Ms. Vannath Chea, a social activist from Cambodia, who offer reflections on the themes “Buddhist-Christian Cooperation for Moving Together towards Life, Justice and Peace” and “Buddhist Resources for Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Cambodia”, respectively. This issue of the journal also contains reports on recent interreligious work undertaken by the WCC. I offer a reflective report on an interface between Buddhists and Christians – “Interreligious Interfacing in Search of Life, Justice and Peace” – which took place in Bangkok from 27 to 31 May of this year. Dr Marina Behera offers a brief report on the summer course on “Building an Interfaith Community” which was conducted at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute from 12 to 30 July, 2013. Completing this issue of the journal is a book review by Mr S. John Boopalan on the book: *B. R. Ambedkar, The Buddha and His Dhamma: A Critical Edition*, edited, introduced and annotated by Aakash Singh Rathore and Ajay Verma (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011).

When I started writing my “original” editorial, one of the first things that I wanted to acknowledge was that my last nine months with the Programme on Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation of the World Council of Churches have been a time of joy in every sense of the term. This is not the least because of the whole-hearted and deeply touching welcome that I have received from my colleagues in the Programme on Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, Dr Clare Amos and Mrs Marietta Ruhland. One couldn’t have wished for a firmer starting ground than that of the gracious and generous hospitality in which I have been grounded ever since I arrived at the Council. Working with them has been enriching and energizing and has made my transition into a full-time ecumenical setup meaningful and enjoyable. I am particularly thrilled at the possibility of sharing the editorship of *Current Dialogue* with Clare, because in many ways it bridges the transition, and makes me less estranged from my previous and predominantly academic engagement. I extend my gratitude to the various partners who have consistently offered encouraging accompaniment to the work of the Programme on Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation in their own unique ways. I am much indebted to Ms. Carrie Diaz-Littauer for her patience and hard work in paying meticulous attention to the typesetting and copyediting of this issue of the journal.

The process of waiting and working towards the Assembly has been one of trepidation (given the enormity of the event) and anticipation. As the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches draws nearer, I hope and pray that the reflections offered in this journal would help us understand a bit more of what it entails to pray the prayer “God of life, lead us to justice and peace” in an increasingly interreligious yet deeply polarized world. It is probably at times like this that prayer ceases to be mere “talking the talk” and becomes more of “walking the talk”. Let us therefore “walk the talk” and follow the God of life into paths of justice and peace.

Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, Programme Executive, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation

Challenges the Assembly Theme Poses for Interreligious Dialogue: Some Personal Reflections

S. Wesley Ariarajah

Even after thirty-eight years, my immersion experience in what has come to be known as the “Nairobi Controversy” over interfaith dialogue is still fresh in my mind. My involvement with the WCC in the 70s, however, was not related to interfaith relations. In fact, I had been invited to the 5th Assembly of the WCC in Nairobi (1975) by the Commission on Faith and Order as its Youth Advisor and as one of the speakers at the Unity Plenary. Little did I expect that I would be dragged into the acrimonious and heated debate over interfaith dialogue that dominated the Assembly. My participation in that debate and in the subsequent meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand (1977), which drew up the “Guidelines on Dialogue” led to my greater involvement with the WCC programme on interfaith dialogue and the eventual opportunity serve as director of the programme for over ten years.

I have attended all the WCC assemblies since Nairobi and had the privilege of following the manner that interfaith concern has developed and found its place in the life of the assemblies and the churches over these thirty-eight years. As I prepare to attend the 10th Assembly in Busan, I am grateful to the editor of this special Assembly issue of *Current Dialogue* for requesting me to share some thoughts on the challenges the Assembly theme, “God of Life, Lead Us to Justice and Peace”, poses to interfaith dialogue.

Assembly Themes as “Time Signals”

The former general secretary of the WCC, Dr Philip Potter, used to say that the themes chosen for the WCC assemblies are “time signals” that indicate the times in which the churches lived and the “mood of the churches” at those times when particular assemblies were held. Thus, meeting in the aftermath of the devastations of World War II, the founding assembly in Amsterdam in 1948 chose

“Man’s Disorder and God’s Design” as its theme. Even though Karl Barth had complained that the theme, in keeping with his own theology, should have been reversed to read “God’s Design and Man’s Disorder”, it was man’s (sic) disorder that stared at the face of the churches at that time.

Ever since the second assembly in Evanston (1954) with the theme, “Christ, the Hope of the World,” Christology has been the focus of most of the assemblies, with Jesus Christ as “Light of the World” (New Delhi), “Life of the World” (Vancouver) and one that “Frees and Unites” (Nairobi). Konrad Raiser, former general secretary of the WCC, traces the development of this Christocentric universalism as a conscious choice made by the Council especially under the influence of its first general secretary, W. A. Visser’t Hoof, and points out that we are in the process of transition from that predominant paradigm. He points to the reality of irreducible religious plurality as one of the factors that is moving the ecumenical movement towards a new paradigm.¹

At the 7th Assembly in Canberra (1991) the emphasis moved from the second to the third person of the Trinity, and from missiological proclamations to an attitude of prayer: “Come Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation.” But what is more significant from the dialogical perspective is that since the 8th Assembly in Harare, the assembly themes, in addition to being petitions, have also taken a Theo-centric focus, with such themes as “Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope” (Harare), “God in your Grace, Transform the World” (Porto Alegre), and now for Busan, “God of Life, Lead Us to Justice and Peace”.

There is no suggestion here that the churches are purposefully moving away from their confession of Christ or have any

less confidence in the significance of what God has done in Jesus Christ for the life of the world; rather, what is suggested is that the nature of the times in which we live, the complexities of the problems we face as a whole human family, and the increasing human interdependence in all areas of life have gradually awakened us to a fuller and richer meaning of the word *oikoumene*, not in its limited and literal meaning as the “whole inhabited earth” but as the “whole household of God”. In fact, the root of the word *oikoumene* is *oikos*, meaning a house or a household. In other words, the move of the assembly themes to Theo-centric petitions indicates an increased awareness of the churches that they are part of a larger human family to which their lives are deeply bound.

The move away from a narrow missiological and Christological focus to a prayer directed toward God opens many windows for interfaith relations. It is significant that perhaps with the exception of Buddhists, who might have reservations about the word “God”, people of all religious traditions would be able to pray, by themselves or with us, the petition, “God of Life, Lead Us to Justice and Peace.” Even the Buddhists, who understand the human predicament without the need to refer to God, would without any reservation join us in our quest for life, justice and peace. Does the theme chosen for the Busan Assembly also gives us a “time signal” about the nature of the world we live in and the “mood” of the churches in our day?

The Dialogical Imperative

I am certain that some hundred or two hundred years from now, those who look at the history of the church would say that the emergence of interfaith dialogue, both within the WCC and within the Roman Catholic Church (as the result of Second Vatican Council), brought about a major shift not unlike what happened when the nascent church, which was entirely Jewish, encountered the Greco-Roman world; the church was never the same again in its life and theology. The encounter of Christianity with religions of

our world today is bringing about a similar change, but through much more complex processes and at a slower pace. Discerning persons, however, can read the signs of the time and the dialogical imperative into which even the most conservative of churches are being pushed.

At Nairobi, for instance, where the newly created Sub-Unit on Dialogue was reporting for the first time to an assembly, the whole rationale for dialogue was vehemently challenged. Even though the emphasis of the section dealing with dialogue was on “Seeking Community” across the religious divides, it was feared that dialogue would lead to syncretism, compromise the uniqueness and finality of Christ, and undercut the urgency of mission. “If we truly believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6), and that he has commissioned us to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20), why should we dabble in interfaith dialogue?” was the force of the argument of some strong voices from within the churches in Europe. Even though a number of Asian voices sought to counter the attack, it took a special conference in Chiang Mai to seek clarity on these issues before the dialogue programme survived in the structures of the WCC.

Today, only about three decades later, there are no serious voices questioning the need for interfaith dialogue. Even though the problematic issue of our traditional understanding of mission and its relation to dialogue remains unresolved, the dialogue programme has flourished within the Council and most of the member churches have drawn up their own statements on the importance and significance of interfaith relations and dialogue. In the Western hemisphere, many ecumenical councils at the local level have become ecumenical and interfaith councils. There are interfaith clergy fellowships in many cities of the world. The international interfaith movements have grown and in some parts of the world there are robust Muslim-Christian dialogue programmes and

“Abrahamic Tables” where Jews, Christians and Muslims come together to rebuild their relationships. There seems to be increasing agreement with the sentiment that today “the only way to be religious is to be interreligious.” And as Wilfred Cantwell Smith had said, it would appear that the world “has gone irreversibly interfaith.”

Fields of study related to dialogue, such as the Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology, have become popular in many universities, and there is a movement calling for “deep dialogue” which insists that dialogue should go beyond mutual understanding, building communities, and promoting collaboration to influencing and changing each other at the theological and spiritual levels. In addition, Jewish, Islamic and Buddhist communities have also launched interfaith initiatives of their own and a number of trained Christian clergy, in the United States, for instance, have begun “interfaith ministries” of their own. It has become impossible to keep track of all the interfaith work happening in different parts of the world. Nairobi is a far cry from where we are today.

But does this mean that all is well with interfaith relations? By no means! In fact, even as interfaith relations and dialogue have grown and flourished over these decades we are also facing considerable challenges of a very large magnitude. Among such challenges, I will lift up a few with which we are confronted as we approach the 10th Assembly.

Contemporary Challenges to Interfaith Relations and Dialogue

The rise of militant expressions of religion

The first and the most obvious one has to do with the role of religion in public life and the rise of militant and extremist forms of religious expression. There are several views on the reasons why sections of many religious communities have become religious extremists, but an analysis of these views is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, the phenomenon,

termed in various ways, such as “fundamentalism”, “religion-inspired terrorism”, “religious extremism”, “militant forms of religion”, etc., has raised serious problems to interfaith dialogue. Apart from the difficulties of engaging these groups in any form of dialogue, the reality has opened up a number of old and new questions related to religion and state, religion and violence, religious freedom, religion and human rights, the rights of minorities, the place of missions and so on, with no obvious forum to which all the stakeholders can be brought. The enormous difficulty in dealing with these problems within the established norms of dialogue has led some to doubt the relevance and value of dialogue itself.

In one recent meeting, after I had given an impassioned talk on dialogue and its urgency, one of the participants rose up to ask, “This all sounds very good, but what has dialogue done about the Christian-Muslim conflict in Nigeria where thousands are killed and churches and mosques are burnt down?” Even though I am aware of a number of interfaith initiatives in Nigeria trying to address the issue, I understood the question as one that dealt with the limitations of dialogue in dealing with conflicts. All I could do was give my usual answer: “Interfaith dialogue is not an ambulance service, but a public health programme.” Once conflicts have broken out, we need other skills related to conflict management, conflict resolution, peacebuilding and so on to deal with them. In multi-faith contexts, the role of interfaith dialogue is preventive; it attempts to create a community of conversation or a community of heart and mind that can hold together even when social and political forces attempt to polarize it.

The increased use of religious sentiments in social, ethnic, economic and political conflicts has often been explained as the abuse or misuse of religions, with the claim that all religions are basically for peace, love and harmony. This common response is under increased scrutiny and challenge. “It is too easy in an apologetic concern,” says Francois Houtart, “to claim

that the contents of the religion is essentially non-violent and that it is the human beings who, whether individually or collectively divert them from their meaning." He adds, "In fact, the roots of violence can be found right back in the religions, and that is why the religions can also easily serve as vehicles for violent tendencies."² In a more recent study entitled *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Mark Juergensmeyer documents how the scriptures and doctrines of religious traditions are filled with attitudes that are inherently violent.³

Even though one is also aware of the positive sides of religions, we approach the Assembly in a context where many outsiders to the religious traditions see religions as part of the problem and hold out little hope that they are able to help in building a just and peaceful world. Much of past interfaith dialogue has been built on the understanding of religions as spiritual traditions which deal with questions of Truth and human destiny. Today, we are under much pressure to become more realistic and to also view them as sociological and political entities that are sometimes entrenched in specific ethnic, cultural and socio-political realities.

The change in religious consciousness

The second challenge relates to what is happening to religions themselves. Even though internal diversity has always been part of all religious expressions, the forces of globalization and postmodern attitudes have brought about much more diffused and fragmented religious communities, often with little or no sense of loyalty to the central traditions or original visions that had given them their identity and profile. It has become much more difficult today to determine who is a Muslim, a Christian, or a Jew that can speak for his or her own tradition. I remember when, as a new staff member of the WCC dialogue team I was given the responsibility of organizing the first Hindu-Christian dialogue event, held in Rajpur at the foothills of the Himalayas (1981), the question I asked myself was, "Which Hindus and which Christians?" Eventually, we managed to gather Hindu

representatives from the classical traditions of Saivism and Vaishnavism, some representing the monastic and guru movements and some strong voices from the Dalit community. On the Christian side, I had to look for Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic participants. The subject of the dialogue was, "Religious Resources for a Just Society." It turned out to be a useful encounter, both in terms of interfaith and intra-faith dialogue. Often there were more disagreements among the Hindus and Christians than between them.

The problem has been multiplied manifold in our day. While some under the pressures of globalization seek refuge in the more fundamentalist or conservative expressions of their respective religious traditions, others in response to the same pressures have become much more open to religious diversity. To many in our day, especially to young people, being a Christian, Hindu or Buddhist is no longer as stark an alternative as it used to be. The last two marriages I was asked to officiate were Christian-Hindu and Christian-Sikh weddings. Earlier, I was also asked to officiate with a Rabbi for a Christian-Jewish marriage. What surprised me most was that it was not only the couples that saw no real problem in those unions, but the parents, who were in very good standing with their churches and the synagogue were also quite relaxed about what was happening.

In the Western hemisphere it has become rather common for people to adopt a religion other than their own as a second spiritual home. Many see no contradiction between being in church on Sunday and practicing Yoga or Zen meditation or attending lectures on the Bhagavad-Gita by a visiting Guru on Wednesday. There is pressure to lower the barriers between religious traditions so that the spiritual heritages of all the traditions can become the common property of humankind. The practice of seeing other religious traditions as valid alternatives has come under pressure and requires different assumptions and methods of interfaith dialogue moving forward.

Rebirth of the old missionary imperative

The third issue relates to the internal life of the churches in all parts of the world, especially in Asia and Africa. While much has been done to develop interfaith relations and contextual theologies in Asia and Africa, today there is a surprisingly robust rebirth of the 17th and 18th century missionary enthusiasm to expand the church at the expense of other religious traditions. These neo-missionary movements are predominantly led by local evangelists, but are heavily funded by conservative streams within the United States and other Western countries. These local missionary efforts make the same mistakes the early missionary movement made in relation to other religious traditions, provoking new extremism within the dominant religious traditions. For instance, there are many Christian-Hindu clashes in India and Buddhist-Christian conflicts in Sri Lanka over the issue of conversion, which are reopening old wounds in interfaith relations. These misguided missionary activities are destroying carefully built interfaith relations in these countries.

It is in this context of positive and negative developments in the world of religions and interfaith relations that we need to look at the theme of the 10th Assembly.

Opening Provided by the Assembly Theme

I have already indicated the benefits of a Theo-centric theme for interfaith relations. Religions do differ in their conceptions about God, but within the monotheistic traditions God is the creator, protector and provider of the whole creation. In Christian thinking, there are no Hindu, Christian and Muslim gods. There are different conceptions of God, and the differences do matter, but there is only one God who relates to the one human family. In this context, "God of life" is perhaps the broadest attribute that one can give to God that is both rich and inclusive. Life is not a property of any one religious tradition; it is a gift of God, and we all "live and move and have our being in God."

Of equal interest is the petition to "lead us to justice and peace." Christians have learned through experience that peace and justice in the world cannot be established by any one religious community. These two, perhaps more than any other concerns, need cooperation and collaboration across all human boundaries. What is even more important for us to realize is that there are many in other religious traditions, and with no religious labels, that are deeply engaged in the struggles for justice and peace. They are our partners and co-workers, and the church needs to find ways to institutionalize the collaboration of religious traditions in their struggle for justice and peace in the world. We need to locate this collaboration theologically within a renewed emphasis on the Kingdom or the Reign of God and broader concepts of the Mission of God as God's work of renewing the whole creation towards its intended Shalom.

At the Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago (1993), Hans Kung made the bold assertion that "There can be no world peace until there is peace among religions" and that there can be peace among religions only through dialogue and by affirming some fundamental ethical values to govern our common life together. In other words, the theme can also be understood as a petition to lead us to just and peaceful relations with other religious traditions through dialogue and cooperation.

Whether the Assembly would rise to these challenges remains to be seen. If it fails to do so, an opportunity to take interfaith relations and dialogue to yet another level will have been missed.

Prof. S. Wesley Ariarajah, Methodist Minister from Sri Lanka, and former director of the Interfaith Dialogue programme of the WCC is currently Professor of Ecumenical Theology at the Drew University School of Theology. His latest publication is: *Your God, My God*,

Our God: Rethinking Christian Theology for Religious Pluralism (WCC Publications, 2012).

¹ Konrad Raiser. (1991) *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* WCC Publications, Geneva, see especially chapters 2 and 3.

² Francois Houtart. (1997) *The Cult of Violence in the Name of Religion: A Panorama*. In: Wim

Beuken and Karl-Josef Kuschel (eds.) *Religion as a Source of Violence?* Orbis Books, Maryknoll, p.1.

³ Mark Juergensmeyer. (2000) *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. University of California Press, Los Angeles, California.

Whose God of Life? Whose Justice and Peace?

Edmund Kee Fook Chia

What if . . . ?

What if the headline news in Geneva or Rome or Baltimore announces that a group of Hindus or Buddhists or Muslims were coming to town to have a general assembly? How do you think the residents (leaving aside the traders and those in the hospitality industry) of the city would receive such news? What if it then goes on to state that they are expecting a turnout by the thousands, with participants coming from Bangladesh, Thailand, India, Nepal, Singapore, Japan and everywhere else? How do you think the security services and the CIA would respond? What if you learn that the gathering is focused on the theme “God of life, lead us to justice and peace”? Would that make a difference?

WCC Assembly in Asia

Yet this is exactly what the World Council of Churches will be doing later in 2013. It will be hosting a gathering in Busan, South Korea. From the preparatory documents for this 10th Assembly one notices that this mammoth gathering will be unique in certain aspects. Conspicuously mentioned is the fact that it will be the first WCC assembly taking place in northeast Asia.

What is peculiar about this geographical region is that it is shaped largely by the East Asian religions of Buddhism-Confucianism-Taoism and the indigenous Shamanic traditions. Other regions in Asia would be similarly shaped but by other religious traditions, such as Hinduism in South Asia or Islam in the Malay archipelago. Christianity has not really made inroads into much of Asia. In fact, as the Busan Assembly preparatory documents point out, Christianity remains a minority religion throughout Asia (except for the Philippines and Timor Lorosa) and in some countries, its population numbers even less than one percent. These statistics are spelled out in view of

asserting that the church in Asia “is growing fast” and that “Asia is to become one of the largest Christian populations in the world, on pace to eclipse Europe in the next 30 years.”¹

While this may sound like good news to the four thousand participants of the WCC Assembly, it may not sound as good in the ears of the four million inhabitants of Busan, as well as the forty million who live in Korea or the four billion across Asia. The reality is that aside from growth through new births amongst Asian Christians, the church’s numerical growth is necessarily at the expense of the other religious traditions. For every new Christian convert in Asia there will also be an ex-Buddhist or an ex-Hindu or an ex-Muslim. How do we think news of conversion to Christianity resonates in the minds and hearts of the members of those communities where the ex- come from? The “God of life” whom Christians are proclaiming loud and clear may end up becoming the “God of death” for our neighbours of the other religions. Do we really expect such a situation to be viewed as a manifestation of justice and peace?

Christianity and Other Religions

This is not a new dilemma that has arisen only in contemporary times. It is as old as Christianity itself. Even the early Christians were confronted with a similar predicament. For every new Christian in the early Church there was an ex-pagan or an ex-Jew. The animosity that the members of these communities had against Christians was not so much because they had embraced a new religion, but because they were rejecting the old one. Likewise, the adherents of religions other than Christianity today have little problem with their followers embracing Christianity; they only take issue with their renunciation of the traditions of their ancestors. We therefore have cases of new converts to Christianity

returning home not only to renounce their own religious faith and practice but also to denounce their parents for not doing the same. This is in part due to the force of Christian exclusivism, where the first of the Ten Commandments (“thou shalt not have any other gods before me”) is prioritized over all others, including the fifth (“honour thy father and thy mother”) or the second of Jesus’ Commandment (“love thy neighbour as thyself”). Anything which gets in the way of the first commandment is subordinated as, according to Christian orthodoxy, ours is a jealous God. The Christian has to make an either/or choice for faith and commitment in Jesus as the only Lord and Saviour.

This reality is particularly relevant to note for a WCC assembly being held in Asia. The only other time when the WCC met in Asia was for its third assembly, which took place in New Delhi. But that was more than fifty years ago when the world was not as connected as it is now. Today, Korean airlines will easily fly practically anyone from anywhere to Busan and the news of a gathering of the largest organized Christian body in the world can reach practically everyone and everywhere within seconds. Moreover, this is an era when the phenomenon of pluralism has become more pronounced and acknowledged. Previously homogenous cities are becoming more pluralistic, both religiously and culturally.

While information technology has brought us closer together, it has also enhanced our awareness of real differences, including the differences across religious traditions. Slowly but surely the impulse of having to deal with the religious “other” has been dawning upon the consciousness of many members of religious communities. This, in turn, has implications on how each religion conceives of itself and especially in discerning where its place is and what its mission is in our contemporary, religiously plural world.

The events following the second world war contributed to and tremendously shaped

much of these understandings, especially for Christianity. With the end of colonialism and the rise of independent nation-states also came the end of the Christian empire as it had been known for centuries. Just as the colonial masters were expelled from the former colonies, Christian missionaries were also similarly denied easy access to the peoples in many countries. They were no longer welcome, especially in countries where anti-colonial sentiments ran high. Nevertheless, Christian missionaries continued to enter these so-called “mission countries”, at times clandestinely disguised as English teachers or highway engineers.

In any case, with the decline of Christian hegemony in contemporary society also came the ascendancy of the influence of other religions. Thus, Christianity now has to contend with the world’s other religions as one amongst many. It no longer is privileged, nor does it hold the hegemonic power it once did or the status it enjoyed in yesteryears. This certainly is true in many countries in Asia and increasingly in the West as societies become more secularized and post-Christian. Immigrants from Asia are increasingly establishing gurdwaras, temples and mosques, as well as centres of Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim learning in a number of Western cities. Religious pluralism is here to stay. It is now Christianity’s turn to discern not so much the place of other religions in the Christian economy of salvation, but rather the place of Christianity itself in a world of many religions.

Reappraisal of Christian Mission

The realities and challenges of religious pluralism have resulted in a major renewal and transformation of Christian self-understanding, and especially Christian theologies of other religions as well as Christian theologies of mission. While previously it was probably universally understood that Christian mission is nothing less than to “make disciples of all nations” (where “nations” is almost synonymous with those who are not yet Christian), today the idea of mission has

become a bit more nuanced. Mission is not as readily conceived of in terms of the colonial or conquest model where the Christian missionary's task is the displacement of the existing religion in view of replacing it with the Good News of Jesus Christ which the church alone can offer.

This soul-saving and church-planting method of mission regards other religions as in error at best or in need of fulfilment by Christ or that they may be even false or demonic. Since error has no right to exist it is the Christian's God-given duty to bring to salvation those who would otherwise be condemned to the eternal fires of hell. Stanley Samartha has once described this as the "helicopter approach" to mission. It is mission which comes from above, wipes out all that is on the ground, in order to create a clear landing pad for the helicopter to descend. The leader's guide of the WCC's *Pilgrimage to Busan* booklet includes this lament: "Regretfully, mission activity linked with colonization and empire has often denigrated cultures and failed to recognize and draw from the wisdom of the local people."²

A heightened sense amongst Christians that the method and mode of mission needs to be reappraised also comes from the fact that Christians themselves have in recent decades been on the receiving end of missionary activity. Many cities in the West have witnessed an influx of missionaries of other religions entering Christian-majority enclaves and making disciples of their own faiths. Just as Christians might not be enamoured by these gestures of the other religionists, they have also come to realize that questions need to be raised about the *modus operandi* of their own Christian missionaries. The commandment "do unto others what you would have them do unto you" takes on new meaning and has informed the objectives and methods of mission.

Mission in Partnership

This calls for a radically different understanding of what mission means and

especially what the place of persons of other religions is in God's economy of salvation. While previously the adherents of other religions were viewed either as targets of Christian mission or as competitors, increasingly they are seen as partners and collaborators. With the objectives of mission tweaked to focus on the ushering in of the Kingdom of God, rather than of the church, attention has therefore centred on what Christians can do for the sake of humanity and on behalf of the cosmos. The Good News of Jesus also shifts from an emphasis on the "eternal life" aspects of salvation to an emphasis on salvation's implications for this life. The *Pilgrimage to Busan* guide explains this new understanding of mission thus: "Mission moves the church into a wider understanding of unity – unity with those who are poor, excluded, marginalized, and with the cosmic unity of the whole of God's creation."³

Because the oppression and suffering of the world remains pervasive, it would be erroneous to assume that Christians are the only ones engaged in bringing about the liberation and salvation of the poor, the excluded and the marginalized. Many people of the other religious traditions are also participating in the mission of bringing about what Christians call the "Reign of God". Mission is made manifest whenever the missionary stands on the side of the oppressed and the poor and in confrontation with Mammon, the usurper of God's Kingdom. Such understandings of mission see persons of other religions as standing alongside Christians as partners and collaborators. They are the Christians' co-pilgrims in the common search for God and God's Kingdom here on earth, as in heaven, and serve as agents on behalf of God's mission. The church, therefore, is a participant of this *missio Dei*, just as the other religions are a part as well.

This partnership model of mission followed by Christians is unique in the way that it brings Christians together with their brothers and sisters of other faiths. It is grounded in everyday realities and draws upon the resources of the local

community, including its people. It is what Samarth refers to as the “bullock-cart approach” to mission. It is an approach to mission that moves slowly, is always in touch with the ground and is generally in harmony with the worldview and rhythm of the peoples of Asia. It is also often called “mission from below” – a mission by the people, for the people and of the people. Such an approach to mission is more consistent with the God of life who is leading all the co-pilgrims on earth to establish communities and societies of justice and peace.

Mission in Dialogue

This new approach to mission has paved the way for Christians to be engaged more intentionally in dialogue with members of the other religious traditions. That is why the theme of interfaith dialogue features prominently in many Christian programmes today, not merely as an appendix but as an integral dimension of faith for disciples of Christ. The *Pilgrimage to Busan* booklet expresses these sentiments well:

A few years ago, interfaith relations might have been considered an appendix or afterthought to what the ecumenical movement historically has been about, namely, Christian churches coming together and acting for the sake of God's mission in the world. Today, however, how we relate to and engage with people of other faiths – such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, various spiritualist movements, and other indigenous and localized religions – cannot be postponed until we put our house in order or complete our ecumenical agenda.⁴

We are still in the infancy stages of this dialogue. There is a long way to go and many more people to convince that dialogue is indeed part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian. This new agenda of dialogue needs to be looked at in the context of the whole. Against a two thousand-year-old church, the last forty or fifty years of openness toward other religions is but a few seconds in the span of Christian history. Just as Christianity

developed from having a predominantly Jewish base in its initial stages into a movement which was largely “gentile”-affiliated for nearly two millennia, it is envisaged that this new phase will see it developing into what has come to be known as Global or World Christianity.

“World Christianity” as such has found expression in various forms, and has different emphases according to different contextual realities. In Latin America, its emphasis has been on the liberative dimensions of Christianity. In Africa, its emphasis has been on how the Christian faith is inculturated in the local cultures, especially in areas of language, worship, church laws and interpersonal relationships. In Asia, which is the cradle of the major religions of the world, its emphasis has to be on dialogue with other religions. While Asia will lead the way in encapsulating this dialogical way of being church, the spirit of dialogue must permeate all churches in the *oikoumene*, “the whole inhabited earth”. This is what this new phase of dialogue will represent and this is the task of the future church.

Indeed, this is the spirit which is slowly being embraced by most of the mainline Christian churches. The Roman Catholic Church embarked on this dialogical revolution about fifty years ago at the Second Vatican Council. Its landmark 1965 document, *Nostra Aetate*, was unambiguous when it stated: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions.”⁵ Since then, the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has led the Church through numerous engagements with leaders of other religious communities. Its aim is not only to break down negativity and prejudices but also to foster better understandings and positive relationships.

The WCC's Central Committee meeting at Addis Ababa in 1971 called for the establishment of the sub-unit for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies (DFI). Stanley Samarth became its first director and led the WCC through many uncharted territories in an attempt to establish more congenial

relationships with religions other than Christianity. In a review of the DFI guidelines in 2010, it was highlighted:

[t]he words “mission” and “evangelism” are not often used in this statement. This is not because of any desire to escape the Christian responsibility, re-emphasized in the Nairobi Assembly, to confess Christ today, but in order to explore other ways of making plain the intentions of Christian witness and service.

In other words, the essence of Christian witness and service has to be rethought. This intra-church conversation needs to be augmented by interreligious conversation. Whether we call it “mission” or “evangelism” there seems to be a reckoning that the whole enterprise of a one-way “reaching out” in order to “bring in” is problematic in today’s religiously plural world. This has been made known through dialogue. In the ears of our neighbours of other faiths our Christian understandings of mission and evangelism continue to smack of the colonial approach. We need, therefore, to seriously explore how we ought to be witnessing to our faith, but this time doing so while in conversation with our brothers and sisters of other faiths. This is where dialogue becomes urgent. It helps not only in understanding the religious “other” but in understanding our own Christian faith. In short, our self-understandings of the Christian faith need to be conceptualized together and with our dialogue partners. It is only through patient and persevering dialogue that we will eventually discern what it means to be Christian in today’s world of religious pluralism.

Pilgrimage to Busan

This is precisely what the Busan Assembly has set out to accomplish. The pilgrimage to Busan is described as an ecumenical journey into World Christianity. Since it is passing through Asian terrain it is positioned well for encountering the world’s many religions. WCC leaders aim to employ the Korean *madang* concept to:

[...] root the assembly in the host context and help to give it shape and meaning ...

Madang is the traditional Korean “courtyard” connecting different parts of a house; a space for discussion, deliberation, celebration and fellowship; a traditional centre of family and community life.⁶

In most courtyards around Asia, one will find Christians gathering together with their neighbours of other faiths. They gather there not as nosey neighbours but because they are residents in the adjacent homes sharing the very same courtyard with Christians. Thus, the courtyard is a place of celebration, a place for festivities and rituals, for Christians and adherents of other religions as well. By opting for the *madang* symbol, the Busan Assembly is calling upon Christian leaders around the world to sit in conversation with leaders of other religious traditions so that they can then explore together where World Christianity is headed.

This will be Busan and Asia’s contribution to the face of World Christianity. It is in this open space that Christians will be able to engage in face-to-face dialogue with their neighbours of other faiths. It is through dialogue that they can learn more about the effects of Christian mission and the shape it ought to take in light of the input from their dialogue partners. Finally, it is through dialogue that Christians will discover what actions need to be taken when they call out in prayer for the God of life to lead us all to justice and peace.

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¹ “Asia: A Growing Christian Community” WCC 10th Assembly Website. World Council of Churches, 2013. Web. Accessed 24 September 2013. wcc2013.info/en/about-the-assembly/asia-korea/asia.

² World Council of Churches. (2012) *Pilgrimage to Busan: An Ecumenical Journey into World Christianity*. WCC Publications, Geneva, p. 9. See also wcc2013.info/en/resources/pilgrimage-to-busan.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵ Pope Paul VI. (1965) *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*. Vatican City. See also www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

⁶ “An Assembly in Asia, an Assembly in Korea”, WCC 10th Assembly Website. World Council of Churches, 2013. Web. Accessed 23 September 2013. wcc2013.info/en/about-the-assembly/asia-korea.

Orthodox Expectations from the 10th WCC Assembly: The Importance of Interfaith, Ecological and Economic Witness

Petros Vassiliadis

The Assembly of WCC in Busan, South Korea (30 October – 8 November 2013), is the 10th in the history of this privileged ecumenical organization in the past 65 years of its life, and the 2nd in Asia after its historic meeting in New Delhi in 1961,¹ which was significant for two main reasons: the full integration of the Orthodox Christian family in the ecumenical movement, and the importance it laid on the interfaith encounter and dialogue, especially with regard to the old “mission paradigm” of a more arrogant and offensive strategy that was followed by that time by most mission agencies.

The interdependence, therefore, of the Orthodox Christianity with the new paradigm in Christian mission makes the Busan Assembly a unique opportunity to change in a positive manner, and even more radically, the route of our Churches’ ecumenical endeavour. In my view, the two most important documents that this wide Christian gathering will reflect upon are the new mission statement, entitled “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes”, and the 2012 AGAPE Call for Action, entitled “Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All: A Call for Action”. Both of these important documents address in a complementary way the issues of the Assembly theme, “God of life, lead us to justice and peace.”

It was exactly this kind of activity that initially the Orthodox expected as the very first steps the ecumenical movement should take, even before the 1910 Edinburgh mission conference, considered in the West as the beginning of the ecumenical era.² The famous Circular Letters of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1902, 1904, and later in 1920, to all Christian churches, insisted that social and other practical activities of

the churches should not be postponed until a complete doctrinal agreement is achieved. Only through cooperation in social issues and joint commitment in the name of Christ for the sake of humanity, the circular went on, can a visible unity of the church be accomplished.³ Of course, for unspecified reasons, the Orthodox interest in the course of time shifted to an exclusive quest for Church unity, depriving the most urgent quest for the unity of humankind of the Orthodox energy and theological reflection.⁴

This is what all Orthodox committed to ecumenism expect from the 10th WCC Assembly. In the last Message of the Primate of the Orthodox Churches it was clearly stated:

*Orthodox Christians share responsibility for the contemporary crisis of this planet with other people, whether they are people of faith or not, because they have tolerated and indiscriminately compromised on extreme human choices, without credibly challenging these choices with the word of faith. Therefore, they also have a major obligation to contribute to overcoming the divisions of the world.*⁵

These divisions, due to a certain extent to the failure or shortcomings of modernity in justice, peace, the integrity of creation, and the world economy, is the result of individualism, one of the pillars of modernity, and the ensuing absolute, unconditioned, uncontrolled freedom of the individual in all aspects of life (sexual freedom, legally protected freedom in accumulating wealth etc.), heralded as the new faith after the Enlightenment. Looking at the ambivalence of modernity, many Christian theologians and activists (and many more faithful from other religions, I suppose) insist that there must be a criterion to judge what should be saved from the values and achievements of

modernity and what should be overcome. For with the free-market economy, especially in its latest neo-liberal form, the argument goes on, the power balance changed and modernity from a midwife of human rights became their murderer. On the basis of the old principles of modernity, the present world economic system is increasingly falling back into totalitarian trends. Only if the world listens again carefully and gleans from the shared wisdom of religions and other ages-old ethical traditions, can the positive values of the “modern paradigm” be renewed and revitalized. It is for this reason that from all religious quarters we speak of *liberation of modernity*.⁶

The most tangible aspect of this liberation has to do with the most revered in modern culture of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In view of the last breakdown of the International Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen a few years ago, just to mention one case, it became clear – at least in religious circles – that human rights are awfully ineffective, if they are not accompanied by “human responsibilities”. The people of faith nowadays believe that the values and principles that form part of a common world ethic need not only be publicly declared, they also require an international legal endorsement. One of the most fervent proponents within the ecumenical movement in the Christian world for such a declaration of human responsibilities is the Russian Orthodox Church.

The struggle, however, of Christians and the faithful of other religions to promote a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities is not just a diplomatic initiative aiming at introducing in the world agenda moral values at the expense of the values of modernity and the democratic achievements of the Enlightenment. It came out of pressure from prophetic and charismatic figures and theological movements for social and ecological justice from a faith perspective. “Economic justice” is a concept developed by the churches and the ecumenical movement towards achievement of global

justice through advocating for equitable sharing of resources and power as essential prerequisites for human development and ecological sustainability. Long before a universal concern (political, scientific etc.) and advocacy for the dangerous effects of climate change was developed, theologians from all religious quarters put a critical question to their own religious institutions: “Will the churches have the courage to engage with the ‘values’ of a profit-oriented way of life as a matter of faith, or will they withdraw into the ‘private’ sphere? This is the question our churches must answer or lose their very soul,”⁷ declared a WCC consultation of Eastern and Central European Churches on the problem of economic globalization at the dawn of the 3rd millennium, and the *Call for Action* appeals for “building a common voice, fostering ecumenical cooperation, and ensuring greater coherence for the realization of an Economy of Life for all.”⁸

And the Orthodox Primates clearly affirmed:

*[t]he gap between rich and poor is growing dramatically due to the financial crisis, usually the result of manic profiteering by economic factors and corrupt financial activity, which, by lacking an anthropological dimension and sensitivity, does not ultimately serve the real needs of mankind. A viable economy is that which combines efficacy with justice and social solidarity.*⁹

Therefore, the Christian churches slowly, but steadily, started being concerned about two interrelated aspects of globalization: ecology and economy, both stemming from the Greek word *oikos* (household), and both carrying inherently the notion of communion (*koinonia*), so dear and revered in all Christian denominations, but definitely rooted stronger in the Orthodox tradition. Therefore, it did not come as a surprise that the immediate response by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and Patriarch Bartholomew in particular, who has become known all over the world for his sensitivity for the environment, God’s

creation, and the universally appreciated activities, like the series of the international ecological conferences, for which he was given the nickname "Green Patriarch."

On a theoretical level, however, the most significant and crucial decision, shared now by all religions, was the conviction that from a faith perspective economy and ecology cannot be dealt with in isolation from each other. This interrelatedness is in line with a similar conviction in the ecumenical movement, which for almost half a century had been examining justice and peace as inseparable entities, even at a time when the superpowers during the cold war stubbornly were prioritizing them in differing and opposite ways.

In the wider ecumenical movement, Christians, in cooperation with their partners in interfaith dialogue, came to the conclusion that "various aspects of climate, ecological, financial, and debt crises are mutually dependent and reinforce each other. They cannot be treated separately anymore."¹⁰ The people of faith "discern the fatal intertwining of the global financial, socio-economic, climate, and ecological crises accompanied in many places of the world by the suffering of people and their struggle for life. Far-reaching market liberalization, deregulation, and unrestrained privatisation of goods and services are exploiting the whole Creation and dismantling social programs and services and opening up economies across borders to seemingly limitless growth of production."¹¹

Therefore, the "Call for Action", finalized at the "Global Forum and AGAPE Celebration" in Bogor, Indonesia in June 2012, is not only addressed to the member churches of WCC, to the Christian religion worldwide, to the people of faith in general, and to all partners from the secular establishment (political, social etc.), who share the common ethical values; it is also an expectation of the Orthodox that the Busan Assembly must fulfil. Needless to say, the faithful from all religions must join forces to this end, and

not fight one another. Hostility between them is a betrayal of religion. And the battle for achieving a legally established Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities cannot be won unless it is fought by a united front of people of faith. If all religious leaders and religious communities take actions similar to the ecological initiatives of Patriarch Bartholomew, a new and better world will certainly rise. And this is certainly the will of God!

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¹ The WCC, established in 1948 at its first Assembly in Amsterdam, Netherlands, convened one more assembly in Europe in 1968 (its 4th in Uppsala, Sweden), two in North America (its 2nd in Evanston, United States in 1954, and its 6th in Vancouver, Canada in 1983), two in Africa (its 5th in Nairobi, Kenya in 1975, and its 8th in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1998) one in Australia (its 7th in Canberra, Australia in 1991), one in Latin America (its 9th in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2006), and one, extremely important, in Asia (its 3rd in New Delhi, India in 1961).

² According to Thomas E. FitzGerald, "even before the Edinburgh Conference, the Orthodox Church of Constantinople, known as the Ecumenical Patriarchate, began a new series of discussions on issues related to church divisions as early as the year 1902. On June 12 of that year, Patriarch Joachim III addressed an encyclical..." from *The Ecumenical Movement: An Introductory History*. Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT, 2004, p. 82.

³ Cf. Ecumenical Patriarchate. (1994) Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 1920: 'Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere'. In: Gennadios Limouris (ed.) *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism: Statements, Messages and Reports on the Ecumenical*

Movement 1902-1992. WCC Publications, Geneva, pp. 9-11. As interpreted by the first General Secretary of the WCC and historian Visser't Hooft, this important principle was one of the key requirements of the ecumenical movement (cf. *Minutes and Reports of the Twelfth Meeting of the Central Committee, Rhodes, Greece, August 19-27*. WCC Publications, Geneva 1959, pp. 95-97). Cf. also § 12 *Unitatis redintegratio*, of the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism.

⁴ More on this in Stylianos Tsompanidis. (2011) *The Ecumenical Process of AGAPE (Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth): An Orthodox Perspective*. In: *A Testimony to the Nations. A Vigintennial Volume Offered to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Faculty of Theology, Thessaloniki, pp. 905-923. Also his (1999) *Orthodoxie und Ökumene. Gemeinsam auf dem Weg zu Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und Bewahrung der Schöpfung*, LIT, Münster/Hamburg/London, especially chapters I,1.3, II,2 and II, 1.

⁵ § 6 of the *Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches*, disseminated *urbi et orbe* by the ultimate authority of the Orthodox Church, namely, the Synod of the Primates of the independent (Autocephalous) Orthodox churches, issued on 12 December 2008.

⁶ This is the general message of an international, interdisciplinary, interfaith project, in which Orthodox institutions participated, analyzed in the recently published book by U. Duchrow-F.J. Hinkelammert. (2012) *Transcending Greedy Money: Interreligious Solidarity for Just Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

⁷ Rogate Mshane, *Globalization. WCC-JPC*, presented in the Harare WCC Assembly, 1998. *The Responsibility of World Religions for Ecology, the World Economic System, and the International Law*.

⁸ *Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All: A Call for Action*, § 23.

⁹ *The Message of the Primates*, § 8.

¹⁰ § 10 of the *Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All: A Call for Action*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Engaging Economic Injustice Today: Challenges for Interreligious Cooperation

Martin Lukito Sinaga

Amidst the recurring news of the exclusive trends in people's religiosity in some parts of the world we have encountered a sign of hope in interreligious or interfaith dialogue. Many theologians today are promoting what is called "comparative theology", which I believe will simultaneously envisage a kind of "collaborative theology" between different religious traditions. In this theology, people of faith would bring their resources together, and use them to engage concrete issues in society. However, this hope of collaboration between the faithful is still challenged by pressing issues. There is a felt need that the path of interfaith collaboration should go beyond personal transformation to social transformation. Indeed, the interfaith movement which is actively engaged in promoting peace will mostly bring transformation to the individuals. Whether carried out through sophisticated theological exchanges or through informal sharing of hospitality, the dialogical process will touch the deeper side of our personality. However, unless we go beyond personal transformation we will not reach any meaningful and just social transformation. One of the ways to move towards social transformation in our interfaith encounter is to name the field of our common social engagement today.

In light of many developments in the world today, I suggest that we name "globalization of Mammon/money" as the social field of our interfaith engagement, where Buddhists and Christians can work together for a just society. John D'Arcy May, himself an ecumenics and Buddhism expert, insists that today we need to bring our interfaith resources to the ethical vacuum at the heart of the world's financial markets.¹ Entering into emphatic relationships with one another through interfaith dialogue can make not only a

moral but also a public or political contribution to such a pressing issue.

Global Mammon as the Challenge

Having suggested that we should today name the common social platform for Buddhist-Christian collaborative interfaith engagement as economic injustice, in which both of our faith resources can be deployed to engage the pressing issue of economic injustice, it is only appropriate that we as the faithful see the expression of that injustice through the so-called "global Mammon/money" issue. Having stopped debate on the negative or positive effects of globalization, we now admit that the world is influenced by economic forces which subject aspects of human life to the threat of commodification. This is what globalization is all about.

Religions are deeply challenged by this new shape of the world: we are under a deep shock to realize that the very mission of religions (say, to redeem the world through Christ or to enlighten fellow humans through Buddha's teaching) are undermined by the fact that Mammon (the power or worship of money) has deeply penetrated the daily life of the people. Since the presence of the Mammon is so pervasive – especially on the way it touches the hearts and minds of people, both faiths have no choice but to confront Mammon.

Globalization and the Loss of Identity

In our globalized world we can also clearly see that the loss of personhood is rampant in this system of commodification; persons are reduced to and measured by the money they earn while experiencing their lives anonymously. Yet, this Mammon is like the "spirit" at the very heart of life, and it claims to give security and enhance the

common good if we follow it with fidelity and hard work. Therefore, we find we have a Mammon in our lives which ultimately challenges the very being of our faith and its resources.

What both Buddhists and Christians need to reflect on – by pulling together our faith's respective faith resources – is the illusory and sinful idea that "I should have nothing but more money". This is the illusion and sin in today's globalized world, which has automatically brought us into another poisonous temptation, i.e. greed or *tanha*. Christians, therefore, need to consult our Buddhist friends to better understand how there is "no 'I' separated from another 'I'", in order that all of us can discern when one accumulates money how they will exclude his/her fellow neighbours in an unjust way if the accumulation is through an unjust structure.

In a context where, as we mentioned earlier, there is a profound loss of identity, the challenge is also to be enlightened so that the "others" can spell out their names (their "I"s) in an inclusive way which is somehow related to the other. Paul Knitter's thoughts on this are useful for us to bear in mind in this regard:

One might say that Buddhism describes our true being in a negative way ... Our true being according to Buddhism, is beyond our individual selfhood. We are not ourselves. What we are, Buddhism does not spell out. Rather, it hints at a way of being that is totally devoid of self, of self-concern, or selfishness – a way of being in which we simply and totally open ourselves to the larger picture and take our place within it. For Christians, that place is described as a way of life and being that is embodied in Jesus of Nazareth. Getting beyond the self is living like Christ, with is total trust in the Power that animates the whole, and especially with his central concern for justice and for the marginalized.²

In other words, our collaboration involves using our Buddhist-Christian traditions and resources in order to "learn every name"

which is there in the diaspora of our global world. Lyotard once said, "name cannot be concluded, only learned." This frees humans from the identity of being mere consumers of globalism and gives them an identity which places personhood at its core. By naming others, we free our space from being abstracted anonymously as a mere consumer. Name localizes every subject, concretizes his/her space, and makes him/her a particular person to create her/his own livelihood.

Buddha and Christ are also names; these names help us to understand what is going on in our history. These names make others' names possible to say. He/she will be more than what the world and capitalism require him/her to be in order to survive. By naming someone, we name also their emerging lives as well as the economic platform that each human being is entitled to have. This is our distinctive challenge to that distinctive Mammon of today.

If both Buddhists and Christians believe in the many names and faces of their fellow human beings, then we can connect to each other without being so often mediated by money. Apichai Puntasen, a Thai-Buddhist economist, urges us to analyze what has become the main tool of global injustice, i.e. money³, and stresses how much we need to critique its use. Money as a medium of exchange is not a bad thing, he says, but when it is seen as "a store of value", and when greed steps in to encourage accumulation, "injustice is already at our door." This occurs as money becomes "disembedded" from productive life, and is traded in speculative, global financial markets. The way money is understood now is paired with the idea that consumption will bring life to *sukha*, but it only brings us closer to injustice and *dukkha*, as we exclude those people without money. Therefore, a global effort is needed, especially in changing the triad of capitalism-industrialism-consumerism comprised of money.

The Recovery of Justice

One of the dangerous trends of global Mammon is that it has nearly silenced us from voicing our basic belief in justice by suggesting that freedom and competition should be the ethos of the faithful if they are to function in the market. William Schweiker asks critically if the emergence and spreading of global economic forces – like transnational corporations – provide any means for sensing the claim of justice as basic to self-understanding and to a construal of the world.⁴ The forces of Mammon have in fact silenced us from putting justice as a central dimension of our life. And we know that any cultural force or social institution that nullifies our sense of the reality of justice and mercy is nihilistic in itself. If this is true of our global situation, then both Buddhists and Christians must find ways to ignite their spiritual resources to contain these forces. These nihilistic, anonymous and totalitarian forces, which claim “there is no alternative”(TINA), poison the mind and shackle the heart through illusion and sin. Therefore we should collaboratively develop religious resources from the Buddhist and Christian traditions to enlighten or deliver us from these forces.

According to Brodbeck, a German-Buddhist economist, we should weaken money as it becomes the global power of an illusion.⁵ Money is now a universalized form of thinking as it enters the psyche of humans today. With money, human beings started to communicate not only through speech but through calculating in the form of counting of nearly everything. According to Brodbeck, this brings money to the level of an illusion: *that we accept* money in exchange for performances or products (which means that we believe in its value) and take its unit as a basis for our *calculations*. This cognitive calculus points to the fact that money is based on a *mental process* or, in other words, on a delusion of thought. We handle our relationships – we disregard or forget people’s names and faces – by calculating their performances or products in terms of the fictional monetary unit and relate them to this unit. People are interdependent in

producing, but this interdependence is not consciously realized because it is conveyed by monetary calculation. Thus, calculating in money becomes an illusory foundation of more and more social interactions.

This global illusion is so prevalent precisely because most people believe in this “Mammon”. The domination of money can be broken the moment many people stop following it, begin to talk and connect to each other, spell out each other’s names, discuss what kind of society they want to live in and start to act in alternative ways. Therefore, religious beliefs and traditions now have the opportunity to inform people of a different reality than money for which to care and in which to trust. Any faith tradition which endorses compassion and solidarity should thus extend their power into society, so that money can again be given its limited function in life, as we promote the names and faces of people as the most precious aspects to be considered.

Our Buddhist-Christian engagement for economic injustice should initially focus on and criticize this “metaphysical” assumption of economy we experience in today’s globalized world. “I should have nothing but money” is the metaphysical slogan of that global Mammon. The one who has no money is then viewed as an infidel to be excluded from society. Therefore, a just economy will be available if every name has their livelihood, and if money loses its illusory and total grip on human relationships.

Learning from the Grassroots

In light of the threat of global economic narratives, it is appropriate that we learn from the local. I believe we could learn from our Namibian people who promote the idea that money should also be regarded as “common”, and no longer be regarded as a thing of scarcity. In Namibia, the religious people, hand in hand with NGOs and politicians, promote and work out the so-called “Basic Income Grant”(BIG). From January 2008 to December 2009, a pilot project with a

basic income grant was implemented. It was mainly funded by a German Protestant church, by individual contributions of German and Namibian citizens and by contributions of the German Ministry for Cooperation. The amount paid out per head was N\$100 (around US\$12).⁶ Six months after the launch, the project was found to significantly reduce child malnutrition and increase school attendance. It was also found to increase the community's income significantly above the actual amount from the grants as it allowed citizens to partake in more productive economic activities. The project team states that this increase in economic activity contradicts critics' claims that a basic income would lead to laziness and dependency. After the conclusion of the pilot project phase, a monthly bridging-allowance of N\$80 (around US\$10) to all who participated in the pilot was paid regularly until March 2012. One of the conclusions of the project was that, even with the restriction that only residents of the village could benefit from the grant (for over a year since the pilot's start), there was a significant migration towards Otjivero-Omitara despite the fact that the migrants would not receive the grant. The project concluded that this phenomenon reveals the need to introduce such basic income systems as a universal national grant, in order to avoid migration to particular regions, towns or households. Another finding of the project was that after the introduction of the pilot, overall crime rates fell by 42%, and specifically stock theft fell by 43% and other theft by nearly 20%.

Reflecting from a Thai-Buddhist point of view, Tavitat Puntarigvivat⁷ also sees the emphasis on the local as being important for confronting the injustices of the global. For the Thai context, he says, "Buddhist values need to be revitalized so that the rural people will retain a level of self-sufficiency and independence." In the past, according to Tavitat, before the modernization of Thailand under capitalism, the Buddhist monastery was the centre of village life and Buddhist monks were its cultural leaders. The Buddhist *sangha* provided villagers not

only with Buddhist teachings, culture, and ritual, but also education, medical care and occupational advice. In such a community, the spirit of sharing and cooperation prevailed; villagers shared a common local Buddhist culture. However, this Thai rural social structure, with the Buddhist *sangha* at its centre, has collapsed under the impact of economic dependence and social dislocation. What is needed today in rural Thailand, he adds, is what he calls a "Buddhist base community", with leadership from well-educated or well-informed Buddhist monks or laity. Such a community would seek to promote the enduring values of Thai culture, which are ultimately rooted in a religious worldview. Cultural identity would be fostered through the adaptation of such values and Buddhist social ethics would become guidelines for action. The economic model of such a Buddhist base community would be one of relative self-sufficiency rather than (free) market dependency.

Having said all of the above, I also recognize that it is important that we do not forget the "non-metaphysical" or "material" part of economic injustice. Money, which has an inflated value (it is an illusion, indeed!), is now hovering globally to find its landing zone, by grabbing (they say: "investing in") people's land. Therefore, we need to organize our local communities for the sake of our self-sufficient economy, which will bring justice into society.

In a Buddhist-Christian dialogue sponsored by WCC/LWF, addressing greed (and the economic injustice it creates), we asked the faithful to promote generosity and cultivate compassion for others. We encouraged effective preaching and teaching as well as spiritual practices such as meditation and prayer to motivate Buddhists and Christians towards personal and social transformation.⁸ We identified four examples of such efforts from around the world: local exchange and trading systems (LETS), in which trading is done in local and regional currencies; cooperative banking; decentralized energy; and

localizing the production and exchange of basic commodities such as water and food. At the bottom of all this is the urgent need to bring the “commons” for all people, so that *justice will be creative* where room for all people will be given and used as means to enhance their good life.

It is important for us to ensure that *inclusiveness and justice* are inextricably linked in the interfaith movement for justice to be effective in facilitating transformation. In Indonesia, for example, the problem of minority religious rights and freedom are defended by an interreligious stance. The street rally for minority rights – in that Muslim-majority country – is always backed by imams and *ustadz* (Islamic teachers). It is this Muslim engagement and inclusivity which has opened the way to justice for minorities. Globally, we can also point to 20th century social justice movements like Civil Rights in the United States, Hind Swaraj on the subcontinent and the struggle in South Africa as inclusive movements. Some suggest that the definition of inclusiveness should include justice, because a diverse society must strive for common peace, freedom, equality and prosperity. Conversely, the definition of justice must include inclusiveness because justice will never be achieved unless all groups are involved.⁹ It is particularly important for dominant and majority groups enter the struggle in a spirit of solidarity with those likely to be affected the most.

In conclusion, it can be said that dealing with the loss of identity that globalization brings, recovering the voice of justice which globalization blurs and learning from local and grassroots contexts can be important points of learning for us, as Christians and Buddhists, as we seek to promote just and creative acts which promote life in the context of today's globalized world.

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¹ See, John D'Arcy May and Linda Hogan. (2011). Visioning Ecumenics as Intercultural, Inter-religious, and Public Theology. *Concilium* 2011/1, pp. 70-81.

² See Paul Knitter. (2009) *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*. Oneworld, Oxford, p. 118.

³ Aphicai Puntasen. (2009) The World's Crises and the Response to the Crises by Buddhist Economics. In: Dion Oliver Peoples (ed.) *Buddhist Approach to Economic Crisis – 6th UNLV Conference Volume 4-6 May 2009*, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Press, Wangnoi, pp. 1-27.

⁴ See his article, “Responsibility in the World of Mammon: Theology, Justice, and Transnational Corporations” in: Max Stackhouse (ed.) *Religion and the Power of the Common Life*, Trinity Press, Pennsylvania, 2000, p. 129.

⁵ Karl-Heinz Brodbeck “Money, the Global Power of an Illusion: A Buddhist Perspective.” PDF file. Accessed 24 September 2013. www.khbrodbeck.homepage.t-online.de/illusion.pdf.

⁶ See their website: www.bignam.org. Some of the notes here are taken from Wikipedia. Basic Income Guarantee. *Wikipedia*. Accessed on 24 September 2013. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basic_income_guarantee.

⁷ See, “Toward a Buddhist Social Ethic: the Case of Thailand”, *Cross Current* 48, Fall 1998, pp. 347-365.

⁸ See, Martin L. Sinaga (ed.) *A Common Word: Buddhists and Christians Engage Structural Greed*, Lutheran University Press, Minnesota, 2012.

⁹ See, Eboo Patel, et al., “Inclusiveness and Justice: the Pitfalls and Possibilities of Interfaith Work/Response”, *Cross Current* 55/1, 2005, pp. 17-40.

Delivering Peace Out of the Broken Womb: A Postcolonial Interreligious Perspective

Jea Sophia Oh

When we talk about interreligious dialogue, we may think of some constructive activities between different religious traditions such as a dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity, Hinduism and Islam, Confucianism and Christianity, Daoism and Christianity, etc. In this paper, having a dialogue between two major religious traditions in terms of a specific theme is not my concern. Rather, I focus on the Jeju people's spirituality, which is a collection of folk beliefs and myths and I compare that to neo-colonialism and cultural imperialism in the 21st century which is based upon a power structure of capitalism, globalization and battling addiction. However, the theme of this paper is not simply dichotomizing peace and war or *salim* (enlivening) and *jugim* (violence) as a parallel structure. Beyond a comparison of *salim* and *jugim*, I would like to find a postcolonial vision of interreligious dialogue through observing the long struggling of the Gangjeong village of Jeju in South Korea against the construction of the naval base. First, we have to learn about the mythology of Jeju, especially its creation story, to see the meaning of the Gurumbi Rock in Gangjeong village of Jeju. Second, we have to ask what it means to build the naval base in Jeju, why it is colonialism and why we need to decolonize "nature as a whole", including humans from human imperialism. Third, we need to find how we make peace and dialogues in the midst of the imperialism and violence against our ecosystem.

She Who Creates (Creating: *salim*)

Jeju Island in Korea is one of the most beautiful volcanic islands in the world. The people of Jeju Island believe that Jeju was created by the Goddess Sulmoondae. According to the mythology of Jeju, Jeju is a beautiful handmade masterpiece of Sulmoondae, the Giant Creator. She

divided the earth from the heavens by stretching her legs so that the earth became a separate place. She made the beautiful Mt. Halla and Sungsan Sunrise Peak by moving and changing the positions of sands and rocks like an artist designs and carves images. Rivers and valleys were made by her urination. She was irritated since a herd of deer came into her vagina because they thought it was a cave. So she ejaculated tremendous amounts of water that eroded mountains and made rivers and the ocean. She is a Giant Grandmother. Her pillow is Mt. Halla and her seat is the Gurumbi Rock in Gangjeong. After she created Jeju, she became a mother of five hundred children, feeding and raising them. What she did was the same as what typical mothers do at home. When she washed laundry, she stepped one foot on the Gwantal Island and the other foot on the Jigui Island and covered the whole part of Jeju Island with her skirt as if she embraced the people of Jeju and clarified the entire Jeju Island. She sacrificed her body while she was cooking a huge pot of porridge for her children. Her hungry children were fed without knowing that her body became a part of the porridge. Her body was melted in her children as *bab* (food) for life.

Sulmoondae, the Creator Goddess, is far different from the traditional image of the Christian God, so-called heavenly Father. She is a representative image of typical mothers of Jeju who are diligent, independent, brave, objective, eco-centred, active, hardworking, and self-giving mothers. What she does is actually what typical mothers of Jeju do: delivering children, taking care of children, cleaning, washing, cooking, all the activities which make things alive. In the traditional sense, we call these home activities *salim*. *Salim* refers to women's tasks such as cooking, cleaning and washing, raising children,

and managing household affairs. Although *salim* has been gendered and degraded as exclusively women's tasks in Korea, *salim* also means making things alive, restoring, and enlivening, including all diverse activities that make things alive and keep things living. Sulmoondae embraces both the narrow and broad meanings of *salim* in her activities. Sulmoondae became the food of her children. Her children mourned their mother by standing in all different places of Jeju and becoming the five hundred guardian rocks in Jeju. Jeju is the sacred body of Sulmoondae, the incarnation of her *kenosis*, self-giving love. Therefore, Jeju is the body of Sulmoondae Halmang (the Eternal Grandmother), among which the Gurumbi Rock in Gangejong is like the womb of Sulmoondae. The Gurumbi Rock is one of the most beautiful natural objects in Jeju. In the centre of Gurumbi Rock, there is a natural fountain, Halmang-Mool (the Eternal Grandmother's water, the Sacred Living Water). The natural spring of Gurumbi is like her Sacred Vagina, the place to give birth that never dries. According to the creation mythology, the ocean and the streams of Jeju were made of Sulmoondae's urine. By her ejaculation, oceans and streams flow and grow for feeding the entire living beings in Jeju Island abundantly. The people of Gangjeong have used Halmang-Mool (the Sacred Water) for rituals (weddings and funerals) and healing. It is not just water, but the Sacred Water for healing and enlivening. For the Jeju people, Sulmoondae is the Living Creator who protects and enlivens the Jeju people. She is the Mother of Jeju mothers, the Grandmother of the Jeju people. She is the Salimist Goddess. The Korean eco-feminist theologian Chung Hyun-Kyung writes, "Salimist is a woman warrior who protects and enlivens the earth. She is a goddess within herself who loves and respects herself."¹

Hysterectomy of the Creator Goddess (Colonizing: *jugim*)

According to a *New York Times* article dated 18 August 2011:

*In January [2011], the South Korean Navy began construction on a USD 970 million base in Gangjeong town, Jeju. Once completed in 2014, it will be home to 20 warships, including submarines, that the navy says will protect shipping lanes for South Korea's export-driven economy, which is dependent on imported oil. It will also enable South Korea to respond quickly to a brewing territorial dispute with China over Socotra Rock, a submerged reef south of Jeju that the Koreans call leodo. Both sides believe it is surrounded by oil and mineral deposits.*²

Villagers from Gangjeong have been protesting against the construction of a naval base on Jeju Island for several years. As the military project would impact the ecosystem of a UNESCO's World Heritage sites, 94% of Jeju's residents have voted against the base in a referendum. Nevertheless, the South Korean government has insisted on carrying out the project. The majority of the Gangjeong villagers and peace activists from all over the nation and from overseas have protested against the naval base for over five years. On 7 March 2012, the South Korean Navy, together with the construction company Samsung Corporation, started blasting out the Gurumbi Rock foundations in the coastline. By the next day, hundreds of activists had arrived on the island to stop the navy from blowing up the coastline further for the construction of the docks. Many have been arrested.³ Now, people cannot even enter into the Gurumbi Rock which has been invaded by dynamite (more than 10 tons) many times (more than 100 times). The Sacred Body of Sulmoondae is destroyed by many dynamite explosions. It is a hysterectomy of the Creator Goddess, raping her Vagina and tearing her Womb up from her Sacred Body.

The Creator of Jeju, Sulmoondae, is the Salimist Goddess who enlivens nature, including humans. She is the God of Life for the Jeju people. Building the naval base in Gangjeong town in Jeju is totally against the Sulmoondae Goddess' creation purpose. The antonym of the

word *salim* is *jugim* (intentional killing). *Jugim* refers to all destructive activities, such as killing, marginalization, oppression, exploitation, coercion, colonization, contamination of the environment, destruction of the ecosystem, etc. *Jugim* is not natural but exists contrary to nature and the unnatural activities of life which engage in violence.

This building of the naval base is not only the *jugim* of the people, the land, and the whole ecosystem in Jeju, but is also the neo-colonization of Korea by the American Empire. "Fight to the death against the American imperialists' anti-China naval base!" says one banner, according to the New York Times. "Many villagers and anti-base activists from the Korean mainland suspect that the naval base will serve less as a shield against South Korea's prime enemy, North Korea, than as an outpost for the United States Navy to project its power against China."⁴ The naval base is likely to satisfy U.S. military interests in the Pacific Ocean in order to restrain China's rapidly growing economic and military power. Korea has been a bulwark against Chinese expansion since the end of World War II. When it is built, Jeju will operate as the base camp of the U.S. military.

The United States already has 219 bases on foreign soil in the Asia-Pacific; by comparison, China has none. The Jeju base would augment the Aegis-equipped systems in South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam and the U.S. colony of Guam. The Pentagon has also positioned Patriot PAC-3 missile defence systems in Taiwan, Japan and in South Korea, which hosts more than 100 U.S. facilities. The rationale behind this "empire of bases" was once the "containment" of communism. Obama's Pacific pivot is a turbo-charged update: not to contain communism but to contain China—economically, politically, and militarily. China has responded by accelerating its production of armaments, including a new aircraft carrier, while courting its own regional allies. As these two global behemoths shape a new geostrategic rivalry and arms race,

tensions are dangerously escalating, and smaller nations and peoples are pressured to choose sides.⁵

This is the same situation as the Korean proverb, "When the whales battle, the shrimps get crushed." An American Film Director, Oliver Stone, visited Gangjeong and said that the naval base is part of the "Asia pivot" being constructed by the United States and that Jeju was going to be "on the frontline" of any future conflict.⁶ This threatens the lives of Korean civilians instead of contributing to peace in the Pacific.

Edward W. Said, a founding figure of postcolonial studies, defines the term "imperialism" as the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; "colonialism" is almost always a consequence of imperialism.⁷ Even though, in our time, direct colonialism has largely ceased, the United States has neo-colonized South Korea. This is one of the apparent cases in which the American Empire exercises its colonial power over Korea by controlling and ruling South Korea from their own "military mentality" in the name of peace. The American Empire has shaped the flow of history far from the borders of the United States, just as empire shaped history within them. George W. Bush stated in his 2002 State of the Union Address: "America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge, thereby making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and pursuits of peace."⁸ Catherine Keller, a leading constructive theologian, says that this is a straightforward announcement of the *Pax Americana*, and by an implication widely noted, to building an empire.⁹ It threatens peace on Jeju Island since the naval base can create higher tension in North East Asian region.

A world-renowned eco-activist, Vandana Shiva, considers "eco-apartheid" as war: "Not only is corporate power converging with state power for the great resource grab, corporate-state power is emerging as militarized power to undemocratically

impose an unsustainable and unjust agenda on the earth and its people. That is how the war against the earth becomes a war against people, against democracy and against freedom.”¹⁰ Building a naval base in Gangjeong can be an example of “human imperialism” against the ecosystem. Building the naval base has already been destroying Gangjeong’s environment and has severely interrupted the ecological life. Eventually, it will change and damage the whole ecosystem of Jeju Island. Even though the Korean government – unsympathetic to non-human nature rather than just humanity – has undertaken the naval base project, it still can be viewed as a postcolonial issue. In this case, the state exercises its sovereign power to dominate the nonhuman nature, which has been greatly devastated. Eventually, humans will be affected as well. Many ecological movement groups and ecologically-minded individuals from Korea and from overseas resist this eco-destructive project, which will eventually break the rhythm of the ecosystem and destroy multiple life forms. This can be considered an example of humanity’s colonization of nonhuman nature. It is not *salim* but *jugim*.

Out of the Broken Womb (Decolonizing: *salim* dialogue)

The government authorities are using illegal force and violence to repress the anti-naval base protesters. The anti-naval base protesters march together in various ways on numerous occasions. Not only the Gangjeong villagers, but also diverse people from the Korea mainland and from all over the world participate in the Gangjeong peacemaking movements. Peacemaking activism creates solidarity beyond religious and spiritual boundaries. People who want peace in Gangjeong gather together and protest against the naval base. There is no boundary of age, gender, class, nation, culture, ethnicity, and religion. Buddhists, Christians, indigenous religious believers, artists, musicians, theologians, filmmakers, farmers, divers, etc. all resist together against the militarism in Gangjeong. Facebook networking is also very active

under the banner of “Save Jeju Island, the Town of Life and Peace, Gangjeong!” The villagers invite anyone who is committed to peace to join this peacemaking movement.

This is amazing, that as much as the state power violently suppresses the Gangjeong peacemaking movement, the solidarity for a peace march in Gangjeong becomes more solid and powerful. In the process of anti-naval base protests, people from all different places, religions, cultures, classes, etc. get together for peacemaking. This is a place of *salim* dialogue. From a postcolonial perspective, I would call this a “third space of hybridity.” According to Homi K. Bhabha, one of the most important figures in postcolonial studies, hybridity is a sign of the presence and engagement of colonial power. “The effect of colonial power is seen to be production of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs.”¹¹ Nevertheless, the colonial power produces a creative place of solidarity of the colonized. Bhabha adopts the concept of hybridity for the subversion of authority in colonial discourse and resistance against the dominant imperialist power of the colonizer. To Bhabha, hybridity is defined as “a problematic of colonial representation” that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other denied knowledge enters upon the dominant discourse and estranges the basis of its authority.¹² Hybridity deconstructs the binary logic and melts away the difference between “self” and “other”. As such, hybridity seeks a “third space”¹³ beyond the polarizations and deadlocks of identity politics.

This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.¹⁴

For Bhabha, the third space is a hybrid place of newness for both the colonizer and the colonized. It is that place which has no primordial unity or fixity, and therefore, is a place where one creates a newness, hybridity:

*The Third Space constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.*¹⁵

Under the state power and U.S. militarism, Gangeong has created a third space of solidarity which is transcultural, transnational, multireligious, interdisciplinary, etc. for decolonizing. Peacemaking organizations from Korea and from overseas gather together under the banner of the Creator Goddess Sulmoondae who embraces and clarifies the entire Jeju Island. Peacemaking involves the work of decolonizing movements and entering into *salim* dialogues – work that is only done through the power of life, as our prayer of the Busan Assembly states: “God of life, lead us to justice and peace.” It is a boundary-breaking movement. We do not need a standard form of dialogue for peacemaking. It does not matter what your religious background is; peace is made of all the collective activities of enlivening, *salim*. Any religion that practices *jugim* against life becomes an empire. No religion can claim to contain all truth. It also cannot be denied that there are elements of truth in the different religions. In order to make peace out of violence, I suggest collecting all the constructive and enlivening points for life from diverse traditions, including mythologies, and weave them together to bloom and bear the flowers and fruits of peace. As a quality of life, peace is not the absence of violence but the presence of the fullness of life. Rather, people call for peace when there is violence. Consequently, the peacemaking march and *salim* dialogues will continue whenever the sovereign power exercises *jugim* against people, land and ecosystem. As the Salimist Goddess

Sulmoondae clarifies: the whole island of Jeju like a mother washes her children’s clothing. As long as there is a destructive force of *jugim* against life, we can’t stop continuing *salim* dialogues. For peace and justice, we have to declare a sacred “No!” to *jugim* and a sacred “Yes!” to *salim*.¹⁶

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¹ Chung Hyun-Kyung. (2001) *Goddess-Spell According to Hyun Kyung*. Yeolimwon, Seoul, 18.

² Choe Sang-Hun. “Island’s Naval Base Stirs Opposition in South Korea.” *The New York Times* 18 August 2011.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Koohan Baik and Jerry Mander. “On the Front Lines of a New Pacific War.” *The Nation* 14 December 2012.

⁶ “Jeju is on the Frontline.” *The Jeju Weekly* 3 August 2013.

⁷ Edward W. Said. (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books, New York, p. 9.

⁸ Mark Whitaker. “Bush & God.” *Newsweek* 10 March 2003.

⁹ Catherine Keller. (2005) *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, p. 37.

¹⁰ Vandana Shiva. (2012) *Making Peace with the Earth*. Pluto Press, New York, p. 5.

¹¹ Homi K. Bhabha. (1994) *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, New York, p. 112.

¹² *Ibid.*, 114.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴ Homi K. Bhabha. (1990) *Nation and Narration*. Routledge, New York, p. 212.

¹⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 37.

¹⁶ Jea Sophia Oh. (2011) *A Postcolonial Theology of Life: Planetarity East and West*. Sopher Press, Upland, p. 33.

Life, Justice and Peace through Mission and Dialogue

Graham Kings

Introduction

In these reflections for the 2013 World Council of Churches Conference in Busan, South Korea, and its theme, “God of life, lead us to justice and peace”, I will be drawing on the wells of my engagement in mission and dialogue in the contexts of Kenya, Cambridge, London and Dorset.

1. God of Abundant Life: African Traditional Religion and the Bible

After a four-year curacy in Harlesden, a multicultural and multireligious parish in North West London, my wife and I were Church Mission Society (CMS) mission partners at St Andrew’s College, Kabare, in the foothills of Mount Kenya (1985-91). The college there trained theological students, community health workers and secretaries.

From my students, colleagues and conferences, I soon learned the significance of African Traditional Religion in the development of African Christian Theology. God is seen as the God of abundant life in Africa and he had not left himself without witness before missionaries came.

Kwame Bediako, the Ghanaian theologian, came to a conference at Kabare soon after we arrived, invited by David Gitari, the Bishop of Mount Kenya East, where we lived. The conference was entitled, “The Living God”.¹ My thinking about religion – which, as a contrast to faith, had been Barthian and somewhat negative at the time – was transformed. Bediako wrote later, in his *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*:

The cross-cultural transmission did not bring Christ into the local African situation. If that were to be the case, then, in African terms, Christ would be a disposable divinity, actually able to be taken, carried

*and brought ... and presumably also, disposed of if not needed. The deeper insight is, however, that Christ, already present in the situation, called in His messengers so that by proclamation and incarnation, He might be made manifest.*²

I developed my thinking on this subject when asked to write an article for *Anvil* in a special edition on Christianity and people of other faiths, “Facing Mount Kenya: Reflections on the Bible and African Traditional Religion.”³ The first section considered the continuity of the concept of God in traditional religion and in Christianity and was entitled “Ngai or ngai?” Should the Kikuyu name for God begin with a capital letter or a small letter? I argued for a capital letter.

The second section looked at *inculturation* with the heading “The Treasures and Wealth of the Nations”, drawing on the vision of Revelation 21:24-27 and the liturgies of traditional African prayers.⁴

The third section was on *confrontation* and headed “Theological Fornication”, a provocative phrase of Lesslie Newbigin’s, in his autobiography *Unfinished Agenda*,⁵ on the line between “inculturation” and “syncretism”. It drew upon the warnings of the prophets against *Baal* worship and considered four ways in which biblical writers were forced to deal theologically with “pagan gods” and how this is reflected in Kenya:

1. continuity (Yahweh is the same God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Exodus 6:3),
2. denial of their existence (Elijah and Deutero-Isaiah),
3. demotion (de-deified as sons of God or angels, part of God’s world-wide administration), and finally, and less commonly,
4. demonization (the Hebrew *sedim* of Deuteronomy 32:17 and Psalm 106:37 is translated in the Septuagint by

daimonioi, a disparaging term for other people's gods).

The fourth section dealt with *salvation* and was entitled "*Extra Regnum Nulla Salus*" (Outside the Kingdom there is no Salvation): this developed as a contrast to Cyprian's phrase *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (Outside the Church there is no Salvation).

I posited five responses which I considered to be biblically inadequate:

1. the denial of God's judgement (universalism);
2. the denial that God's judgement is just (i.e., condemnation by geography or chronology – judged in effect by being born in a place, or at a time, before the coming of the good news of Christ);
3. the denial of the distinction between the people of God and of the world (conflating "covenant" and "image of God" language);
4. the development of the Logos/Cosmic Christ doctrine (where sometimes "universality" shifts into "universalism"); and finally
5. justification by works (e.g., if you are a good Muslim, you will be saved).

Positively, I developed four responses which I considered reflected both the trajectory of the Scriptures and the context of Kenya:

First, the numerous individuals in the Bible outside the covenant who knew God: Melchizedek, Abimelech, Jethro, Baalam, Rahab, Job, Naaman, the Magi, et al. were all important pointers to God's grace.

Second, the position of the patriarchs. Abraham died before Christ but his faith in God illustrates and is equated with our faith God and his Christ.

Third, the surprises of the kingdom: the book of Jonah, Jesus' parables of the messianic feast where people are welcomed from East and West, and the parable of the sheep and the goats.

Fourth, the crisis of the kingdom. The "but now's" of the Gospels and Acts, e.g. "the

times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands everyone to repent", Acts 17:30, also Romans 3:21 and 25. The gospel of the kingdom brings out people's real response to God, which is already hidden deep in their hearts.

2. God of Academic Life: Mission and the Meeting of Faiths

In 1992 I was appointed the first Henry Martyn Lecturer in Mission Studies in the Cambridge Theological Federation, an ecumenical position where I taught in the four theological colleges (two Anglican, one Methodist and one United Reformed) and was also an affiliated lecturer in the Faculty of Divinity. A part-time theological course, a Roman Catholic women's institute, an Orthodox institute, and a dialogue institute also joined the Federation.

While founding the Henry Martyn Centre for the study of Mission and World Christianity⁶ at Westminster College, an Associate Institute of the Federation, I also studied for a Utrecht University PhD which became *Christianity Connected: Hindus, Muslims and the World in the Letters of Max Warren and Roger Hooker*.⁷

When Warren was General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society (1942-63), he played key roles in the conferences of the International Missionary Council, wrote significant books⁸ and edited the *Christian Presence* series, which included the following famous insight, in the general introduction to each volume:

*Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival.*⁹

Warren also wrote a monthly *CMS Newsletter* which had a circulation of about 14,000 around the world. It was read by diplomats and politicians, as well as by missionaries and supporters of mission. He reflected on new books, the contexts of mission in Africa and Asia and

on geopolitics. From 1963 to 1973 he was a Canon and sub-dean of Westminster Abbey. I studied Warren's weekly correspondence with his son-in-law in India, Roger Hooker, who was learning Sanskrit at Varanasi and was engaged in regular grassroots dialogue with Hindu and Muslim friends. Hooker later became the Bishop of Birmingham's Adviser for Interfaith Relations based in the inner-city area of Smethwick. They wrote to each other from 1965 until Warren's death in 1977, and developed a theology of mission and a theology of religion by letter. It seemed to me that Warren was continuing his newsletters in a new style and was pushed on theological issues by a family member. I found the letters by both Warren and Hooker to be a gold mine.¹⁰

I summarized the theology of religion developed by Warren and Hooker as generous, capacious and realistic:

*It is generous in that they saw the best in people of other faiths (rather than the worst) and also in that they wanted to share the wonderful riches of God's grace shown in Christ (rather than keeping that news only within the Christian community). It is capacious in that their theology had room enough for insights about God revealed in the wisdom of other faiths and their concept of eternal life was large enough to include countless people of other faiths. It is realistic in that they did not close their eyes to historical, political and theological clashes that have taken place between Christians, Muslims and Hindus and in that Hooker's practical experience of close friendships informed their "corresponding" theology.*¹¹

This theology of religion reflected the CMS tradition developed by Temple Gairdner, Constance Padwick, Kenneth Cragg and John V. Taylor.

Temple Gairdner (1873-1928) was a CMS missionary in Cairo from 1899 and the author of *Edinburgh 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference*, and the pioneering *The*

Reproach of Islam, which he later retitled, *The Rebuke of Islam*.¹²

Constance Padwick (1886-1968) was one of the leading British women missionaries in the 20th century. She made her way in the Middle East through her own initiative, having been rejected by CMS, but was in very close liaison with various CMS personnel. She wrote biographies of Henry Martyn and Temple Gairdner and published a collection of Muslim prayers.¹³

Kenneth Cragg (1913-2012) was never technically a CMS missionary. He served in Lebanon, taught at Hartford Seminary, in Connecticut, was an assistant bishop in Jerusalem, a reader at the University of Sussex, and Warden of St Augustine's College, Canterbury. His book, *The Call of the Minaret* had a profound influence on mission and dialogue.¹⁴

John V. Taylor (1914-2001), having served in Uganda, succeeded Warren as General Secretary of CMS (1963-74) and then was consecrated Bishop of Winchester (1975-85). His major works on the theology of religion were *The Primal Vision*, *The Go-Between God* and a seminal essay "The Theological Basis of Interfaith Dialogue".¹⁵ Warren described Taylor in a letter to his daughter Pat Hooker, dated 26 April 1973:

*He is head and shoulders spiritually and mentally above any of his contemporaries and is one of the few Anglicans with a capacity for seeing 6 feet in front of his nose and then a little more. What is more he doesn't possess the peculiar Anglican Ecclesiastical squint which gets virtually every important issue out of focus.*¹⁶

In a letter to me, dated 27 July 1997, Taylor wrote:

The historic Christ, the Logos fully revealed, comes as a story that must be told and an image reflected in other human lives – but he does not come as a stranger. He has been there all along, but his footprints were not on the most frequented paths and he is recognized as a face seen in half-forgotten dreams like

*that of the Suffering Messiah foreshadowed in the Old Testament but neglected in the on-going tradition of Judaism. He comes to his own in the other faiths in another way also, in that he, the Logos incarnate once for all in Jesus of Nazareth, matches the need and fulfils the promise of each traditional world-view as though he had emerged from within it with no less relevance than he did within Judaism. We who stand outside the other traditions may only guess how this may be.*¹⁷

From Cambridge I moved to be involved in front-line mission again, in a parish in London.

3. God of Urban Life: Amidst Terror, Justice and Peace

Praying for justice and peace to the God of life, in the midst of death, is not easy. I was vicar of St Mary's Church, Islington near the centre of London, from 2000 to 2009. Islamist bombs were detonated on London Underground trains in July 2005. The route of the Number 30 bus, which was also blown up in Tavistock Square, went past the church.

As I reflected on this atrocity, lines from T. S. Eliot's *The Dry Salvages*, part of his *Four Quartets*, came to mind:

*...To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams; all these are usual
Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:
And always will be, some of them especially
When there is distress of nations and perplexity
Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware Road.*¹⁸

I wondered how we should begin to respond as Christians to this "distress of nations and perplexity on the shores of Asia and in the Edgware Road"? Edgware Road is an underground station in west London where one of the bombs was detonated.

The Sunday after the bombings, I preached on "London Bombings: Warning

and Support" which developed into the first newsletter of *Fulcrum*, an online evangelical Anglican journal, of which I was theological secretary.¹⁹

The warnings were: we are called not to hate Muslims; not to hate terrorist bombers; not to ignore theology; not to scatter blame everywhere; and not to overreact with draconian legislation.

The suggestions of Christian support were: Jesus' response to the Zealots (non-violent peace); Jesus' response to the Samaritans (dialogue); support for the Police and the Judiciary (justice); support for youth clubs (education); support from the heart (prayer).

This was the prayer we prayed on that Sunday:

*Almighty God,
Creator and Judge of all,
through the death of your only Son,
you know tragedy and loss.
We pray for those mourning the death of loved ones killed in the London bombings,
for the wounded in hospital,
for the doctors and nurses,
for the firemen and transport workers,
for the police and intelligence services:
grant them your healing presence, insight and courage.
We pray also for those who planned and planted the bombs:
turn their hearts to peace and bring them to justice,
through him who prayed for his enemies,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

In November 2001, after the Al Qaeda attacks of 9/11 in New York and Washington, we held a civic service. Kristin Bruess, an American member of St Mary's, read out the list of nationalities of people who had died. I interviewed Musa Admani, the Imam "chaplain" at London Metropolitan University: he was very perceptive. After the 7/7 bombings in 2005, I invited Musa to lead a discussion group at St Mary's about Muslim responses to the bombings, and again later interviewed him during a service. We were struck by how the present Islamic context was similar to pre-Reformation

England. Musa was trying to encourage younger Muslim students to get to know the text of the Qur'an in English translations. A former student testified to becoming more moderate as a Muslim, once he had studied the text of the Quran, rather than relying on what he was told by his leaders what the Quran said.²⁰

I was also involved in a Shiite-Anglican dialogue in Maida Vale, the first Vicars and Imams Conference in Britain and in the Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON) of the Anglican Communion. In 2008, NIFCON published an Anglican theology of interfaith relations, *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue*.²¹ Later that year, I led a seminar on salvation and people of other faiths at the Lambeth Conference.

4. God of Rural Life: Education for Dialogue, Justice and Peace

Since 2009 I have been Bishop of Sherborne in the Diocese of Salisbury, focusing in particular on the county of Dorset, in South West England. There are not many people of other faiths in this part of England but I have given a lecture at Bournemouth University on interfaith issues and will be speaking later this year at a meeting of the Council of Christians and Jews in Bournemouth.

Doing theology as a bishop, as well as writing it, often turns out to be exhilarating. At the end of November 2011, I chaired an extraordinary study day with 300 sixth-formers from four Sherborne Schools: The Gryphon, Sherborne Boys, Sherborne Girls and Leweston School.²² We welcomed Peter Kosminsky,²³ the film Director and considered the issues of Israel-Palestine,²⁴ through clips from his Channel Four series, *The Promise*.²⁵

The film interweaves the history of Britain's involvement in the founding of the State of Israel with current events, seen through the eyes of Erin, an 18-year-old girl retracing events in her grandfather's diary. Aired over four 100-minute episodes in the spring of 2011, it explores the little-known experiences of British soldiers serving in Palestine in 1947-48 and

confronts the troubled present-day reality in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We were joined by Rabbi Danny Rich, from London, and the Senior Lecturer in Computer Animation from Bournemouth University, Dr Hammadi Nait-Charif.²⁶

The fascinating questions – many of them unexpected – ranged across the fields of religion, politics and the creative arts. The workshops in the afternoon and the final plenary panel were deeply moving. That evening at Sherborne Abbey, we had an Advent Carol Service with a difference.²⁷ It included readings in Hebrew and Arabic, (with translations) and a song in Aramaic, the mother tongue of Jesus of Nazareth.

Future discussions with sixth formers will include Nicholas Mercer, curate at Gillingham, Dorset, and former senior legal officer of the British Forces in Iraq. In November 2011, he had been awarded the Human Rights Lawyer of the Year award, by Liberty.²⁸

In July of this year, the Diocese of Salisbury and the Episcopal Church of Sudan celebrated 40 years of their partnership-in-mission link. On 9 July 2011, during the Independence Day celebrations in Juba, I sat next to Shik Juma Said Ali, a South Sudanese Imam who was one of those leading prayers at the celebrations: we had long discussions about the just call for independence from the Republic of Sudan in the North and hopes for peace in the new country. Like many Muslims in the South, he was delighted at the new birth of South Sudan.²⁹

Conclusion

These experiences of mission and dialogue in African, academic, urban and rural contexts I have found energizing and transforming. May the God of life, indeed, lead all those present at the World Council of Churches conference further into his reign of justice and peace, centred on Jesus Christ, in the power of his Holy Spirit.

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¹ D. M. Gitari and G. P. Benson (eds.) *The Living God*, Uzima Press, Nairobi, 1987.

² Kwame Bediako. (1995) *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. Edinburgh University Press and Orbis Books, Edinburgh and Maryknoll, p. 226.

³ Graham Kings. (1987) Facing Mount Kenya: Reflections on the Bible and African Traditional Religion. *Anvil* 1987, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 127-143. Robert S. Heaney has reflected perceptively on this theme in his recent Oxford DPhil thesis "Culture, Context and Theology: The Emergence of an African Theology in the Writings of John S. Mbiti and Jesse N. K. Mugambi" (2013).

⁴ This developed later into Graham Kings and Geoff Morgan. (2001) *Offerings from Kenya to Anglicanism: Liturgical Texts and Contexts*. Grove Books, Cambridge.

⁵ Lesslie Newbigin. (1985) *Unfinished Agenda*. SPCK, London, p. 244.

⁶ See www.martynmission.cam.ac.uk/. The year 2012 was the bicentenary of the death of Henry Martyn (1812) and I was invited to give a lecture in the Faculty of Divinity, "Henry Martyn: Missionary Scholar for our Age", available at www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/699.

⁷ Graham Kings. (2002) *Christianity Connected: Hindus, Muslims and the World in the Letters of Max Warren and Roger Hooker*. Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer.

⁸ E.g. Max Warren. (1955) *Caesar the Beloved Enemy*. Highway Press, London; (1955) *Partnership*. SCM Press, London.

⁹⁹ Max Warren, general introduction to the Christian Presence series in Kenneth Cragg. (1959) *Sandals at the Mosque*. SCM Press, London, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰ The originals may be read at the University of Birmingham and copies in the Henry Martyn Centre, Cambridge. Annotated selections are published in *Christianity Connected*.

¹¹ *Christianity Connected*, p. 147.

¹² W. H. T. Gairdner. (1910) *Edinburgh 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference*. Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, Edinburgh and London; (1911) *The Reproach of Islam*. CMS, London; (1920) *The Rebuke of Islam*. United Council for Missionary Education, London.

¹³ Constance Padwick. (1929) *Temple Gairdner of Cairo*. SPCK, London; (1923) *Henry Martyn: Confessor of the Faith*. SCM Press, London; (1961) *Muslim Devotions*. SPCK, London and Oxford; and (1996) *One World*. Catriona Laing wrote a recent Cambridge PhD thesis on Constance Padwick.

¹⁴ Kenneth Cragg. (1985) *The Call of the Minaret*. Oxford University Press, London and New York, Collins, 1956, 1st Ed.

¹⁵ John V. Taylor. (1963) *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion*. SCM Press, London; (1972) *The Go-between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*. SCM Press, London; (1979) *The Theological Basis of Interfaith Dialogue*. *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 68, pp. 373-384.

¹⁶ Cited in Graham Kings. (2000) *Mission and the Meeting of Faiths: The Theologies of Max Warren and John V. Taylor*. In: Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley (eds.) *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, p. 285-318.

¹⁷ Cited in Kings, "Mission and the Meeting of Faiths", p. 309 and in Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson and Rowan Williams (compilers) *Loves Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 714.

¹⁸ T. S. Eliot. (1941) *The Dry Salvages*. Faber and Faber, London, p. 14, and later in (1944) *Four Quartets*. Faber and Faber, London and (1969) *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*. Faber and Faber, London, p. 189.

¹⁹ Graham Kings. "London Bombings: Warning and Support." Accessed 24 September 2013. www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/?1.

²⁰ Graham Kings. (2006) *Worship on Upper Street, Islington*. In: Tim Stratford (ed.) *Worship: Window of the Urban Church*, SPCK, London, pp. 74-86.

²¹ Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns. (2008) *Generous Love: The truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue*. Anglican Consultative Council, London. Also on the web. Accessed 24 September 2013. nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/resources/documents/generous_love_A4_with_foreward.pdf.

²² "Sherborne Schools Explore Israel-Palestine Issues with Peter Kosminsky and Faith Leaders." The Diocese of Salisbury Website. Accessed 24 September 2013. www.salisbury.anglican.org/news/sherborne-schools-explore-israel-palestine-issues-with-peter-kosminsky-and-faith-leaders.

²³ Peter Kosminsky. In *Wikipedia*. Accessed on 24 September 2013. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Kosminsky.

²⁴ A documentary DVD, produced by Jon Pullman, was made of the study day at Sherborne, *A Heartfelt Wish: An Interfaith Search for Justice in Israel-Palestine* (Jews for Justice for Palestinians, 2012). Web. jffjp.com/?p=34938.

²⁵ *The Promise*. Channel 4. Web. Accessed on 24 September 2013. www.channel4.com/programmes/the-promise.

²⁶ "Gallery." The Diocese of Salisbury Website. Accessed 24 September 2013. www.salisbury.anglican.org/gallery-1/a-day-in-sherborne-with-peter-kosminsky.

²⁷ "Advent Carols with a Difference." The Diocese of Salisbury Website. Accessed on 24

September 2013. www.salisbury.anglican.org/news/advent-carols-with-a-difference.

²⁸ "Curate Wins Human Rights Award." The Diocese of Salisbury Website. Accessed on 24 September 2013. www.salisbury.anglican.org/news/curate-wins-human-rights-award.

²⁹ Graham Kings. "South Sudan, The Promised Land." *The Guardian*, 18 July 2011. Web. Accessed 24 September 2013. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2011/jul/18/south-sudan-leaders-of-africa. For a photo gallery of Independence Day, see www.salisbury.anglican.org/gallery-1/sudan-independence-2011.

Towards an Other-Shaped Paradigm for Interfaith Relations in Nepal

Esther Parajauli

Having been recently declared a secular state, interfaith relations between Christians and Hindus in Nepal have become a focus of reflection for many. Though Christians in Nepal have had a history of painful struggle for religious freedom, Nepal is currently home to a variety of Christian groups. Christians are, however, not free from public accusation of proselytizing and destroying the Nepalese culture. But with the decline of religious persecution, Nepalese churches are reassessing their overall mission. It is in this context of rethinking the mission of Nepalese churches that I want to reflect on what the theme of the Busan Assembly “God of Life, Lead Us to Justice and Peace” might imply for the Nepali interfaith context. In light of this theme, I offer reflections on what might be an appropriate paradigm for interfaith relationships in Nepal, taking into consideration my own bicultural identity as a Nepali-Naga Christian (more on this to follow) as well as my own encounter with feminist theology, highlighting the importance of taking into serious consideration “the other” – in the case of Nepal, the religious “other” – for interfaith dialogue to be a form of justice and a means of peace.

Brief Historical Survey of Hindu-Christian Encounters in Nepal: The Encounter of the Other in Nepal

For almost a century, the Jesuit missionaries used Nepal’s natural route to travel between Tibet and India. Though there were positive contacts with local Rajas, the Jesuit mission never took its roots in Nepal. The Capuchin Fathers who arrived on 21 February 1707¹ established mission centres in Nepal by 1715, in Kathmandu. It was under the Malla Dynasty that the doors of Nepal were thus thrown open to the gospel. It is clear that the missionaries used both evangelistic

and medical means to reach the masses – people of other faiths – with the gospel.

Then under the Shah Dynasty, the doors were shut. Nepal had expelled all known Christians and firmly closed its doors to any further infiltration of the gospel. For the next 180 years, the Shah’s and later the Rana Regime, rigorously enforced a strict exclusion policy towards the Christians. This policy was also supported by the politically influential Brahmins, who wanted to see their country and society remain pure and free from the defilement of foreign presence. It forbade Christians – whether foreign, Indian, or Nepalese – to reside in the country. To the global Christian community, Nepal became known as a “closed land”. Meanwhile, Nepali churches across the border, though young, began to grow into their own, concerned for the evangelization of Nepal.

Later, following the revolution during the winter of 1950-51, a new policy of national development opened the country to foreigners. Thus, Christian missions interested in helping in the development of the new Nepal were de facto able to enter as well, but with strict restrictions against proselytizing.² At this time, a group from Darjeeling in India met with some missionaries from the Mar Thoma Church in Kerala, India, to return to Nepal. They discussed how to start the Nepalese Church and whether it should be like the churches found outside of Nepal or if it should be an independent church. The Nepalese Christians decided that the church needed to be separated from foreign mission groups.³ This decision allowed the church in Nepal to develop its own theology and to identify its own leaders.

In 1961, Nepal became an autocracy under the rule of King Mahendra who banned political parties, officially declaring

Nepal to be a Hindu Kingdom and introduced Panchayat, a traditional Hindu form of local governing councils. Under Panchayat, many non-Hindus were persecuted. During these years the Nepali church was an underground movement. In 1990, demands for reform triggered civil unrest on a massive scale, and the Nepali Congress Party gained majority control of the new parliament, which led to a new constitution and many democratic reforms. In 1996, the Maoists got tired of the failing democracy and launched an armed struggle, a civil war that would last for ten years, with secularism as one of its agendas. Nepal was officially declared a secular state on 19 May 2006. The 2007 Interim Constitution of Nepal, in regards to the right to religion, declares:

Every person has the right to profess, practice and preserve his/her own religion as handed down to him/her from ancient times having due regards to the social and cultural traditional practices. Provided that no person shall be entitled to convert another person from one religion to another, and shall not act or behave in a manner which may jeopardize the religion of others. Every religious denomination has the right to maintain its independent existence, and for this purpose to manage and protect its religious places and religious trusts, in accordance with law.⁴

However, Saubhagya Shah in *The Gospel Comes to the Hindu Kingdom* posits that after the political change in 1990, the churches have grown more and more, especially in cities, and there is dynamic evangelistic expansion. These changes have made interfaith relations between Christians and Hindus brittle and provide the impetus for rethinking Hindu-Christian relationships in the Nepali context.

The Encounter of “the Other” on a Personal Level

I believe it is important for me to recognize my existential multi-identity as a Nepali-Naga Christian to engage with the idea of imagining a paradigm for interreligious relationship between Christians and Hindus in Nepal. For most of my life, I

have lived in the North East Indian state of Nagaland where Christians are in the majority. Therefore, at a personal level, I was never confronted with the question of salvation outside of Jesus Christ, instead, I understood my responsibility as a Christian in terms of evangelism. In such a context, my faith enjoyed the comfort of “unquestioned theology”. The change of social location from Nagaland to Nepal was essentially the time I encountered people of other faiths. Even though my father is a Hindu convert, the very reality of having Hindu relatives often created immediate tensions within me. I remember how I would think that it was perfectly fine, and right, rather, for my Hindu relatives to join my family in any Christian activities, even though I myself would struggle to accept their invitation to be part of their religious activities. It is difficult to locate the exact reason for my attitude. Was it because I was in denial of the divine experiences in other religions? Or was it because I was too comfortable in my own Christian religion and consequently so conditioned? Whatever it was, I had my own prejudices toward other religions. Nevertheless, my encounter with feminist theology has conscientized my narrow-minded approach towards the whole concept of “the other” and has laid the foundation for broader theological understanding in relation to people of other faiths. Of the various ways by which I have been influenced by feminist theology in engaging with the other, I would like to mention two in this article.

Lessons from Feminist Theology: The Inevitability of the Other for Interfaith Theology

Feminist theology critiques religion and recognizes its oppressive nature when it takes the form of domination over the other. Along with this denunciation of power, feminist theologians’ critique of the monopolistic understanding of God and divine reality provided exclusively by men, often excluding the voice of the other (in this case, women), had implications for my own interfaith journey. The feminist critique confronts oppressive andro-centric notions of Christianity disseminated by

patriarchy and challenges a move towards unprecedented attempts to re-discover the God of life through embracing the theological proposals of the margins – “the others” – in order to truly realize justice and peace in our society. This spoke to my own narrow-mindedness toward other faiths. Earlier in my life, one of the most intensely entrenched theological understandings I had was that the “God of life” could be captured exclusively and entirely by my limited yet superior Christian understanding. I was reluctant to accept the largeness of God beyond my own theology, which in my opinion exhausted the fullness of God. The notion of the self-sufficiency of my theology contributed to the superiority of my religion. However, I was also concerned that openness to other faiths meant to compromise one’s faith, which might then lead to loss of my identity as a Christian. Openness to other faiths seemed antonymous to being a Christian. This, directly and indirectly, meant that I as a Christian claimed a monopoly over the whole understanding of God, thereby, completely dismissing the possibility of any wisdom and experiences of God in other faith traditions. By helping me to become aware of the politics of the dominant, which ignored the visions and voices of the other when speaking of the divine, feminist theology instilled in me the theological importance of embracing and being embraced by the other.

Feminist theologians also helped me to understand and critique the notion of power which asserted itself over-against the other using religious claims. Kwok Pui-lan, reflecting from an Asian context in *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, critiques that the Bible has often been used as a weapon of domination and taken as a norm to judge other cultures and religions.⁵ In other words, in our attempt to engage with our own understanding of God, other religions and cultures are often negated. Drawing parallels in gender and religion constructions, feminist theologian Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki points out that hierarchy is seen in both sexism, where one gender is constructed as the norm for human

existence and religions, as well as in victorious versions of Christian theology, where other religions have been constructed as not only different, but inferior.⁶ Thus, the whole construction of the relation between Christianity and other religions and gender is carried out through the category of hierarchy, which threatens peace and justice. Instead of promoting mutually-affirming relations it perpetuates hierarchical structures which denounce and dehumanize the other. This was another valuable insight that I gained from feminist theology, which had implications for my interreligious thinking.

A Caveat

I am aware of the colonial and eurocentric definitions of the other that arose out of the philosophical mind-set where the other is that which is “strange” and needs to be conquered, or suppressed, converted and civilized. However, from the history of Nepalese encounters with different faiths, it is plausible to infer that these constitutive incidents reveal the experience of encountering the other, whether they are Christians encountering Hindus or vice versa. Therefore, I have found it not possible to avoid this category of “the other” thus far. I am also conscious of the complexity of the use of the categories of self and the other to talk of the Christian self and the Hindu as the religious other in the context of Nepal. Nepal, despite its claims to secularity, is still Hindu. In a sense, the Nepali self is the Hindu self and the Christian is the other, not just the religious other but the political other. Acknowledging this complexity, my contention is: though Christianity is at the margins in Nepal, in its missional imperatives the Hindus are the other. It is from this perspective I would like to use the category of the Christian Self and the Hindu as the other in this article.

What are the implications of the paradigm of openness to the other for interreligious living in the Nepali context?

One distinctive aspect of the Christian tradition is the fact that the gospel imperative is always an imperative for a permanent openness to the other, the stranger. Hence, hospitality to strangers and mutual recognition of the other is intrinsic to the Christian story of God's love in Christ.⁷ In the same vein, Japanese-born theologian Kosuke Koyama argues convincingly that the gospel is essentially stranger-centred. An inclusive love for the other is at the heart of biblical faith and is the defining characteristic of the early church's understanding of the person and work of Christ.⁸ Therefore, for any genuine interfaith theology, it must be constantly challenged, disturbed and stirred up by the presence of the other, thereby, making the other indispensable. This pertains to the Nepali culture as well.

In a pluralistic context like Nepal, where Christians in some ways inhabit two worlds – the religious world of Christianity and the socio-cultural world of Hinduism – I am aware that there may be complexities and ambiguities involved by the mixing and blending of cultures and religions as we engage with the others, their faiths and theologies, which may impact our own Christian self-understanding. As Hermans and Hermans-Konopka say:

*On the interface of different cultures, a self emerges with a complexity that reflects the contradictions, oppositions, encounters, and integrations that are part of the society at large and, at the same time, answers to these influences from its own agentic point of view.*⁹

Appropriating this statement, it may mean that a self with multiple identities is developed in the process of encountering different categories of our society rather than a self that is unified or "purely integrated".¹⁰ The byproduct of this encounter is the self which is continuously in dialogue with different realities. Thus, in

such a context, which can arguably be described as one of "multiple belongingness", the self and other structural categories influence each other, simultaneously. In such a context, though there is a certain measure of invariability in the essence of that self, there is also a constant dynamic process of engaging with the other around us and also within ourselves which has implications for interfaith relations. Openness to the other in a way also orients us to be open to the ways in which we are influenced by the other in understanding ourselves.

Apprehending the experience of the multi-belongingness of Nepalese Christians and also the challenge of the other-centred nature of the gospel, I want to emphasize that at the heart of a genuine interface with the Nepali Hindu community, would be the challenge for Nepali Christians to overcome the attitude of conquest and adapt mutuality and dialogue as a means of missional engagement. This would consequently also imply that if interfaith encounter is to contribute to peace, especially in the context of Nepal where people are suspicious about the intentions of Christian missions, the challenge is to embrace the expansiveness of the God of peace and justice as understood by the other and identify points of convergence and divergence which need to be acknowledged, affirmed and negotiated to work together towards a life-affirming world. This triggers the impulse towards a fresh understanding of the expansiveness of the divine image in a way which is not constrained by hierarchies of domination (especially gender, race, caste, class and religion) but is set free by cartographies of inclusivism, which, by emphasizing attention to hitherto excluded persons, widen the horizons for delving into the unfathomable mysteries of the divine – the God of life, who leads us to justice and peace.

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¹ Jonathan Lindell. (1979) *Nepal and The Gospel of God*. United Mission to Nepal, New Delhi, p. 2.

² Norma Kehrberg. (2000) *The Cross in the Land of the Khukuri*. Ekta Books, Kathmandu, p. 124.

³ Kehrberg, *The Cross in the Land of the Khukuri*, p. 99-100.

⁴ *The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063 (2007)*. Accessed on 26 August 2013. www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=189180.

⁵ Kwok Pui-lan. (1989) Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World. *Semeia*, 47, p. 25.

⁶ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki. (1987) In Search of Justice: Religious Pluralism from a Feminist

Perspective. In: John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (eds.) *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY. As quoted by Helene Egnell. (2010) Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions. *Modern Believing* 51/ 3, July, 2010, p. 61.

⁷ Christopher Duraisingh. (2000) Contextual and Catholic: Conditions for Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics. *Anglican Theological Review* 82/4, Fall 2000, p. 681 (679-701).

⁸ Kosuke Koyama. (1993) Extend Hospitality to Strangers: A Missiology of Theologia Crucis. *International Review of Mission* 82, no. 327, July/October 1993, p. 283-295.

⁹ Hubert J. M. Hermans and Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka. (2010) *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society*. CUP, New York, p. 2.

¹⁰ Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory*, p. 91.

Answers to Justice-Related Suffering in Rabbinic Judaism

Viktória Kóczyán

As the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches concentrates on the themes of justice and peace inspired by the diversity of Asian contexts, the topic of suffering as related to justice and injustice must be considered from the point of view of different religions to enhance interreligious dialogue in these given contexts. This paper gives an insight into Rabbinic perceptions of human suffering and serves as a possible contribution to Jewish-Christian dialogue that also aims at striving for justice and peace in the Israeli context – one of the most painful conflicts of the Asian world today. In what follows, there is an examination of the concept of justice based on Rabbinic writings that deal with the suffering of the righteous due to perceived injustice.

The concept of justice occupies a central place in Judaism and is associated with the notions of *mishpat*, *zedek*, *zedakah* and *hesed*. As opposed to the Greek-Western view of justice, which concentrates on how to do things, the Jewish idea of justice has a substantive nature, meaning that it is concerned with what human life should be like.¹ Justice, in biblical and rabbinic writings, is closely connected to the “measure for measure” (מדה כנגד מדה) principle: “But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise” (Ex. 21: 23-25). Retribution for enemies and reward for the righteous are both decided on this principle that is based on the idea of balance.²

However, the problem of theodicy – the apparent unjust suffering of the righteous and the wellbeing of the wicked – poses a challenge for all justice interpretations. The topic of suffering is approached by the Torah and several books of the Ketuvim, while the Rabbinic explanations treat the issue in smaller fragments.

Writings like the Book of Job or Ecclesiastes speak about the unexplainable nature of human suffering; there is written material that places the problem of suffering outside of the area of human understanding. In the biblical books themselves, there are references to the fact that there is not such an available system of reward and punishment that could explain the suffering of the righteous and the wellbeing of the wicked adequately.³ The answers to the questions which the problem of theodicy inspires have a mosaic-like nature. There are different explanations covering certain cases, but the unexplainable nature of certain misfortunes is admitted as well.

Afflictions of Love

One of the explanations offered to the seemingly unjust suffering of the righteous is the treatment of misfortunes as afflictions of divine love. According to this idea, God, the loving Father, uses suffering as a means of correction for the people. In this case, the relationship between God and humanity is not spoilt and there is no wrath of God that would evoke punishment, but there is a protecting love correcting humanity which has committed sins, thus ensuring the opportunity of human moral development. Thus afflictions are the sign of the love of God.⁴ Ideally, the righteous, who aim at improvement, can suffer these sufferings of love in love. That is the reason why sometimes it is the righteous who are visited by suffering, states the Tractate Berakoth.⁵ The Amoraim differentiated between two types of suffering depending on whether there was sin preceding it; thus there are sufferings as consequences of the love of God and there are sufferings due to sin.⁶ Another aspect is that God tests the righteous by afflicting suffering on them.⁷

Justice and Punishment for Sins in This World

The classical and most prevailing answer to the question of suffering in Rabbinic theology presents the issue as punishment for sins and breaking the law. This idea has a well-known influence on Christian theology as well; it appears in the Book of Job and is represented by the friends of Job, it appears in Deuteronomy and the Psalms and works on the basis of a cause and effect relationship. The thought also enters the Mishnah, where suffering and pain are seen as punishments for sins, both on the individual and the community level.⁸ In the Tosefta, although there are not many remarks on the topic, the same concept is shared that appears in the Mishnah.⁹ But at the same time, the Tosefta recognizes the atoning power of suffering, like in the case of sacrifices.¹⁰ However, suffering reconciles one to God even better than sacrifice, for in suffering one does not offer something from his/her property, but it is born inside oneself.¹¹ In cases of serious infractions to the law, the relationship of God and humanity can be corrected only by suffering, which of course can be set in parallel with the early Christian martyrdom concepts. The consequence of suffering is a restored relationship with God. Suffering and death can be seen as punishments required by justice or atonements that bring forgiveness and reconcile humanity with God.¹²

Though not in a systematic way, the Mishnah deals with the issue of suffering as well. It happens that the measure for measure principle does not seem to be applied in a balanced way: in the Tractate Shabbath, women's death at childbirth is connected to three infractions of the law – suffering and death are the punishment for breaking the law, but the punishments seem to be bigger than the measure of the infraction.¹³

The fourth chapter of the tractate Ta'anit of the Mishnah teaches about fasting and other restraints related to the anniversary of the destruction of the First and Second

Temple. According to Kraemer, this is parallel to the Yom Kippur celebration, as the goal here is also atonement, and both events are proofs and punishments of sins.¹⁴ As the Mishnah teaches, punishment follows sins, the world of God is a just world; if the individual suffers or if nations suffer, those are the consequences of not keeping the law of God. But at the same time, the book does not give answers to all the different kinds of suffering related to the life of the Jews in the 2nd century; it was not written for Jews in general, but for the rabbis.¹⁵

As the Talmud says, "Just as punishment will be exacted of the wicked in the world to come even for a slight transgression which they commit, So too is punishment exacted in this world of the righteous for any slight transgression which they commit."¹⁶ This leads to the wider spectre of punishment in the world to come.

Justice and Suffering in the World to Come

Rabbi Akiva, being present at the deathbed of his master with the other disciples, was laughing while the others were crying. He believed that as everybody is flawed, no one has the right to rebel against suffering. But his laughter was based on the faith according to which "who does not suffer in this world, receives his reward in this world, but who suffers, will be rewarded in the world to come."¹⁷ This thought that the sufferers will receive their reward in the other world is very similar to the idea of Christian martyrdom, as martyrs were believed to be rewarded in heaven after their death on earth.

The following argument also supports the concept of reward in the world to come. Suffering is precious, as Israel got three gifts – all three through suffering – and these are the Torah, the land of Israel and the world to come. Which is the way then that leads people to life in the world to come? This is suffering.¹⁸

Cohen argues:

Justice can be striven for and looked for only in the future – whether the future of mankind as a whole (the days of the Messiah) or of the individual – i.e., in God, whose justice in judgment is affirmed in the blessing recited in the hour of death, “blessed be the just judge.”¹⁹

Self-Inflicted Suffering – Asceticism

Asceticism and privation were considered sins by the rabbis, who referred to the obligation that humanity has to enjoy the gift of life.²⁰ The Talmud says, “Whosoever fasts [for the sake of self-affliction] is termed a sinner.”²¹ Other passages describe kinds of ascetic starving:

He who starves himself in years of famine escapes unnatural death, as it is said, “In famine He will redeem thee from death.” [Scripture should have said] “from famine.” This is therefore what [Scripture] meant to convey. As a reward for starving himself in years of famine one will escape unnatural death.²²

According to Rabbi Nathan, “The purpose of Scripture was that he [Moses] might be purged of all food and drink in his bowels so as to make him equal to the ministering angels.”²³

However, there appears a certain type of ascetic phenomenon also in Judaism, which is in close connection with sin, repentance, purification and divine revelation. As a withdrawal from the joys of the world, fasting was a habit in certain circles, especially in the era of the Second Temple and before there was an ascetic character present inside Judaism, and also, the first Tannaim tended to have an ascetic nature.²⁴ From the end of the era of the Tannaim we know stories of people who brought upon themselves self-inflicted suffering in the fear that they might have had sins inside themselves; but there were also others, who did not see sin in themselves, but who practiced suffering as a kind of sin-offering.²⁵

Suffering appears not only as coming from the outside, but also as something people undertook voluntarily. Here the concept of repentance is important: one undertakes suffering after recognizing his/her sins so that he/she can become purified through it. This is one of the topics of the 12th-13th century mystic Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg. He and his circle were the initiators of the view that self-torture is part of repentance – a view that had an important influence on Christian monasticism as well. They rolled in snow naked, covered their bodies with honey, had them stung by bees, and fasted for days.²⁶

Looking at the various interpretations of human suffering in a world that is governed by a just God, it is clear that wrestling with this contradictory issue has been intense for two reasons: trying to understand the nature and acts of God whose main attribute is *mishpat*, and setting guidelines for human behaviour which aims at righteousness. The view of human suffering as a consequence of afflictions of divine love reconciles the just and loving nature of God with the negative experiences of God’s creatures. The idea of suffering as punishment is built on the notion of the broken relationship of the Creator and creature due to sin, where further possibilities are provided for humankind to improve the relationship that became damaged by its sinful acts. Thus, suffering plays a major role in restoring the relationship of God and humanity. Based on the expected rewards in the world to come, suffering was explained as beneficial when experienced in this world, an idea which is also grounded in the belief that balance is an important decisive factor in the relation of good and evil. Finally, asceticism entailed an evaluation of sin and righteousness and placed a decision in the human hand: a conscious, self-inflicted punishment could balance the evil, and serve as a reconciling force between God and God’s people.

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¹ S. S. Schwarzschild. (2007) Justice. In: F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum (eds.) *Encyclopaedia Judaica: Second Edition*, Volume 11, Thomson Gale, Detroit, p. 578.

² Cf. E. A. Phillips. (2004) The Tilted Balance: Early Rabbinic Perceptions of God's Justice. *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 14.2, 2004, p. 223-240.

³ L. Jacobs. (1973) *A Jewish Theology*. Darton, Longman and Todd, London, p. 262.

⁴ D. Kraemer. (1995) *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 23.

⁵ L. Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, p. 262.

⁶ E. E. Urbach. (1975) *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*. The Magnes Press, Jerusalem, p. 446.

⁷ S. S. Schwarzschild, *Op. cit.*, 579.

⁸ D. Kraemer, *Op. cit.*, 55.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹¹ G. F. Moore. (1927) *Judaism. In the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, Vol. I. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, p. 546-547.

¹² S. Schechter. (1909) *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*. Adam and Charles Black, London, p. 304.

¹³ H. Danby. (trans.) *The Mishnah*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 102.

¹⁴ D. Kraemer, *Op. cit.*, 60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁶ I. Epstein. (ed.) *The Babylonian Talmud*. The Soncino Press, London, 1936, b Ta^can 11a.

¹⁷ E. E. Urbach, *Op. cit.*, 444.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 445.

¹⁹ S.S. Schwarzschild, *Op. cit.*, 579.

²⁰ P. Hachohen Peli. (2007) Asceticism. In: F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum (eds.) *Encyclopaedia Judaica: Second Edition*, Volume 2, Thomson Gale, Detroit, p. 546.

²¹ I. Epstein, *Op. cit.*, b Ta^can 11a.

²² *Ibid.*, b Ta^can 11a.

²³ *Ibid.*, b Yom 4b.

²⁴ P. Hachohen Peli, *Op. cit.*, 545.

²⁵ E.E. Urbach, *Op. cit.*, 446.

²⁶ L. Jacobs, *Op. cit.*, 250.

“Being found in human form...”
Monastic Practices of Humility in Archbishop Rowan Williams’
Dialogue with Buddhist Leaders

Katherine Wharton

As the Archbishop of Canterbury from 2002 to 2012, Rowan Williams’ biggest impact in the international media was related to his dialogue with Islam, and in particular his attempt to open up a discussion relating to religious freedom and Sharia law in the UK. Less well-known at the time was his extensive work with Hindu, Jain and Buddhist communities, especially among monks and nuns. In this article I would like to concentrate on his engagement with these smaller minority communities in Britain and analyze both his theological intentions and the effects he achieved in practice. Although the former archbishop will always be publically associated with dialogue with Islam, I would argue that some of Williams’ most important reflections on dialogue actually occurred during these visits to some of the smaller religious communities in Britain.

From 2009 to 2012, I worked with Archbishop Rowan arranging his visits to Buddhist, Jain and Hindu places of worship.¹ I always found that he was welcomed by these communities with great reverence as if he were a *bhikku* or *sadhu*. He was greeted in this way because people felt he could transmit holiness to them. He always met with people on their own level, if not lower like a child, and this was recognized as a sign of blessing across religious and cultural boundaries. Although he had incredible gifts in preaching the word, it was his *humility* that consistently affected people of other faiths and was his greatest act of witness to the love of Christ.

During his tenure at Canterbury, Archbishop Rowan often spoke about the Desert Fathers and ascetic texts on the “prayer of the heart”. Although he was not a monk, he had considered this path as a young man, and throughout his life he

founded his approach to preaching and teaching on monastic practices of humility. He defined monasticism as “a living out of the fundamental Christian doctrine of human nature as restored in Christ.”²

In many contexts of his ministry, Archbishop Rowan returned to this idea of monastic practices, particularly repentance and the inner struggle with pride and negative thoughts (temptations), as a means of uncovering restored human nature in Christ.

In the following article I would like to show how Archbishop Rowan’s reverence for monastic practices of humility influenced his approach to dialogue with other religions. I cannot show you how these practices of humility transformed his bearing or demeanour, but I would like to make a brief analogy with some of his reflections on icons in order to show the effect he was capable of having just through his presence.

Archbishop Rowan was particularly interested in the Eastern Orthodox belief that the grace of the Saints can be physically seen and transferred through icons. He stated that the features of faces on icons declare that “it is possible for human beings in communion with Christ to be bearers of divine action and divine light.”³ Although he would never speak about himself in such a way, I often felt that his humility of expression, his way of meeting people, looking into them and listening, and his words, made him a “living icon” to all people regardless of their faith.

“Being found in human form...”

When we speak of someone being “human”, we often mean we can relate easily to them. The “most human” of

people hold all people naturally in relationship. But human nature in Christ is more than this – He holds the “most” and “least” of humans together. Christ’s humility is the unceasing exchange of life from the least to the first and back again.

How can we be “fully human” in our presence to people of other religions? Monastic practices of humility are based on the principle that following Christ’s commandments requires us to reconcile the “highest” and “lowest” in human nature in our own thoughts and behaviour.⁴ This process occurs through the “shame of the face” of monastic repentance. During repentance, there is an expansion or enlargement of the heart,⁵ so that every previous claim to have known or loved Christ is found to be mean and mediocre (“put to shame”) as the true dimensions of the love of Christ begin to be felt. The lowering of the person in repentance occurs in equal dimensions to the “enlargement” of Christ’s presence in their heart. Monastic texts describe tears that occur at the point of being completely humbled (or humiliated) with respect to what was thought to be “love”. The movement of this prayer is like a bow or prostration (*metanoia*). At the moment of the greatest lowering, “the breadth and length and height and depth” of Christ’s love opens up in the heart. From this view: all humans, best and worst, are seen as equal.⁶

Archbishop Rowan Williams presented himself, even though a Church leader, as someone who stood before people of other religions with an internal gesture like a *metanoia*, acknowledging that he knew, as yet, nothing of Christ’s love. Usually, in interreligious dialogue, Christ’s love is presented as a basic ethical principle of love of neighbour, similar in kind to any other form of human love. Archbishop Rowan Williams’ greatest innovation in his approach to dialogue was to maintain his internal humility with respect to Christ’s love, even when speaking to audiences who barely knew the name of Christ.

He described the theological motivation for this in a paper entitled “Anglicanism

and Other Faiths in the Future”, given in 2011.⁷ In this paper, he states that when Christians come to dialogue we should expect to encounter the Word in *all* people. Although these people may not outwardly acknowledge Christ, ultimately, he argued, they are created out of the divine Word, and we should “expect to hear something of Christ” by attending to them.

It is important to acknowledge that when Archbishop Rowan speaks of a person of another faith who has the potential to reveal the Word to us in dialogue, he is not speaking of an enemy of Christ, or of anyone that is hostile to the church. Instead, he is speaking of the “worthy” that are mentioned by Christ when he sent the disciples to the villages to proclaim the good news: “if that house is worthy then let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy let your peace return to you.”⁸ Archbishop Rowan speaks on the presumption that his audience will prove worthy of the Word, but his speech also allows his peace to return to him if it is not received.

In order to see this approach to dialogue in practice, we will now turn to the Archbishop’s address given at the Buddhist Society in March 2012. In this address, he described to Buddhist leaders his relationship to the Word and the practices of humility that he felt prepared him to encounter it in all people, in all places and at all times.

Humility Before the Word of God

At the Buddhist Society, Archbishop Rowan began his address to Buddhist leaders by speaking of the process by which Christian monastic practices of self-examination create humility. He stated that the aim of these practices is to attain “clear vision about oneself” through “vigilance.” He described processes of self-scrutiny, developed by early Christian ascetics such as Evagrius, and observed that:

Christian traditions assume that what arises when we seek to contemplate God is going to be confused, dark, diverse, and

*that if we do not examine it and scrutinise it then the confusion and the darkness will dictate our actions and dictate how we see one another.*⁹

The purpose of monastic practices of humility, for Archbishop Rowan, is to “seek the word, the self-utterance of God coming alive in us, which allows us true sight, truthful vision of the other”.¹⁰

He described the vision of the “other” found through practices of humility as one in which all are loved in equal measure. This can be difficult, the archbishop admitted, particularly when human thoughts and behaviour take diabolical forms. However, he points out that St Isaac the Syrian says that a Christian must “even love the demons, because although they are out to make our lives difficult we are not out to make their lives difficult.”¹¹

Monastic practices of humility, Archbishop Rowan observed, seek a “universal love, a love without condition that is able to embrace all the diversity that the world may bring to us.”¹² He sees this expressed most clearly in the “Centuries on Love” of St Maximus the Confessor:

*St Maximus speaks of how what we love in others as Christians is simply their nature. What we love is what is there. We don't ask ‘Does it make us feel friendly? Does it make us feel better?’ We embrace what is there because that is what comes from the hand of God or from the mouth of God. It is Saint Maximus who says that each thing and each person in the world is a word, an intelligible utterance of the transcendent God. And what we love is that transcendent utterance.*¹³

Throughout his address, Archbishop Rowan anticipated how Buddhists might respond to terms like “universal human nature” or “universal love”. In describing Christ's love as an irreducible, ever-expanding “divine utterance”, he spoke into the Buddhist doctrine that there is no universal except change. He avoided language of stasis, and emphasized experience, so his audience could relate to the way he described the Word:

*We're not turning towards something which is solid and fixed. We are turning always towards the communication that is coming from the divine. There is no thing there that we can lay hold on. There is an act of the eternal coming to us.*¹⁴

In Archbishop Rowan's account, Christian practices of repentance and humility are acts of constant reorientation and readjustment that allow us to respond to an ever-changing flow of energy (utterance) from God. Prayer is our response “to that eternal limitless action which cannot be solidified, cannot be held down.”¹⁵ As we repent our previous inadequate notions of love and knowledge of God, we “seek to remove particular images and perceptions from our minds [...] in order to make contact or be in contact with that eternal limitless act.”¹⁶

This divine utterance is not an abstract, impersonal concept like “emptiness” (encompassing both everything and nothing), but is one that is in its very nature humility: “being found in human form, he emptied himself”. This is not an emptiness that is evasive, but one that restores human nature through creating a bridge between divine utterance and human speech. As Archbishop Rowan states, the truth of Christ's life is found and born witness to not through claiming ownership of the Word, but by “sensing and experiencing in ourselves the self-emptying which has made possible our entire invitation into life.”¹⁷

As a speaker, Archbishop Rowan embodied practices of self-emptying in his approach to his partners in dialogue. He often reversed the usual roles of proclamation and response. Traditionally, it is the angel that brings “Good tidings and great joy to *all* mankind!” But Archbishop Rowan identified instead with the shepherd – a figure made tiny beneath the Word, as if a star were hovering overhead. In this position, as shepherd, he managed, through making himself small, to bring people of other faiths to sense something of what it meant to be beneath the star.

The Unexpected Word: A Buddhist Response

In response to Archbishop Rowan's discourse on the divine utterance at the Buddhist Society, a Japanese Jodo Shinshu Buddhist priest, Kemmyo Taira Sato, read a poem he had composed. This poem began by using recognizably Buddhist or Daoist impersonal language:

*Great Nature,
The very origin beyond form...*

As it progressed towards its last lines, the poem changed and ended with words like a hymn:

In praise of the infinite Light of Eternal Life.

In the setting of the Buddhist Society, as this poem was read out loud – the Archbishop's face lit up. He had spoken previously of expecting to hear the Word in the mouth of the other but perhaps he had not *really* expected it. Yet, in this almost indiscernible form, it happened – something of the teaching of Christ was expressed spontaneously, without pressure or coercion, simply through the on-going relationship this Buddhist priest had with Christian scripture. This is only a very minor example of the effect that Archbishop Rowan's method was capable of having, but at the time, it was clear that these lines were read by the Buddhist priest because he had been touched by Rowan's *charism* and the two instantly formed an on-going relationship in the Spirit of his words.¹⁸

Conclusion: "God of Life: Lead Us to Justice and Peace"

The WCC General Assembly is being hosted this year in South Korea, a country with a strong Buddhist heritage. What lessons can be learned in Busan from Archbishop Rowan's approach to interreligious dialogue?

Archbishop Rowan always approached dialogue with his ear turned to the other as if to the unexpected Christ. Although this is an extremely difficult discipline, if

there is anything we take to Busan it should be the intention to greet all whom we meet there with humility and in the hope that we will learn something of the Word from them.

Humility has authority. Archbishop Rowan knew the monastic descriptions of the process of repentance, which describe the holding together in the heart of both the height of Christ's glory and the depth of his humility. He knew that Christ restored human nature through by embodying its perfected or highest form and by also embracing the worst of sinners and lowering himself beneath them. Every Christian who has practiced *metanoia* of the heart makes a bridge between the highest and the lowest and inherits the gift of being able to speak to and reach all humans on their own level. This is our shared inheritance, born to us from the monastic tradition – human nature restored in Christ.

At the WCC General Assembly in October we will be asking "God of Life: Lead Us to Justice and Peace". As we call upon the God of Life it is important to reflect carefully on the testimony within the Christian tradition as to what might be the form of life most well pleasing to God. God is a life-bestowing God: "I came that they might have life and have it abundantly."¹⁹ At the same time, He does not present this life as something we already possess. Instead, he teaches "those that lose their life for my sake will find it."²⁰ I noticed in writing this article that the word "penitent" has almost fallen out of use in the English language. I wanted to use it but it looked antiquated and pious. What has happened to us that we are *ashamed* of Christian monastic and ascetic practices, which once had so much grace and power? We need to remember and re-inhabit monastic practices of humility, so that we can experience again, as Archbishop Rowan said:

*[that] self-emptying which has made possible our entire invitation into life.*²¹

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¹ During his tenure at Canterbury, Archbishop Rowan visited Sri Venkateshwara (Balaji) Hindu Temple, Sri Vallabha Nidhi Hindu Temple, Oshwal Jain temple, Sri Guru Singh Sabha Sikh Gurdwara and the national Buddhist Society, among other places of worship.

² "Monastic Virtues and Ecumenical Hopes", the Archbishop's address at San Gregorio Magno Sunday, 11 March 2012. Also online (accessed 24 September 2013): <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2385/monastic-virtues-and-ecumenical-hopes-archbishops-address-at-san-gregorio-magno>.

³ "Royal Academy of Arts Byzantium Lecture 'Icons and the Practice of Prayer.'" *Archbishop of Canterbury Website*. Rowan Williams, 16 January 2009. Web. Accessed 25 September 2013. rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/834/royal-academy-of-arts-byzantium-lecture-icons-and-the-practice-of-prayer.

⁴ The following account of repentance is taken from a range of monastic sources which have influenced Archbishop Rowan, including the texts of the Desert Fathers, St John of Sinai and St Symeon the New Theologian.

⁵ Psalm 119:32.

⁶ Ephesians 3:18.

⁷ "Anglicanism and Other Faiths in the Future", Lecture given at a conference entitled "The

Presence of Faith: A Century of Anglican Engagement with World Religions", at Lambeth Palace, 7-9 December 2011.

⁸ Matthew 10:13.

⁹ The full transcript for this address can be found on www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/pdf_lib/76_resource.pdf.

¹⁰ "The Archbishop of Canterbury's Dialogue with Buddhist Leaders." *Presence and Engagement*. Archbishop of Canterbury – Interfaith Relations, 2013. PDF file. Accessed 25 September 2013. www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/pdf_lib/76_resource.pdf.

¹¹ This may well be a paraphrase!

¹² "The Archbishop of Canterbury's Dialogue with Buddhist Leaders." *Op. cit.* www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/pdf_lib/76_resource.pdf.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Archbishop Rowan did not just speak in terms of and eternal acts or "utterance", but also spoke about the Trinity and the life of Christ. I have not quoted other passages of the exposition purely because of space. One example: "We believe in a God who empties divinity so that we cannot be under the illusion that God is a being far away. We encounter a God who in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, in emptying out the distance, the difference, is alive, in our midst and through the Spirit lives in us and transforms us."

¹⁵ "The Archbishop of Canterbury's Dialogue with Buddhist Leaders." *Op. cit.* www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/pdf_lib/76_resource.pdf.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ A future dialogue is planned with the two of them as speakers in 2014.

¹⁹ John 10:10.

²⁰ Matthew 10:39.

²¹ "The Archbishop of Canterbury's Dialogue with Buddhist Leaders." *Op. cit.* www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/pdf_lib/76_resource.pdf.

“Minorities” and...

Clare Amos

In June 2011, while I was still working for the Anglican Communion Office, a group of colleagues and I visited the offices of Sabeel in Jerusalem to discuss the (then) forthcoming report on Christian Zionism being produced by the Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns. Sabeel is a Christian-based organization which is committed to developing and sharing the insights of Palestinian Liberation Theology. Its founder is the Anglican priest Canon Naim Ateek. It will be a long time before I forget that visit to the Sabeel offices. A few days before our visit, Dr Rowan Williams, then Archbishop of Canterbury, had given an interview on the BBC Radio. He had been speaking about the situation of Christians throughout the Middle East, including Israel/Palestine. What he had said had provoked rage (that is not too strong a word to describe the emotion!) among some of the Sabeel staff: we, who were perceived not altogether accurately as coming from Lambeth Palace, were the recipients of that anger. One particular aspect of the criticism that was thrown at Dr Williams by our interlocutors was that he had referred to Christians of the Middle East and the Holy Land as a “minority” or “minorities”: this, however, was not a word that our Palestinian Christian hosts were prepared to accept to describe themselves. Among some of my colleagues there was a certain incomprehension as to why this term provoked such rage: after all, in purely numerical terms – which is, I am sure, how Dr Williams was primarily using it – Christians are undoubtedly a minority among the majority Muslim population of the Middle East. The Archbishop’s choice of the expression was not intended to disparage the Christian community in the Middle East or Israel/Palestine – it was rather intended as an expression of his concern for their wellbeing – indeed, their survival – in a Middle East which even by June 2011 felt quite threatening.

Having myself lived and worked in the Middle East – both Jerusalem and the Lebanon – for a number of years, I was not unaware of the sensitivities around the use of the word “minority” for some Christians in the Middle East – though I also could not help recalling that when I worked for the Middle East Council of Churches in 1978-79 one of the things I helped to organize was a conference focusing on the situation of Christians in the Gulf region, which, if I remember correctly, had the word “minorities” in its title. Perhaps it was telling that it was relating primarily to the situation of the Gulf rather than the historic Christian heartlands in the Middle East. And I also recall that back in those days, before the Catholic Churches had joined the Middle East Council of Churches, the Maronites of Lebanon, proud of their own status as the largest Christian community in Lebanon, used to refer to the Council somewhat disparagingly as the “Bureau des minorities”!

Since I joined the staff of the World Council of Churches in September 2011, I have participated in several international or regional meetings which have focused either on the situation of Christians in the Middle East region or on concerns linked more widely to religious freedom. Two in particular stand out: a conference held in May 2013 near Beirut, Lebanon titled “Christian presence and witness in the Middle East”, and a meeting convened in September 2013 in Geneva under the title “Politicization of Religion and Rights of Religious Minorities”. This latter conference looked at situations in a wide range of countries, including Asia and Africa as well as the Middle East, which is perhaps why it dared to put the dreaded word “minorities” in its title. In both conferences, some Christian participants from the Middle East expressed publicly their dislike of the word “minority” to describe themselves. The second conference, however, with its wider geographical remit, was a cross-cultural

learning experience for Middle Eastern Christians, as well as others. Perhaps it was important and good that our Middle Eastern participants heard that Christians in a number of other contexts, Pakistan for example, not only were prepared to allow themselves to be described as “minorities” but actually welcomed the name, and regularly used it of themselves. Such Christians from Pakistan deserve to be allowed to “self describe” equally as much as Christians from the Middle East demand that right for themselves.

Why is it that some Christians from the Middle East dislike the concept and language of “minority” so intensely? I suspect that a large part of the answer is that, in their eyes, it plays into and reinforces the *dhimma* model of the historical Middle Eastern political relationship between Islam and religious “minorities”, which has, at least to some extent, its origin in the history and theology of Islam. Such a model was institutionalized in Ottoman times in the *millet* system, through which each “minority” religious community was organized as a discrete entity within wider society. This system both acknowledged that the ultimate governance of a country or political region was in the control of Muslims, and according to Muslim principles (at least to some degree); it also gave the minority communities a considerable degree of autonomy, particularly in respect of social, personal and religious issues. There were varied consequences of this: the “minorities” did not have a fully equal citizenship compared with the Muslim community, they were encouraged to feel themselves to be a distinct and separate part of society, there was considerable and even quasi-political power given to the religious leadership of minority communities, and it was effectively legally impossible for a person to be an atheist!

The vision of the “Arab Awakening” at the beginning of the twentieth century, in which a number of Christians played a prominent role, was very different. The aspiration was for the creation of a society not divided along religious lines, but rather

for a common citizenship, in which shared Arab identity was intended to be of much more significance than any religious disparity. But even though that “vision” was a factor in a number of political developments in the Arab world in the second half of the twentieth century – I think of the ideology of Baathism, or of the PLO’s repeated insistence in the 1970s on the mantra of “a secular democratic state of Palestine” – it never really realized its full potentiality. Perhaps the counter understanding of Israel as a “Jewish state”, certainly after the 1967 war, was a major factor in encouraging the concept of an on-going link between religion and political structures in other parts of the Middle East as well. But particularly among Christian Arabs, and especially among Christians of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the vision of the “Arab Awakening” has never been entirely lost. It has remained a powerful driver, especially among Palestinians. And the early days of the Arab Spring offered – at least to some – a renewed hope that such a non-sectarian ideal of nationhood and citizenship might at last come to fruition. Such an ideal was certainly there in the mind of many of those from the WCC and the MECC who planned the conference on “Christian presence and witness” in May 2013. Such an ideal does not distinguish in citizenship terms between majorities and minorities: hence the dislike on the part of some Middle Eastern Christians for the expression “minority”. Such an ideal of common citizenship may be held more strongly by Christians in the Middle East than by “minority” Christian communities in other parts of the world, in part because many Middle Eastern Christians are conscious of the historic nature of Christian presence in the region. Christianity in the Middle East is not a product of the Western missionary movement of the nineteenth century but pre-dates Islam in the region by several centuries. But such an ideal of common citizenship can also feel threatening even to some within the Christian community, because it removes or decreases the powerful space which has till now often been occupied by hierarchical religious leadership. If all Christians and Muslims –

and those who wish to describe themselves in purely secular terms – are equal citizens of their society then there is not the same need for religious community leaders to play a quasi-political role on behalf of members of their community. Such an ideal also makes it clear that when we speak to the issue of religious freedom it is the human rights of individuals we need primarily to be concerned with, rather than the traditional rights of a particular religious community. Whether directly or by implication, a number of these concerns were raised at the two 2013 WCC conferences in Beirut and Geneva – and it was clear that there were different views held among the participants. But it was precisely those who held most passionately the ideal of common citizenship who also spoke most strongly against the concept of "minority". More about these two conferences can be found on the WCC website.

There is, however, a further issue – linked, I suspect, to the concern about the word "minority" which I also want to touch on briefly. Returning for a moment to my visit to the Sabeel offices in June 2011, I remember being startled when one of our hosts stated baldly, "I am a Palestinian first and a Christian second". Similar remarks were made by some speakers at the two WCC conferences. I confess to finding such comments problematic. This is because there is a tradition deeply embedded within Christian faith that for Christians our primary and core identity is as Christian – which must take precedence over our ethnic, or national identity. I am thinking of texts such as "Here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14), Paul's comment that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20) or the description in I Peter of Christians as "aliens and exiles" (I Peter 2:11). That is true whether we see ourselves as a minority or not, or a majority or not. Intriguingly, it is also a motif with which Muslims would be familiar, with the belief that belonging to the Muslim *umma* takes precedence over national belonging. It is a view that those who worked to establish the WCC would

have been committed to, for many of those who led the ecumenical movement in the 1940s believed passionately that they needed to prioritize a common Christian identity over the national identities which had provoked two bloody global wars. Those who made the remark about the priority of their national identity over their Christian one would have also been arguing for a "common citizenship" rather than a "minorities" model for Christian presence in the Middle East. However, it seems to me that actually their understanding of the relationship between the two identities, religious and national, was originated in and was trapped by a *millet* understanding of the relationship between religion and state: the religious community, though smaller, existed in a sort of parallel to the nation. Perhaps, though, the two kinds of identity should be seen as qualitatively different yet interlocking: with the core Christian identity – precisely because the nature of incarnation is only able to flourish fully when it stands in a transversal sort of relationship to our national identity – the two must be linked together, yet that Christian identity can never be confined by the limits of nation. I know that at our meeting in September several of us were helped to wrestle with this issue by a remarkable sermon preached by Bishop Duleep de Chickera, who, using as his text John 12:20-26, challenged us by suggesting that the very nature of Christian identity is to share in the cross of Christ which requires us to be willing to die in order to give life.

Finally, perhaps, since this brief article began with a reference to Dr Rowan Williams, it is worth reminding us that one of the themes which Dr Williams was seeking to explore throughout his archepiscopate (and I am sure will continue to explore in the future) is the relationship between religion and the public and political arena. For in contemporary western Europe, no less than in today's Middle East, it is a topic of considerable importance: each region perhaps needs to learn from the other (and from different parts of the world as well). At the beginning of the 21st century

the interacting roles of religion and state not only affect relationships between Christianity and Islam, but have become of increasing significance across the entire interreligious spectrum.

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Hopes and Uncertainties: Sri Lanka's Journey to Find Peace and Justice in the Midst of Religious Conflicts

A. W. Jebanesan

Whenever there are equally sharable issues among people, it is easier to create groupings where people could be divided. But when we find issues among people where we cannot create specific groupings then the issues often come out through ugly, violent expressions in various forms. If we consider Sri Lanka, for example, we for the last thirty years handled two main issues: Sinhala vs. Tamil and military vs. militants. Now, four years after winning the war, we have a third issue: religious supremacy. This paper is about the journey to find peace and justice in the midst of religious conflicts.

Sri Lanka has no visible enemy and a very substantial military. This gross disproportion would not have mattered much had the internal issues been sorted out. But the distorted political agenda which paved the way to pass a resolution against Sri Lanka at the UN Security Council in March 2012 and 2013, made even supporters of the present government question the logic of maintaining a huge military without an enemy. This is a context in which we need to look at the issue of justice and peace in the country. There are two ways to find a meaningful approach. The logical approach is to stop the continuous military recruitment drive and to put restrictions on military resources. The illogical approach is to create an enemy – to create an obvious, omnipresent, terrifying enemy – in order to justify the present military establishment.

This terrifying enemy could be an ideological concept or the product of extreme fear (psychosis) about persons or even misconstrued spiritual realms. This enemy can justify dumping endless resources into the military establishment. This situation can also explain radical departures the Sri Lankan leaders have

taken from a democratic approach on public issues. Soon after Sri Lanka's war victory in May 2009, the authorities used the Tiger story to suit their purposes by saying that the regrouping and the reorganization of Tiger separatists within Sri Lanka was still a threat to national security. It was also said that we must maintain a sizeable defence force as well as defence spending. But as economic hardships reached new peaks after 2010, the authorities realized that the Tiger story alone would not do. Thus, there was a need for an enemy terrifying enough to make the masses forget hunger, want and insecurity.

The Religious Context: Hate Campaign

The initial hate campaign started against the Christians in 2003. On Monday, 29 December 2003, dozens of Buddhist monks protested against "unethical conversions" by Christians and demanded anti-conversion laws be enacted immediately. One hundred Buddhist monks of the Jathika Sangha Sammelanaya (National Bikku Association) commenced a hunger strike "unto death" opposite the Buddhist Affairs (Sasana) Ministry, urging the government and the then President Chandrika Kumaratunga to bring in laws to curb unethical conversions.¹ The initial controversy started when the Venerable Gangodawila Soma Thero, a champion of Buddhist nationalism, died of a heart attack on 12 December in Russia where he was receiving an honorary doctorate. Ven. Soma's supporters allege, however, that he was number four on a "hit list" of an unnamed Christian group. Thousands of colour posters appeared which accused Christians, certain NGOs, and leading businessmen of hatching a plot to kill Ven. Soma. Angry, vengeful and grief-stricken Buddhist nationalists are embracing the late Venerable Soma's contempt for

Christianity and Christian NGOs, and his passion for anti-conversion legislation, with renewed militant fervor.² A recent highlighted event was about a mob of about 1,000 people in southern Sri Lanka, led by Buddhist monks, which protested the presence of a church by overpowering police, vandalizing property and beating the pastor on 9 December 2012. The attackers destroyed the church's furniture, equipment and vehicles, and assaulted the pastor.³

Until the attack on the Dambulla mosque⁴ on 20 April 2012, the Sinhala-Buddhist lobby was focused on Christians.⁵ The Tamils had been defeated and humbled, and, almost as soon as the war ended, attacks on Christians resumed with a new vigour. Until April 2012, the Muslim threat did not exist. With the Dambulla attack there was a sudden shifting of focus. A new political era characterized by anti-Muslim hysteria came into being. Suddenly, the main enemy was a man in a cap and a woman in black.⁶

This, I believe, is the context for the religious intolerance that emerged in Sri Lanka from nowhere. The explosion of anti-Muslim sentiments, completely out of the blue, and the government's tolerance of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) begins to make sense in this context. The present aim of political leaders is to convince the Sinhala Buddhist masses that they have only one threat and one enemy – the Muslims. Every other problem and concern, from economic hardships to the crime wave, is pushed out of sight. To the extent that these other issues are acknowledged, it is only as by-products of the larger "Muslim problem". So far, the Muslims have responded with reason and moderation to the ugly and violently provocative campaign of the BBS. The BBS would be delighted if the Muslims reacted with a comparable, or much worse degree of fanaticism. That is precisely what the BBS and its political masters would want.

Causes of the Conflict

The current explanations suggest that the cause for the conflict is not to be located in the issue of religion and conversion itself, but in the nationalistic agenda of the politically motivated Buddhist community. Some say that Buddhist high priests fear they will lose their grip on Sri Lankan society if more and more members are converted away from Buddhism.⁷ Others suggest that the attack on Christian conversion is merely a convenient pretext of Sinhala nationalism. These explanations are not supported by an analysis of the debate on conversion. They seem to consider the viewpoints in this debate as side issues in the struggle between the aggressive Buddhist movement on the one hand and the religious minorities on the other. At the very least, a genuine explanation of the clashes over conversion in contemporary Sri Lanka should give us insight into the viewpoints of the different parties. It should tell us why so many Sri Lankans have invested so much time, energy and emotion in discussing this particular issue.

When the Anti-Conversion Bill was presented by a member of the Sri Lankan Parliament in 2004,⁸ Sri Lanka's Supreme Court conveyed to the President and the Speaker of the House that the Bill – entitled "Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Act" and published in the Gazette of 28 May 2004 – does not contravene the Constitution. According to one report, "the Bill is likely to find an easy passage in Parliament as the Supreme Court has given the green light." It is therefore of crucial importance to understand some basic aspects of this legislation, some of its causes, and also its probable consequences. The Anti-Conversion Bill introduced by the Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalist Jathika Hela Urumaya is arguably inconsistent with international law concerning religious freedom. The legislation,⁹ with the blessing of the government by the Buddhist-Sinhala fundamentalists in Sri Lanka,¹⁰ has raised profound concerns especially among Christians, a small minority of the population.

The proposed anti-conversion legislation that alarms religious minorities, and in particular the Christians, generally states that there will be a penalty of five years' imprisonment and a fine of Rs 150,000 if convicted. The penalty is seven years and a fine not exceeding Rs 500,000 if a minor, woman, or a person referred to in the schedule group was converted. Briefly, any attempt to "persuade or influence a person to adopt another religion" would become a criminal offense, and anyone convicted of offering "moral support [or] material assistance" leading to conversion¹¹ could be imprisoned for up to seven years.¹²

The debates of the last few years have been variations on the same theme. On the one hand, there are Christians and secularists who insist that conversion is a fundamental right, which is part of the universal freedom of conscience: "The right of conversion and the right not to be forced to convert or reconvert belong to the internal dimension of a person's religious or belief-related conviction, which is unconditionally protected under international human rights law..."¹³ On the other hand, we have Buddhists who say that conversion is an act of violence, which violates religious traditions and disrupts families, communities and society in general. According to some:

*Buddhism, which has been the moral and spiritual force in Sri Lanka in the last 2500 years, having survived a prolonged period (nearly 450 years) of persecution and discrimination directed at its adherents under western colonial rule, now faces a serious challenge from a growing Christian evangelical movement, represented mostly by foreign funded non-governmental organisations (NGOs) based in the country.*¹⁴

While it is obvious to one party that belonging to a religion implies the need and the right to convert others to that religion, the other party shows nothing but incomprehension towards this professed link between religion and conversion.

Between the 16th and 21st centuries, Christians often viewed their encounter with other religious traditions as a battle between Christianity and idolatry. This theological framework attributes certain characteristic properties to religion: it is conceived of as a struggle between the true and the false. The struggle has different aspects to it. Firstly, it involves rivalry between religions with regard to the truth of doctrines. Insofar as different religions are either true or false, they revolve around a set of doctrines or beliefs. Therefore, Christians oppose the other religious traditions in terms of the beliefs these "rival religions" proclaim. The main issue of religion is in making a choice between these different sets of beliefs – the message of the atoning death of Jesus Christ and the related precepts on the one hand or the errors of false religion on the other. Secondly, the competition between religions revolves around the gaining of converts. The true religion strives to save the souls of men and women, while false religion keeps them in the command of the devil. This can also be put in terms of their respective ends. The true religion is the only path to salvation. Hell is the fatal destination of all other religions. Thirdly, rivalry not only concerns the life to come, it is also expressed in the conduct of the followers of the different religions here on earth. Conversion, then, cannot but be a fundamental right, since it allows individuals to be guided from falsity to truth.

Buddhism as a Religion

Religion is the element in human nature which considers no price too great to find full expression. The essence of all religious practice involves changing human nature. Buddhist Scriptures place on record the experiences of the Buddha who grappled with the fundamental reality. It is not doctrinal conformity or ceremonial piety, but it is participation in the mystery of being. It is wisdom or insight into reality. Although there is no denying the fact that religion has its roots in solitude, it has not remained isolated in solitary confinement, but has manifested itself in society,

associated itself with social conditions and gone beyond its initial privacy. Religion as an institution may easily lose contact with its source and can again become a living reality only when its members renew their rapport with that original source.

Buddhism is a religion of humanity, kindness and equality.¹⁵ It strives to promote peace and harmony among people. The Buddha appeared with this unique religion when the sacrificial rituals of the Vedic religion had reached their height, and the peace of mind of Indian people was much disturbed. Buddhism set its face against such sacrifices, and declared the futility of animal sacrifices. The Buddha expressed the idea of the fellowship of faiths; he never spoke critically of others' beliefs and always exhorted his followers to avoid doctrinal controversies with others:

*If anyone were to find fault or abuse me or the Doctrine or the Noble Order, do not, monks, for that matter, be offended, displeased, or ruffled. If by any means you become offended or perturbed, it will be to your own harm. On the other hand, whenever people hurl abuse and criticize, you should pause and think whether what they say contains some truth or whether what they say is just slander and falsity.*¹⁶

Buddhism is a great peace-establishing force in the world. The Five Precepts¹⁷ teach us to change our nature. They prohibit killing under any circumstances. Since it is beyond our power to give life, we have no right to take life. They lay emphasis on respecting another person's property. They denounce the life of unchastity and of falsehood. They prohibit the use of intoxicants. As soon as the principle of the Five Precepts is adopted, a marked change will take place in a person's outlook. Today, when the whole world is in the grip of great trouble, the teachings of the Buddha give us a voice of hope. He says that it is difficult to establish peace by methods of war. Victory breeds hatred; the conquered live in sorrow.¹⁸ War results in a vicious circle of hatred, oppression, subversive movements and false propaganda. Never in this world can

hatred be conquered by hatred. It can only be conquered by non-hatred. Human beings must give up the idea of being warlike and become non-violent. We must develop in our hearts the spirit of love, fraternity and fellow-feeling in order to break through the encircling gloom, and bring about a new alignment of human relations, of race to race, of nation to nation.

Buddhism does not put hindrances in the way of human progress and development by rigidity of thought and legalistic morality. It encourages the development of human thought, human virtue and human beauty. It teaches us to be ready to oppose injustice with courage. It teaches us to go beyond the boundaries of caste and race, which tarnish the whole human community. It teaches us to feed the hungry, nurse the sick, lift the downtrodden, and love even our enemies. It tells us to strive for binding the wounds of the suffering world. It tells us to build peace rooted in justice. It enjoins us to avoid the two extremes, the pursuit of worldly desires and the severe ascetic practice, which culminate in the annihilation of the body. It helps us to adopt a middle course between extremes. According to Buddhism, desire is the root of all evil. Therefore it must be transformed. In order to live an ideal life and ultimately attain Nirvana, it is essential to tread the eight-fold Noble Path and practice morality, concentration and wisdom. The best memorials to the Buddha are lives well lived in the Dharma. If it is taken seriously, the Buddha's teaching requires a new alignment of one human being to another, of nation to nation, of race to race. If we do not change our ways, the night of spiritual blindness will descend upon us, the gains of science and the glories of culture will be lost and humans will revert to barbarism.

Striving for Life, Justice and Peace

Striving for life, justice and peace in the Sri Lankan context needs to involve people who are indifferent, living in isolation, have misperceptions, false impressions, suspicions, mistrust and

negative feelings towards other religious groups, who have never gathered for a common purpose or an event, who have had no contacts out of their villages, or who have had little opportunity for communication across ethnic, religious and geographical boundaries. This is a difficult path to tread. However, I believe moving forward is possible when people of different ethnic and religious groups come together regularly and share their experiences and issues of common interests. When people become aware of the issues, the causes of conflict, and recognize the importance of working together, misconceptions and negative effects will be replaced and space provided for interactions.

“Promoting dialogue, reconciliation and co-existence amongst local communities and religious groups” is a programme initiated by the Peace and Justice Desk of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka. Working together for a cause, e.g. building a house for a poor family, cultural exchanges, cooking, discussion on values, etc., have brought about more understanding between groups by having them experience diversity and accept it. Common activities undertaken by participants in the programme’s work have proven to them that they too can contribute to the development of their village. Also, some of the initiatives show that youth are becoming better aware of the needs and helplessness of others. The experiences of such activities have made them realize that as a youth group they can use their energy positively for interreligious interaction on behalf of their people.

The church has been actively engaged in several discussions with both religious leaders and civil society leaders. Such meetings have not only nurtured healthy relationships but also have enabled the church to explain the objective of the project as well as to understand the different viewpoints and concerns of leaders and their suggestions to address and find remedial solutions to issues that prevent co-existence and peace among local communities. The religious and civil

society leaders have acknowledged and appreciated the initiative of the church and have assured us of their collaboration. Monthly discussions have been conducted with the representatives of religious and civil societies and of youth leaders. This forum has enhanced the integration and coherence of socio-economic and peace building activities at the village level and has protected space for dialogue. Matters related to religious activities, cultural affairs, common village-level needs, priorities, challenges and responsive actions have been discussed.

As conflicts have deepened divisions, it remains necessary to support peace, justice and conflict resolution in Sri Lanka. The poster campaign built knowledge and awareness of the importance of reconciliation. The message reiterated the fact that the need in the country is not just for a peace agreement, but most importantly for genuine efforts for reconciliation among the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslim communities living in this country. Meaningful catchwords, cartoons, photos and phrases were used to convey the gravity of such messages, while posters, leaflets, hand-outs and stickers were used as means. The welfare activities were conducted not only to address the needs and priorities of the locations, but most importantly to provide a space and an entry point where members of all communities and religions can work for a common purpose.

The attempts of the church have provided the necessary facilities, space and environment for children and students to continue their education in schools and have further contributed to secure peaceful surroundings in which to live and grow up in freedom. Children are potentially among the most powerful of peace builders, and adults support them in their efforts. Children, more often than adults, display the willingness to forgive and forget, to promote friendship and affection, and can see others as equals without a sense of superiority or difference. Therefore, children contribute in a meaningful way to develop and sustain peace. The activities of children

have nurtured good qualities as well as enabled positive personal development. Further, space is given for children to have greater voices in their own development as well as in the development of their own communities. Their participation has also impacted parents and local communities.

Generally, reconciliation among the ethnic groups is taking place at the village level even in the absence of specific government policies or interventions. This is based on people's yearning for reviving pre-war relationships mostly based on joint community interventions. These interventions have brought ethnic and neighbouring communities together on a much higher plane than the mere exchange of labour as in pre-war days, as now it is based on mutual understanding and respect for one another. The project activities have provided these people with appropriate opportunities to get to know one another in order to promote and build peace and practice peaceful coexistence.

The project interventions were in line with the project milestones, and competitively followed the process indicators:

- Leaders of different religions increasingly interact, jointly initiate and engage in common initiatives.
- Interfaith group members regularly participate in meetings and events and willingly contribute towards community interests.
- People interact and comfortably relate with neighbour communities, take part in common events, exchange freely without fear and restrictions.
- Issues that disturb communities are openly discussed, solutions are unanimously agreed upon and actions are executed. Diversity represented in such events (diversity in terms of locality, gender, religion, ethnicity, age) should be a proper reflection of the composition of the community.

The project has also successfully brought several constructive changes among the key actors of change at the outcome level. Thus the church is confident to state that:

- The key actors are able to respect other religions and their practices, value the cultures of the different ethnic groups and faiths, understand truth, reconcile and engage in activities which address ethnic divides, develop common identity and promote unity and harmonious relationships.
- The key actors remain examples to others in accepting members of other communities as they engage in healthy discussions, establish truth, accept responsibilities, forget bitterness, work with commitment and promote interethnic cohesion as well as co-existence.

Since this is a continuous process of change, it has not reached its fullest impact but has seen considerable and significant changes and has remained in line with the set objectives of the project. Therefore, the key actors of change need to be further empowered and supported, and also the available local structures have to be strengthened. Although the project has not necessarily addressed each of the root causes or the dynamics of the conflict, it has created spaces for interaction and improved communication, and given better understanding of the situation to the project target group. In addition, the project has strongly motivated people and built their confidence. The interfaith initiatives have given a platform for all religious leaders to assemble, agree on matters, unite and then advocate at different levels with the purpose of promoting harmony. Therefore it can be concluded that this project has been efficient in its contribution to community peace and unity in the respective project locations.

The church firmly believes that the initiation of key activities supported by the acknowledgment and participation of key actors will pave way towards long-term changes and will thereby reach the set objectives. I see this project as a change initiative. The church maintains transparency and in all circumstances has clearly explained the purpose of the project which is neither governed nor subjected to any hidden agendas. Having

observed the positive changes, the church will emphasize the need for a continuation of such projects by other religious and secular groups, mainly with the purpose of strengthening the local structures to ensure sustainability. This project has reduced tensions among the communities through dialogue and interaction. The participating communities were able to realize that it was a third party who was provoking them to fight with each other. This common initiative has given the opportunity for people to rebuild their broken relationships. Some of the villagers who never walked across to the other houses due to tensions are currently visiting one another's houses and villages. This friendship and trust has been built through common initiatives with the participation from all the villages. Many incidents, which earlier may have provoked dispute among the ethnic groups, have been handled peacefully and solved with the assistance of the religious leaders.

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¹ Amarawansa said that Sri Lanka has traditionally been a Sinhala Buddhist country, but foreign invasion and domination by the Portuguese, Dutch and the English spread Christian denominations. The Christian community has cohabitated in harmony with the Buddhists during the last three decades. In the last decade or so, various Christian interests have come to Sri Lanka in the guise of Christian missionaries, NGOs, investors and media institutions and have engaged in converting indigenous Buddhists by unethical means, exploiting their poverty and social deprivations. See Rohan Mathes, "Sangha Sammelanaya's Three Proposals for the Well-Being of the Nation". *The Island Online*. 25 September 2003. Web. Accessed 30 September 2013. www.island.lk/2003/09/25/news08.html.

² On 1 December 2004, 8:00pm: Venerable Omalpe Sobhitha, a Member of Parliament in Sri Lanka for the Buddhist nationalist party Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), appears on the

Swarnavahini TV news programme *Live at 8* and makes three demands of the Sri Lankan government: (1) A presidential commission should be appointed into the death of Ven. Gangodawila Soma Thero; (2) All liquor outlets in supermarkets should be closed down; and (3) A time frame should be specified for taking up the Prohibition of Forcible Conversions Bill in Parliament for a vote. Ven. Sobhitha then issues an ultimatum to the government: if these demands are not met by 6:00AM on 12 December 2004, the JHU will begin a fast-unto-death. We tend to picture a Buddhist monk as a man or woman with shaven head peacefully meditating in the lotus position, but some Buddhist clergy in Sri Lanka pass out hate literature, assault church workers, raze churches, stone pastors' houses, issue death threats, write inflammatory articles for Buddhist newspapers, and ultimately force churches to close down.

For more information, see: "Buddhist Nationalism and Sri Lanka's Christian Minority." *Institute for Global Engagement*. www.globalengage.org/issues/articles/freedom/590-buddhist-nationalism-and-sri-lankas-christian-minority.html.

³ "Monks Attack Church in Sri Lanka." *Christianity Today Online* 12 December 2012. Accessed 30 September 2013. www.christiantoday.com/article/monks.attack.church.in.sri.lanka/31232.htm.

⁴ According to a statement released by the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka, dated March 2013: "The Council...is perturbed at the 'Hate Campaign' that is presently directed at the Muslim Community, the intensity of which is growing daily, unchecked and uncontrolled. We sadly note that this trend is gradually leading to a situation where groups of people are taking the law into their hands, unfortunately resulting in Mosques being attacked, business establishments sieged, and even individual persons professing the Islamic faith are ridiculed and or harassed in public..."

⁵ The Bodu Bala Sena has now warned it will take action against Christian pastors who work with NGOs to unethically convert Buddhists to Christianity. See "BBS Warns Against Unethical Conversions" *Colombo Gazette* 27 March 2013. Accessed 30 September 2013. colombogazette.com/2013/03/27/bbs-warns-against-unethical-conversions/.

⁶ Buddhist Power Force (BBS) is a Sinhala-Buddhist organization based in Colombo. It has organized various campaigns against the country's minority Muslim and Christian communities which, according to the organization, are needed to protect the country's Sinhalese-Buddhist character.

⁷ See Fernando, Keerthisiri. "Minority Christian Identity in the Context of Majority Buddhist Identity in Sri Lanka." *Current Dialogue* 51, December 2011, WCC, Geneva. www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/what-we-do/current-dialogue-magazine/dialogue-51.

⁸ Mr Maheshwaran, former Hindu Cultural Affairs Minister, made a visit to Tamil Nadu, one of five states in India with anti-conversion laws. On his return to Sri Lanka, Maheshwaran made a public statement vowing to introduce a Bill in Parliament to curb religious conversions. In subsequent months, Maheshwaran repeated his intentions to introduce the Bill to Parliament. A draft Bill closely modelled on the Tamil Nadu anti-conversion law has now been prepared. See also Don Asoka Wijewardena. "Anti-Conversion Laws within 60 Days." *Sunday Observer* 18 January 2004. www.sundayobserver.lk/2004/01/18/new16.html.

⁹ The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (a branch of the World Evangelical Alliance), which represents charismatic or evangelical churches, issued a statement on 6 January 2004 condemning violence against Christians and alleged unethical conversions. The Archbishop of the Catholic Church of Sri Lanka, Oswald Gomis, also issued a statement condemning alleged unethical conversions.

¹⁰ Buddhist Jathika Hela Urumaya monks, on 21 July 2004, submitted a Bill in Parliament seeking to outlaw religious conversions based on offers of cash or other incentives. 70% of Sri Lanka's 19 million people are Buddhists, while about 7.5% are Christians. Hindus make up about 15% and Muslims comprise 8%.

¹¹ The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Part I: Section (I)—General Government Notifications, Ministry of Buddha Sasana. No. 1322/4-2004, 5 January

2004 at §2. "No person shall proselytize or attempt to proselytize any other person nor shall any person aid or abet such proselytizing."; §8(a)(1); §8(a)(2).

¹² *Ibid.*, §5(1). Furthermore, "[e]very director, office bearer, shareholder, member, or employee" of an organization found guilty of an offense would be subject to the same punishment. Also see §5(5)(a)(b).

¹³ A news release from the UN on 25 October stated: "The United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, today urged States to consistently respect, protect and promote the human right to freedom of religion or belief in the area of conversion." *United Nations Human Rights Website*. Accessed 30 September 2013. www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=12699&LangID=E.

¹⁴ See Senaka Weeraratna. "Manipulative Christian Conversions in Sri Lanka" *Global Politician Online* 12 August 2012. Accessed 30 September 2013. www.globalpolitician.com/default.asp?27554-christianity-buddhism-sri-lanka.

¹⁵ See Thich Huyen-Vi. "Vegetarianism in Buddhism" *Dharma Realm Buddhist Association Website*. Accessed 30 September 2013. www.drbachinese.org/vbs/1_100/vbs72/72_8.html.

¹⁶ Ch'an-ju Mun and Ronald S. Green. (2006) *Buddhist Exploration of Peace and Justice*. Blue Pine Books, Hawaii, p. 76.

¹⁷ See Sunthorn Plamintr. "The Five Precepts" at *Urban Dharma*. Web. Accessed 30 September 2013. www.urbandharma.org/udharma2/5precepts.html.

¹⁸ The Dhammapada. (1965) Buddha and the Occident. (trans from the Pāli), *Irving Babbitt* (trans. edition). University Press, New York, p. 32.

Buddhist Resources for Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Cambodia

Vannath Chea

Introduction

I have been through seven political regimes: (1) from French colonialist to (2) Absolute Monarchy, to (3) Khmer Republic, to (4) the Khmer Rouge absolute Communist, to (5) the Socialist, to (6) the US Federal regime, and then back to (7) the current Cambodia Constitutional Monarchy.

Decades of on-going changes beyond control, destruction and rebuilding allows me to better understand and witness the values of Buddhism in the reconciliation, peace building, and healing process in Cambodia.

In 1998, Pol Pot, the head Khmer Rouge leader, died by natural causes. I went to visit the place where they cremated Pol Pot, in the forest on the top of a mountain at the Thai-Cambodian border. With equanimity, with no sadness, no joy, no hard feeling, I burned the incense sticks for the liberation of his soul. Based on the Buddhist concept, Pol Pot's existence in this world was a part of nature. War and peace, life and death, sorrow and joy, good and evil, disaster and harmony are intertwined. We cannot pick and choose things that we like, and discard things that we do not like. But, what we can do is maintain our equanimity to better face the reality, and to be part of the solution.

Background

The devastating war in Cambodia first started between 1970 and 1975, between the capitalist Khmer Republic's army, supported by the US and South Vietnam, and the communist Khmer Rouge army supported by China and North Vietnam. The Khmer Republic regime used to justify the war as the "fights of the Buddhist Believers Against the Communist Atheists". During that time, millions of

people were displaced, and an estimated 600,000 people died by the casualty of war.

In April 1975, on the very first day of their entry into the city of Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge military forced millions of people, at gun point, to leave their homes. I was one of them.

Along the exit road, I saw women deliver babies on the dusty side roads. Sick people who were not able to walk clung onto their family members' necks. I also passed by an orphanage for toddlers who had been abandoned by their caretakers. Some fell down the stairs, some were dying from exhaustion with swollen bellies, some were inert and we could not tell if they had already passed away or not. People passed by, too worried for their own survival to stop and help. In one of the abandoned houses along the road where we passed at night, we smelled something decomposing. Because it was so dark, we did not know what it was. The next day, we realized that we had slept near corpses. Along the road, some corpses became stuck in the riverbank, while other corpses were simply pushed downward while people were taking the water they needed for bathing, cooking and drinking.

The Killing Fields

The Khmer Rouge leaders lead the country by terror, hatred, illusion and delusion. The most traumatic years of this period were those of the "Killing Fields" from 1975 to 1979, when the Khmer Rouge attempted to completely transform all aspects of society. Out of an estimated population of 8 million, most scholars place the number of dead from murder, torture, disease and starvation at around, at least, 1.7 million.

You imagine cities with no life, no populations, no schools, no hospitals, and no currencies and markets. The Buddhist value system was brutally replaced by Communist ideology, which depicted every religion as the “opium of the masses”. The practice of Buddhism was entirely interrupted. More than 60,000 monks that inhabited the monasteries were defrocked.

The Khmer Rouge separated families by sex and age groups, and sent everybody to forced labour camps, with little or nothing to eat. Whoever complained about the hardship disappeared with no explanation. Children were encouraged to spy on their parents and other family members’ wrong doings, and to report to their team leaders. At the end of each day, the Khmer Rouge team leaders held a self-confession meeting where people had to confess any unfaithful thoughts, negative feelings, and/or mistakes committed. Women at the reproductive age became sterile. Some experienced the “hanging uterus” condition from heavy duties.

With starvation and exhaustion, I became very sick, and, one day, I felt extremely agitated, and thought that this was what people called agony, the last stage before death, and that I was about to die. At that point, I started to realize the teachings of Buddha about the impermanence of all things and the on-going changes beyond our control. I accepted this law of nature about life and death, and silently prayed for mercy from my parents, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. After a while, I felt that little by little, my heartbeat returned to normal, and my mind became serene.

In January 1979, the Vietnamese army, together with a group of Khmer Rouge defectors, mounted a military campaign against the Khmer Rouge regime. People were allowed to go back to their hometowns. Millions of people, emaciated, dirty and sick, wandered around looking for their families. The horrible scene appears to me as millions of lost souls released from hell looking for refuge. People talked about atrocities, killings, starvation, deaths and separation.

In September 1979, during the first year of the revival of Buddhism, at the ceremony of the Pchum Ben Memorial Day, people flocked into a pagoda at a suburban area, in Phnom Penh, and brought food to offer to the monks. The rituals were to confer the blessings and food to the dead people, for the liberation of their souls to a better world. The opening of the pagoda, the presence of the monks, the religious prayers and rituals provided magic medicine to relieve mental depression and anxiety afflicting millions of traumatized victims of the Khmer Rouge regime.

The political situation was chaotic. The Khmer Rouge joined forces with the Freedom Fighters against the Vietnamese occupation. People switched sides to join the winner and/or other groups that they believed in for survival reasons, and/or greed, anger, illusion and delusion. Suspicion, accusation, hatred, revenge and distrust were widespread, so my family took the risk of escaping to the refugee camps along the Thai-Cambodian borders.

The Awakening

At the refugee camps, I witnessed how most of the people were poor women and children, and something changed inside me. My five-year ordeal, witnessing the atrocity, starvation, disease and death of so many, made me feel full of pity and compassion for their plights. It was a wake-up call for me, and I felt then a sense of duty to help those destitute and vulnerable people.

I forced myself to change from a typical and traditional Cambodian woman to be a more active, assertive and articulate person by participating in different activities in the refugee camps. We joined forces and built one Buddhist pagoda in the Philippine refugee camp.

There were many Christian missionaries working in the refugee camps. Some Cambodian refugees converted to Christianity. They lost hope in Buddhism. They said that in Christianity “God helps whoever believes in him”, while in Buddhism, Buddha said: “you are your

own salvation". With no judgment, I volunteered to interpret in their Bible classes.

In 1981, I arrived in the US. There, we collected money to buy a decent piece of land to build a pagoda, and we organized a class for the children who wanted to learn their native language, a Khmer classical dance, and other social and religious activities to keep ourselves mentally strong and our culture alive.

During my stay in the US, I experienced an identity loss. All I knew about myself was that "I was a Buddhist".

In late 1980s, the Cold War drew to a close. Vietnam decided to withdraw its military forces from Cambodia. In October 1991, the Paris Peace Agreement was made to put an end to the Cambodian armed conflicts. It was signed by 18 countries, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Supreme National Council of Cambodia.

This Peace Agreement placed Cambodia under the administration of the United Nations, which dispatched a peacekeeping force called the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, well-known for its acronym UNTAC. UNTAC's main mission was to keep the peace and organize the election of a new government for Cambodia. But the Khmer Rouge ultimately withdrew from the electoral contest, which meant that the election process could only ever deliver a partial solution at best.

In 1992, I joined the UNTAC Mission. It allowed me to return to Cambodia, and to contribute to the process of rehabilitation and reconciliation of my native country. I felt deep divisions within our society caused by a long-lasting war and destruction.

After the UNTAC Mission, to contribute my own small part to reconciliation, peace and stability in Cambodia, I started multiple projects advocating good governance, supporting social justice and equity by building citizens' participation in the democratic process. One of the

projects of the Center for Social Development was a series of Public Forums where citizens were able to express and convey their needs and concerns to the authorities.

In 2000, we organized a public forum about the Khmer Rouge Trial. But, during the ground preparation, I realized that the trial alone was not the issue, nor the answer. What we needed was national reconciliation. We invited the Khmer Rouge intellectuals and people who lived in the former Khmer Rouge zones to our forum. It was the first series of public forums ever lead by an NGO that involved the Khmer Rouge into a peaceful process. The theme of our forum was: "The Khmer Rouge and the National Reconciliation". At the forums, all sides, including the former Khmer Rouge, stated the need for truth, justice, healing and national reconciliation. Yet it was clear that there were widely different views on what these terms might mean in practical terms.

Each party has its own version of what happened: there is the "truth" according to the Khmer Rouge, the government, the international community and ordinary Cambodians. If a reconciliation process is to move forward and be seen as trustworthy, each of these truths must be accommodated to the satisfaction of all parties. From the discussion it was also clear that a tribunal was only one part of a comprehensive process of reconciliation.

There were also recommendations, raised by forum participants, related to Buddhist values, such as: "we should have a public religious ceremony to end the bad karma of the past", and "the past should be forgotten, all weapons thrown away, and we should hold on to Dharma (Buddhist law/teachings)".¹

The answer therefore relies on finding a vehicle for addressing these issues on a personal level, and in a manner that is consistent with the foundation of the Khmer culture. One potential path for finding this reconciliation and healing is Buddhism, which has a powerful influence in daily life. Buddhism has at its heart

messages of compassion and reconciliation.

In dealing with the emotional and psychological scars left by so many years of war, many ordinary Cambodians have returned to the faith that has been brutally attacked under the Khmer Rouge regime. Many Westerners perceive Buddhism as a doctrine of acceptance, which effectively hampers social change. A noted Khmer Buddhist monk, Yos Hut Khemacaro, explained that Khmer Buddhism in particular, arising as it did from agrarian society that places high value on patron-client relationship and harmony, has provided “a strong disincentive among monks and the wider population to challenge the social order”. Yet, despite these cultural constraints, he went on to argue that the practice of the Dharma (teachings of the Buddha) can lead to social action.

One practical example of this was the Dhammayietra, or annual marches, which began in 1992. The “Peace March” saw thousands of refugees who had been living in camps along the Thai-Cambodian border return to their homeland as they marched for more than 400 kilometres to Phnom Penh city. The spiritual leader of the pilgrimages, the late Maha Ghosananda – nominated three times for the Nobel Peace prize – also argued that reconciliation “does not mean that we surrender our rights and conditions”, but instead that “we use love” to address these questions.

I had the opportunity to join the above march too. I witnessed the march of long lines of thousands of monks in saffron robes, and people from everywhere sit down along the road to receive the blessing of holy water from Maha Ghosananda and his disciples. Also, some soldiers and police in uniform jumped off their bikes or cars and respectfully knelt along the road waiting to be blessed. This image made me think that despite the appearance of their armed weapons and uniforms, deep down in their heart they came to look for peace and took refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

The Law of Karma

In 2000, I built a house right in the city of Phnom Penh, about 50 metres from a former Khmer Rouge S-21 Prison. When they dug up the soil for the foundation of my home, workers found leg bones from two different persons. One was tied with black and another one with white electrical cords.

I tried to imagine the degree of terror, fear and torment the victims must have experienced before they were killed. With tears in my eyes, I placed the bones in a wooden box, wrapped it with white cloth and invited five Buddhist monks to perform a funeral ritual ceremony. The bones were cremated under a mango tree on my land. The ashes were put in a marble urn and kept in the Wat Sophie Pagoda.

Other people living around the former S-21 Prison have had similar experiences. Some have even found piles of human bones. Hence, the area surrounding the former S-21 Prison was its own killing field. Some people believe that the prison is haunted. Living near it, I sometimes hear dogs howling – usually at dawn – at which time people believe the dogs see ghosts. Every day, I burn incense sticks and pray for the victims’ lost souls to be liberated and reborn in a better world. This daily habit also allows me to reconcile with my past memories of the Khmer Rouge era.

Also, every year during the Bon Pchum Ben memorial season, people invite Buddhist monks to come to the S-21 Prison, to pray and guide the trapped souls back into the cycle of reincarnation.

Thirty years after the genocide, a tribunal, called the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) has been established. As a Buddhist, I never hate or want to revenge the Khmer Rouge killers. Buddha said: “Revenge never ends by revenge”. But to bring the Khmer Rouge leadership involved in the killings to court is not an act to seek revenge, but to abide by the “law of karma”, that everything which happens in one’s life has effects.

The karma, either good or bad, is like the shadow of one's self, which always adheres to a person.

According to Yale University's Genocide Programme, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge ran 158 prisons and 309 mass-grave sites with an estimated total of 19,000 grave-pits. So far, only one former Khmer Rouge S-21 Prison chief has admitted his role and responsibility for the deaths of at least 12,380 prisoners. He was convicted of crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Convention, and ECCC sentenced him to thirty-five years of imprisonment.

Buddhist Monks and Politics

Article 31 of the Cambodian Constitution stipulates: "Every Khmer citizen shall be equal before the law, enjoying the same rights, freedom and fulfilling the same obligations regardless of race, color, sex, language, religious belief, etc.". Some activist monks came to the forefront of Cambodian politics in September 1998, during a public demonstration against the allegedly fraudulent electoral results. Two monks were killed in the protesters' skirmishes with police, which provoked public incredulity and outcry.

If Buddhism is to prove a useful tool in the process of national reconciliation, we must therefore ensure that it does not become as politicized as other aspects of reconciliation have. The late King Norodom Sihanouk had suggested holding a cremation ceremony of victims' remains, but this was met with resistance from Prime Minister Hun Sen, who believes that the remains must serve as a historical legacy. While the Prime Minister's view was probably more pragmatic, both claim to be devout and managed to use religion to justify their opposing positions.

To avoid politicization, the noted Khmer Buddhist Monk Yos Hut Khmemacaro advocates following the "middle path" of nonviolence and compassion, the traditional metaphor for the Buddhist way: neither joining the fight nor hiding from it. This middle path provides a model for

solving political problems outside the adversarial framework implicit in partisanship. As these ideas arise from traditional Khmer concepts, they can help the Cambodian people to find their own peace instead of feeling that their problems can only be solved by outsiders.

The risk that peace activism may be opposed with force by the government poses the greatest challenge for contemporary Khmer Buddhism. While the principles of nonviolence and neutrality are not open to compromise, Buddha himself made it clear that social injustices themselves lead to violence. To forsake social change and ignore the causes of Cambodia's persisting conflict will only delay the emergence of a more viable peace in the future.

Conclusion

Cambodia's political fractures have been reflected in the Buddhist community, making it harder for monks to develop a forceful and united stand in favour of peace. In order for their contribution to be constructive, they require greater education on the teaching of Buddhism and on developing the Buddhist virtue of equanimity, while at the same time maintaining awareness of the world outside the monastery. Only then can the monks effectively instruct and provide mental and spiritual guidance to the people.

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¹ For more information about the forum, please visit: www.csdcambodia.org/khmer_rouge_book/text_khmer_rouge_book_eng.pdf.

Buddhist-Christian Cooperation for Moving Together Towards Life, Justice and Peace

Vijaya Samarawickrama

Namo Buddhaya and peace be with you. Let us applaud the World Council of Churches for this initiative it has taken to reach out to Buddhists to explore how the teachings of the Buddha can further enhance our understandings of life, justice and peace which are the elements of the theme for the Assembly to be held in Korea in November this year.

While the conference in Korea will be ecumenical in the sense that Christians will be in dialogue with each other to foster unity and brotherhood, this interface is aimed at reaching out to Buddhists to foster greater mutual respect, tolerance and cooperation between our great traditions. Hopefully our deliberations here will be useful in your discussions to seek ways to help our fellow beings to enjoy the happiness and peace which is their birthright. And hopefully too we can find ways to pool our wisdom and resources for this purpose.

We recognize that interfaith dialogue of this kind does not intend to make all religions one, but simply to promote better relationships so that we can learn from each other and more importantly share our experiences and resources in a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation. As a result of discussions like these let us hope that eventually we will be able to work together in a fraternal spirit to promote the welfare of all living beings while at the same time remaining faithful to our own traditions and beliefs.

While full ecumenism (in the sense of bringing together *all* beliefs as a “whole household of faith”) between Christian and non-Christian religions could continue to be a dream, we can find common ground to work together even more closely in the future than we have done in the past. Interfaith cooperation *is* possible and it has worked in many parts of the world. I

come from Malaysia, which represents a success story in fostering interreligious harmony among its citizens. The people of Malaysia belong to almost every great religion practiced in the world today, but over the centuries Malaysians have proved that we can live peacefully among ourselves by respecting the beliefs of others and not trying to force everyone into one mold. Of course, this does not mean that we do not have any differences or that each group necessarily gets what it always wants. But in the spirit of democracy it means that we are prepared to surrender some of our rights for the common good. It also means that we can find avenues for fostering harmonious relationships if we are sincere in our desire to live as good neighbours. In Malaysia, we have a body called the Malaysian Consultative Council for Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCBCHST). It is an umbrella body, which acts as a spokesperson regarding non-Islamic religious concerns to the government and also promotes interfaith dialogue.

This approach is spelled out in the concept paper for this interface:

The world we inhabit today is characterized by increasing religious plurality and its concomitant problems and promises. In this context the multi-religious environment does not provide Christians with just the “context for” engaging in the pursuit of life, justice and peace. Rather it opens the possibility of “collaboration with” people from other faiths who are already engaged in such pursuits.

The question now arises: Has the time arrived in the course of human evolution for us to sincerely recognize that faiths other than our own can and do hold the key to unlock the secrets of human

existence, that the concerns of others about the value of life, justice and peace come very close to our own perceptions and aspirations? Moreover, are we ready to acknowledge that like the proverbial blind men and the elephant, each of us sees the partial truth, but when we become truly enlightened, the Ultimate Truth is the same for all of us? My answer to these questions is “yes”, for at least some of us.

I believe that given the mindboggling advances we have made in the field of Information Technology we are able to think in global terms – we have certainly made great strides in that direction in commerce and industry. The religions of the world are, I believe, on the threshold of acknowledging the reality of unity in diversity. Only the most obtuse among us still cling to the naive hope that one religion will convert the whole world. We have to admit that all religions are in some way or another challenged and may even be faced with extinction if we do not give up outmoded ways of thinking. I say this because religion as it is traditionally understood is being threatened to the core by the latest developments in civilization, by post-modern secularism, for example. We need to respond to these challenges by adapting to the way the younger generation perceives the world. We certainly need not reject our core beliefs and values. In Buddhism, we call these core values the *Dharma*, eternal laws. These laws cannot change with the passage of time. And because they are eternal, transcending time and space, they are to be found in various degrees in every religious teaching. Our task today is to identify the common values and work together according to our different religious practices to make them relevant to our followers. In Buddhism, we differentiate between *lokiya* (mundane) and *lokottara* (transcendental) concerns. We can continue to think differently on matters of doctrine, but in matters of worldly concern all humans share the same needs and aspirations. The urgent task before us all today is to recognize our common *lokiya* ideals and work in

cooperation to realize these ideals for the greater good of the human race.

With this purpose in mind, please allow me to share with you what I understand of the Buddha’s teachings regarding life and justice. Let us explore some concerns which are common to us all and understand how Buddhists have sought to address these concerns. Hopefully, as a result, we can identify some common ground upon which we can work together.

The Interrelatedness of Life

To a Buddhist, all forms of life are closely interrelated and the happiness of an individual can only be obtained by ensuring the wellbeing of all our co-inhabitants on earth. This interrelatedness is best symbolized by the Buddhist Wheel of Life. It shows that driven by Ignorance, Greed and Ill-will, living beings move ceaselessly in a series of births and deaths called *samsara*. This demonstrates that all forms of life are simply the manifestations of the same life force. Therefore, the actions of one being affects the lives of everyone else. In one of the best known suttras, the *Karaniya Metta* sutra, the Buddha enjoins his followers to care for all beings (not just humans) in the same way that a mother would protect her only child. He explains what he means by *all beings*:

Whatever beings there are, weak or strong, long or short, big, medium-sized or small, subtle or gross, visible or invisible, residing near or far, those born and yet to be born, without exception: may all beings be joyful!

The sutra concludes with this powerful injunction: “*Just as a mother protects her only child, so should one protect all beings.*” This aspect of caring for others is so central to Buddhist practice that it is enshrined in the Bodhisattva ideal. The goal of the Bodhisattva, a future Buddha, is to relieve the suffering of all sentient beings. It entails not merely a pious desire to do good, but to actively promote the wellbeing of others even if it means sacrificing one’s own life and limbs in the

process. Concern for the wellbeing of all living beings necessarily means that the environment must be cared for as well. This of course arises from the recognition of the non-duality with ourselves and the world, of the need to practice compassion, suffering *with* because we are not separate from all that lives.

It is obvious from this view of human experience that there is huge area for Buddhist-Christian cooperation at grassroots levels. There is no doubt that we can work together to care for not only our fellow human beings but also animals and plants as well. All over the world there are Buddhist welfare organizations and environmental groups which are doing excellent services. Their efforts would be even more effective if they could work together with Christian groups in areas like health, education, the eradication of hunger and poverty, child welfare, women's rights and so on.

Eradicating Poverty

Perhaps the most shameful of all social ills facing the world today is the demeaning presence of poverty in vast areas around the globe. What is more painful is the fact that wealth is owned by such a small section of the human race. To illustrate, according to UNHDR, in the 1960s, 20% of the people who lived in the richest countries had 30 times the income of the poorest 20% of people. By 1995 that figure had increased 82 times. Of course, poverty is irrevocably linked to questions of peace and justice. We all know that the primary cause for the Arab Spring was poverty. Religious organizations have been at the forefront of efforts to eradicate poverty through the generous distribution of cash and materials to most of what is considered the third world.

From a Buddhist point of view, however, the mere handing out of aid will not eradicate poverty. In a sutra called the *Sihanada Cakkavatti Sutra* the Buddha talks in mythological terms of a king who sought to eradicate poverty by handing out property. But this made the people lazy, waiting for handouts, so he stopped

the practice. As a result, a man took what was not given and he was arrested. Asked why he stole he said he had nothing to feed his family. So the king gave him some property. Hearing about this, others also began to steal, thinking that they too could get something. To stop this, the king began to punish them. Learning from the king's example the people also turned to violence. Thus from not giving property to the needy, poverty became rife, theft increased and from increased theft, the use of weapons increased and from the increased use of weapons, killing and violence increased.

By contrast, in the *Kutadanta Sutra*, a king is advised:

To those in the kingdom who are engaged in cultivating crops and raising cattle, let your majesty distribute grain and fodder, to those in trade give capital, to those in government assign proper wages. Then these people being intent on their own occupations will not harm the kingdom.

There are many lessons to be learned here which are relevant to our discussion on life, justice and peace. Needless to say, poverty is the cause of a great many social ills, but these social ills cannot be eradicated by harsh punishments but to provide for people's basic needs. Also what we need to do is to help people become independent and to give dignity to their lives: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for life."

Therefore, as Christians and Buddhists committed to improving the welfare of human beings, we need to work together to create opportunities for people, to give them education and training as our first priorities. These are better in the long run because it will give the people, men and women, the means to support themselves.

Eradicate Greed, Satisfy Need

While it is an undeniable fact that a large proportion of the world's suffering is due to poverty, it would also be worth considering that at least some of this suffering is

caused by a *perception* of deprivation. How much is enough? We cannot deny that consumerism has deliberately created in people a sense that happiness lies in the satisfaction of wants. But is everything we want what we need? Remember the saying attributed to Mahatma Gandhi: "The world has enough for everyone's need, but never enough for one man's greed." The Buddha also pinpoints greed and the non-satisfaction of wants as the cause for suffering, *dukkha*. This is represented by the pig (ignorance) chasing the cock (greed, grasping) which results in frustration (the snake) because greed can never be satiated. The Buddha teaches us that with wisdom we will learn that **contentment** is the highest wealth (*santutti paramam dhanam*). There are enough resources in the world to satisfy the needs of all the people of the world, but the unscrupulous tactics of the major corporations of the world are creating more and more wants to keep production of goods at peak levels.

I believe that our religions have a role to play in educating people to want less, to be more frugal and to recycle. We need to come together to drive home, especially to the rich nations, that in the end we have only four basic needs: food, shelter, clothing and medicine. If we learn to keep these needs at a basic level, not only will we conserve the world's precious resources, but we will live healthier lives and save on medical bills.

In the past, Buddhism was generally viewed negatively as being far too concerned with non-worldly matters, to the extent of neglecting social welfare. This of course is not true at all. While those who have renounced the world are free to concentrate on their spiritual pursuits, the scriptures are very clear about the social responsibility of governments and kings and of the rights of citizens. In fact, in the *Aganna Sutra*, for example, the Buddha suggests that the best form of government is democratic, whereby the people are free to choose their leaders and remove those who are ineffective.

Particularly in the last few decades, Buddhists, including monks and nuns, have begun to play an increasingly effective role in community development and in fighting against social injustice, especially in the area of corruption and corporate greed. The best known among these, Ven Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese, and Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa, a Thai, have been at the forefront in promoting the concept of "Engaged Buddhism" to alleviate the suffering of humankind. And in Taiwan, the Tsu Chi Foundation is known worldwide for its commitment to reduce suffering. In Sri Lanka, Dr A.T. Ariyaratne has been internationally recognized for his work through his Sarvodaya Movement, which aims at empowering people and helping them to take charge of their lives. Closer to my home in Malaysia there are numerous Buddhist organizations in all the three major traditions doing exemplary work in the area of community welfare – like the Than Siang Foundation, the Tiratana Society, the Maha Karuna Society, Kecara and so on. It goes without saying that Christian groups are also very actively engaged in almost all the same areas. What strikes me is that if somehow we could look beyond our narrow confines and see humanity in a larger perspective, beyond the barriers of colour, class and creed, we could pool our resources and achieve immensely more than we have done so far.

So, why have we not come together? At the risk of generalizing too broadly, I believe that we could look to history to explain at least part of the problem. No one can deny the enormous damage that ethno-centrism and colonialism have wreaked on many cultures around the world. With independence, however, the roles were reversed, and once colonized peoples went in the opposite direction and exacted new forms of ethno-centrism. The result is that people have been kept apart in an atmosphere of suspicion, mistrust and antipathy. Religion, of course, was closely linked with both colonialism and nationalism and many of the uglier aspects of conversion and superiority

have resulted in much of the sad religious divides we witness today.

I think, however, that given the advances we have made in communications and globalization, at least some of us have a broader worldview to appreciate how diversity is very much a part of the human condition. Today I am happy to note that more and more religious leaders are willing to accept the reality of diversity and to **respect** (not simply “tolerate”) the beliefs of others. But I am also realistic enough to note that we are only at the threshold of true religious harmony and co-existence. There is yet a huge amount of work to be done.

While we recognize that enormous strides have been made to promote interfaith understanding through dialogue and discussion, we must admit that we have not gone beyond talking and making pronouncements of goodwill. We need to move beyond talking behind closed doors in the rarified atmosphere of intellectual dialogue and be *seen* to be *working* together. I believe we need to share our spiritual experiences by praying together and celebrating together to give visible proof to our congregations that we can co-exist harmoniously on the streets. We can then move on to the next stage to identify those among us who are working for the betterment of humanity and provide the encouragement for them to come together in person to carry out their work together. We need to set aside our suspicions about each others’ motives for doing good and instead altruistically promote the wellbeing of our fellow humans. To truly make this a reality we may have to shift from our position of trying to change people’s beliefs to changing people’s lives. We need to realize the aim of this Interface as spelled out in the context paper:

It is our hope that this dialogical exploration of the themes of life, justice and peace will help in the widening of perspectives on the Assembly theme, deepening of interreligious sensitivity and strengthening of interreligious relations between Buddhists and Christians in the Asian context and thereby help in

furthering the flourishing of all life (*emphasis mine*).

To conclude, may I ask you to consider how we can work together for the common good of humanity by promoting the following (by no means exhaustive) ideas:

1. **Spirituality:** Is it possible to find ways of identifying elements in religious practice like common prayer, meditation and reflections? Can we consider celebrating religious festivals together?
2. **Humanity:** Can we find ways to develop compassion for all beings that live and seek ways to protect our environment?
3. **Altruism:** Can we work together to fight corporate greed and exploitation?
4. **Peace:** Can we together become a force to be reckoned with to overcome violence and hatred (to denounce *all* forms of violence, no matter what the excuse or who perpetrates it)?
5. **Equality:** Can we come together to ensure that the weak and the oppressed are all freed from suffering?

There are huge possibilities for us to cooperate for the betterment of humankind. I therefore welcome this opportunity provided by the World Council of Churches to bring Buddhists and Christian together to seek the means to do this. I wish you all the greatest success. May I end with the great Buddhist benediction: *Sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatta*: May all beings be well and happy!

Mr Vijaya Samarawickrama is the Patron of the Sasana Abhiwudhiwurdhi Wardhana Society, which is the oldest Buddhist society in Malaysia, founded in 1895. He has been active in promoting interfaith understanding in Malaysia for more than twenty years. He teaches comparative religions in a private university.

Inter-Religious Interfacing in Search of Life, Justice and Peace:

Report of the “Inter-Religious Interface” Between Buddhists and Christians in Bangkok, Thailand, 27-31 May 2013

Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar

What would be the shape of a world where life, justice and peace thrive? How can we embark on (the path towards) the pursuit of such a world, as Buddhists and Christians? Do our religious traditions offer us the needed inspiration and necessary imagination to envision and engender such a world today? – These were some questions that a group of 25 Buddhists and Christians explored in the context of an “Inter-Religious Interface” between Buddhists and Christians held in Bangkok from 27-31 May 2013. Related to the theme of the forthcoming 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches – “God of life, lead us to justice and peace” – this “Inter-Religious Interfacing in Search of Life, Justice and Peace”, which was organized by the WCC in collaboration with the Christian Conference of Asia, brought together social activists, academics, religious leaders, students and theologians for conversation and possible collaboration on matters of life, justice and peace. Participants came from Britain, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Switzerland and Thailand.

Premised in an ethos of hospitality the interface enabled, in Thailand, an understanding of dialogue as being a dual engagement which could be both “face to face” and “side by side”. Face to face engagement meant that we eschewed any attempt to gloss over our differences, but rather embraced the distinctiveness of our different religious traditions and in a spirit of honesty spoke candidly about our differences. This face to face dimension of our dialogue also enabled us to recognize that dialogue is not only a dialogue with the other but also to borrow the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan

Williams’ idea of a “conversation which continues” with oneself. Being in the presence of and in conversation with our brothers and sisters of different faiths opened the participants to new questions, which had largely remained unspoken and non-existent till then. Such dialogue not only meant embarking on a search for common answers but also meant embracing new questions which could deepen our understandings of our own faith and identities; this much became clear. To put it concisely, the process of the search for answers led us to questions which prompted us to (re)search ourselves.

The interface proved to be an enriching time of learning. While participants acknowledged the bewildering complexity of the dimensions of religions that we needed to consider, when participants engaged in “interfacing”, they affirmed the commonality of our human needs, which presented us with opportunities to put into practice our overlapping visions of peace and justice. Other important elements of learning that emerged were:

- a) both our texts and contexts could foreground fruitful interreligious encounters, and therefore the need arose to analyze both in the common pursuit of justice and peace;
- b) the importance of recognizing linguistic differences in the context of interreligious dialogue (i.e. the understanding that meanings of words as used and understood by other religions may be different from our own use of the same words);
- c) the need to recognize the heterogeneity within religions and therefore not resort to stereotyping;

- d) what seemed important from one perspective did not always seem equally important in another perspective; therefore, we affirmed the necessity of privileging perspectives from the margins in order for justice and peace to be achieved;
- e) the need to name situations of violence, injustice and restricted freedom of which we are a part, and the need to recognize situations where religions act complicitly with state-sponsored violence.

Participants visited the headquarters of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists and the Wat Boworn Temple (the official residence of the royal family members of Thailand and Cambodia when they undertake compulsory monasticism). Speaking to the group, Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa, founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists and a renowned Thai Buddhist activist, affirmed that to be a true Buddhist entailed moving beyond social welfare to social change and translating inner peace into “peace in the world” by synchronizing the heart and the mind. This thought resonates in some ways with the principle of “com-passion” – of solidarity in suffering – as understood by liberation theologians. At the Wat Boworn Temple, the Venerable Phra Dr Anil Sakya, Assistant Secretary to the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand (the country’s governing body of Buddhism) and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Mahamakut Buddhist University drew upon the etymological origins of the word *sasana* (religion) and described Buddhism as being an “education system” (*Buddha Sasana*) which led to awakening. As an education system, Buddhism encompassed

relationship (social education), *reflection* (mental education) and *reasoning* (intellectual education) – the combination of which held the promise and potential to bestow us with true humanity.

The time in Bangkok could be described as intellectually stimulating, practically challenging and spiritually inspiring. The hospitality that the participants extended to each other – in terms of opening up conversational space to one another, as well as communing together as a group which was diverse yet bound together with overlapping visions of justice, peace and life – was deeply touching. In a spirit of generosity, the participants brought the gifts of their experiences, their expertise, their fears and hopes onto the common table. That we were able to agree and disagree openly, and in a spirit of honesty, was a mark of integrity as well as a commitment to make this dialogue authentic and relevant. In these seeds of hospitality and honesty lies the hope that this interface would bear the fruits of life, justice and peace in the long run, provided that these seeds be nurtured with sensitivity and creativity and the freshly broken ground of mutual engagement and encounter be fertilized with commitment and courage to make a difference to life in its diversity and fragility in our varied contexts.

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Building an Interfaith Community of Young People in Bossey

Marina Ngursangzeli Behera

Seeking to provide space and an opportunity for interfaith dialogue among young people, the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland, part of the World Council of Churches (WCC), organized for the seventh time the summer course on “Building an Interfaith Community” from 12 to 30 July 2013, along with the WCC’s Programme on Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, in collaboration with the *Inter Fondation pour l’entre-connaissance* (Knowing Foundation) and the *Fondation Racines et Sources*.

This year’s theme was “Different Creeds, A Common Humanity: Justice and Peace in Interfaith Dialogue.”

Believing that even though we have different creeds, we belong to one humanity, this course intended and hoped to reach out to people of different faiths to reflect on the importance and the need to work together towards building and creating a common future – a more compassionate and just and peaceful society. The emphasis was on respect and mutual trust and the promotion of the role of religions in reconciliation, instead of these being identified with conflicts.

There were three main presentations on Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The presentation on Christianity was done by the WCC General Secretary Rev Dr Olav Fyske Tveit and Rev Dr Jean Claude Basset; the presentation on Judaism was done by Rabbi Marc Raphael Guedj; and Hafid Ouairi, Shady Amman, S. E. Docteur Ibrahim Aladoofi and Mahmoud Hammoud made the presentations on Islam. There were others from the WCC such as Guillermo Kerber-Mas, Peniel Rufus Rajkumar and Fulata L. Mbano-Moyo who gave presentations on “Responsibilities of religious communities towards a sustainable earth”, “Resourcing religions for justice and peace”, and “Religion and culture, gender and women

and theology in a post-colonial context”, respectively. Dora Arce-Valentin from the WCRC (World Communion of Reformed Churches) gave a presentation on “Economic Justice”, and S. Wesley Ariarajah from Drew University, USA gave a presentation on “Fostering Mutual Trust and Respect”. Christine Housel, the General Secretary of the WSCF, also played an important role in leading the community-building sessions.

One important component of the program was the “Scriptural Reasoning” sessions led by Clare Amos, which not only enabled the participants to reflect more deeply into their own sacred texts but also to learn about the others’ sacred scriptures.

Visits to a church, a mosque and a synagogue were also an important element of the programme as it gave the participants the opportunity to experience the worship and ambience of the different worship places of each faith community. A visit to the WCC headquarters in Geneva also allowed the participants to meet with the other staff of the WCC who shared with them their programmes and the work in which they are involved.

There were 25 participants in all, from the following countries: Iran, Nigeria, Israel, India, Egypt, USA, Palestine, New Zealand, Germany, Brazil, Ireland and Sweden.

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Book Review

***B. R. Ambedkar, The Buddha and His Dhamma: A Critical Edition.* By B.R. Ambedkar. Edited, Introduced, and Annotated by Aakash Singh Rathore and Ajay Verma. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011.)**

Written in 1956 at the end of his life, in a hurry, when ill, and published posthumously, B. R. Ambedkar's (1893-1956) magnum opus, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, merits attention, debate and discussion. Among those who dismiss the work, the claim has been made that Ambedkar manipulated source materials to support his ideological positions; the lack of citations, critical apparatus and bibliographies have been cited as evidence for such manipulation. In a much-needed contestation of such a dismissive posture that the editors rightly name a "mistaken impression" and "absurd communication" (Preface, viii), this critical edition offers a thorough inclusion of sources with citations and a critical apparatus, not to mention the extremely helpful bibliography at the end and an excellent introduction in the beginning.

Born a Dalit (a self-given name to communities that have historically been called and treated as "untouchables") in the Mahar community of the North Indian state of Maharashtra, Ambedkar was one of India's foremost champions of democracy and freedom for all and a major figure in the shaping of the Constitution of India. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism on 14 October 1956, along with thousands of his followers, is a major event in Indian history as it revived the religious authenticity of mass conversion as both a protest against exclusion and a forging of a new sense of positive identity. Simultaneously, the event also revived Buddhist thought and practice in India.

The "political reorientation" (Introduction, ix) that Ambedkar offers in his reading of Buddha has been recognized as deserving a special and distinct treatment

in addition to the Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana schools of Buddhism and can be called, as he himself called it, Navayana – a "new yana" (ix), a new way or vehicle. As Navayana, *Buddha and His Dhamma* critically interrogates some of the apolitical interpretations of Buddhism often encountered in interfaith dialogues. Ambedkar offers convincing arguments to show that Buddha was not apolitical, anger-less, or inert. In setting out to show how this is the case, Ambedkar narrates Buddha's critique of *chaturvarna* (graded caste hierarchy), *karma* (caste duty and its philosophical basis), and *dharma* (law, especially the idea of its absolute and eternal validity).

When told that "in war the Kshatriyas cannot make a distinction between relations and strangers" and that "they must fight even against brothers for the sake of their kingdom" (18), Buddha walks out, lamenting intolerant majoritarian tendencies. On a different occasion, he announces, "I desire not that fruit which is sought by causing pain to others!" (39). The idea of unquestionable caste duty and *sanatana dharma* (eternal and absolute law/duty) is thus seen as ethically problematic.

Without relegating the whole of life to a cycle of suffering, he recognizes the "problem of social conflict" (41). It is this dimension that animates his discussion of "sorrow and suffering in the world" (41). "Asceticism" in its inward turn is given up and Ambedkar notes how Gautama desired "that the ills of life on earth be probed and a solution found" (42). These general realizations lead up to the more specific and particular realization that the *chaturvarna* division of castes is a system of "graded inequality" (56) and that "the law of karma" was formulated "to sap the spirit of revolt completely" (58). Lifting up categories such as "love," "justice," "peace," "equality," "liberty" and "fraternity" (121-122), Ambedkar argues that "the Buddha has a social message" and, further, that he privileges all those

categories but that “they have been buried by modern authors” (122). In this way, he argues that Buddha and Buddhism is an active, engaged, non-inert and almost impatient ethical way of living.

Keen to point out that Buddha “was the strongest opponent of caste, and the earliest and staunchest upholder of equality,” Ambedkar argues that “there is no argument in favour of caste and inequality which [Buddha] did not refute” (161-162). The Buddhist concept of *sunyata*, Ambedkar avers, “does not mean nihilism out and out” (130) but is rather “the impermanence of the nature of all things” upon which “the possibility of all other things depends” (130). The take-away for interreligious encounters is that nothing is “final” or “infallible” (148).

Lest one think that Ambedkar’s discussion of Buddhism is relevant only as it stands

in contrast to a certain dominant strand of Hinduism, Ambedkar’s modern reading of Buddhism simultaneously offers itself as a multi-sided critique of religion in general. Ambedkar argues, “The Buddha has not said, ‘Blessed are they who are poor.’ The Buddha has not said that the sufferer should not try to change his condition” (128-129). Further, he notes how Buddhist soteriology privileges Buddha as “Marga Data (Way Finder)” and not “Moksha Data (Giver of Salvation)” (118). Here, a careful reader will note the presence of criticism of certain dominant religious (Christianity included) interpretations that lead to acceptance of inequality and ethical passivity, both of which are fundamentally opposed to Buddha and his Dhamma.

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