

LET THE WAVES ROAR



Perspectives of young
prophetic voices in the
ecumenical movement

Editors
Joy Eva Bohol &
Benjamin Simon



World Council
of Churches

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Edited by: Joy Eva Bohol
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FOREWORD

What would the ecumenical movement be without the young people? It would have no origin and no future, for it must never be forgotten that the various youth movements were already a very important motor of the ecumenical movement at the end of the 19th century. Our history teaches us of the key contributions made by young people in the fellowship: we owe much to their impulses. Because of this, it is important today not only to regard them as the future, but also to listen to them in the present, taking seriously their ideas and suggestions, experiences, and fears, especially in and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Young people have made waves and will continue to do so in the ecumenical movement. These waves disrupt social issues, but at the same time offer resilience and hope to different generations.

Many of their existential concerns are voiced in the following contributions. They deal with questions of politics and church life, inclusion, gender equalities, the role of young people in the ecumenical movement, how to build peace, and how justice can be established, among others. All these issues are on the agenda of the World Council of Churches; it is critical to listen to what young voices have to say on these topics.

I am very grateful to the editors for their work. They have created a platform that enables young people from the eight different regions of the World Council of Churches to be heard across all other generations.

Young people are key members of the ecumenical movement. They are an active part of every aspect of the church and society. I am hopeful that through the brave voices of this diverse group of young authors, the ecumenical movement will continue to grow, with different streams emerging and flowing toward a more just and sustainable future.

Let us build on the energy, enthusiasm, and engagement of young people. The ecumenical movement can learn a lot from them and should intentionally take up their ideas and thoughts in the 11th Assembly, taking place from 31 August to 8 September 2022 in Karlsruhe, Germany, under the theme: “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.”

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca
Acting General Secretary
World Council of Churches

INTRODUCTION

Often, we experience waves as exciting. Sometimes they are scary and even destructive. In the Bible, waves often have this character. In the book of the prophet Isaiah, however, waves have special meaning. Here, it is God who initiates them to demonstrate power and influence: “For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the Lord of hosts is his name” (51:15).

It is remarkable and exciting that the people in the Bible first turn to God in their distress. God perceives the suffering of the people, listens to them, and claims them as God’s own. God shows them affection and empathetically cares for them. Here, images of the ocean are used to show God’s affection for the people. God created the waves and their roar, so why shouldn’t God be able to restore justice and peace?

Roaring waves can also change and persuade. It is clear to us, the editors of this volume, that in our societies the younger generation can serve as sounding and roaring waves. This is the reason for the thought-provoking title and cover image.

Leaving the metaphorical, throughout history and today, young people can be found disrupting systems, challenging norms, and fighting for real change. But what does this mean in the life of the ecumenical movement?

In the gospels, Jesus uses the phrase, “let them/her/him” as an open and inclusive invitation to people in need and to the others present. He says, “Let the little children come to me” (Matt. 19:14), and when Judas chastises Mary for anointing his feet with expensive perfume, Jesus says, “Let her alone” (John 12:3). In this book, young people are the waves, and God is inviting the church to listen to their roar—especially in this time of crises.

Young people are creating waves and splashes in the ecumenical waters. As we journey together as a movement, as a fellowship, young people continually remind us that we are called to be prophetic voices in church and society.

The last book by the WCC on youth engagement in the ecumenical movement was *Echos of Peace*, published in 2011 by then WCC Echos Commission on Youth member Nikos Kosmidis. The book is a compilation of essays of eight young people, representing the regions of the fellowship. The young authors reflect and share their perspectives on peace and justice, “inspired from the WCC’s Decade to Overcome Violence and on the occasion of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation” (Kosmidis, 2011).

In 1995 *Ecumenism and Youth*, by David Devadas, was published. It was released after the 1993 Ecumenical Global Gathering of Youth and Students (EGGYS) in Brazil. The book reflects the personal observations of a young participant in the EGGYS and includes some of the products of the gathering. It presents the challenges experienced by the young people during that period and explores opportunities for further work with the 18–35-year-old age group.

Prior to EGGYS, Ans Joachim Van der Bent produced *From Generation to Generation: The Story of Youth in the World Council of Churches* (WCC Publications, 1986). This book detailed the historical timeline and contributions of young people in the ecumenical movement, including the highlights of significant waves of young people's engagement in different areas and different time periods. Between 1965 and 1977, the WCC youth department and the World Council of Christian Education published the *Risk Magazine* series, which featured articles by young people for young people across the global ecumenical movement.

Between 2011 and now, no book has discussed the current wave of young people's engagement in the ecumenical movement. Since the 10th assembly in Busan, South Korea, there has been an increasing call on the ecumenical community to address concerns and engagement of young people within our churches and the society. Consultations with young people, participants in WCC events between the 10th and the 11th assemblies, and a number of church leaders have concluded that there is a need to provide an updated resource to get to know young people of today and to explore ways for the church to effectively engage the 18–30-year-old age group in the ecumenical movement.

The 17 young people whose voices are heard in these pages represent eight regions and diverse church traditions. Another three chapters have been contributed by the editors and former WCC youth department staff. The book invites all generations to discern the signs of our times and to be proactive in our response to them.

We hope that the waves that today's young ecumenists will make, led by the Spirit of the triune God, will inspire and contribute to the flow of the ecumenical movement on its pilgrimage of justice and peace.

Joy Eva Bohol
Benjamin Simon

Geneva, Switzerland 2021



PART I

CHAPTER ONE

TO BUILD AND TO PLANT

DONNA McNIEL

Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child."

—Jeremiah 1:6

It is a strange time to be looking up and trying to put together an overview of how ecumenically-minded global youth have been and are engaged in the world. 2020 and 2021 will always be known as the year of the coronavirus pandemic. Coupled with this crisis are separate but connected movements for racial equality, sparked in part by the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, and similar incidents that both preceded and succeeded his murder. The injustice that led to his death is mirrored by that in countries around the world, North and South, developed and developing, communal and more individualistic. These protests came on the heels of the persistent and inspiring youth protests in Hong Kong which at this time appear to have been quashed by Chinese leadership. Hong Kong was preceded by the movement of school students started by Greta Thunberg for climate justice. And in regions across the globe, young people have been advocating for gender inclusion and equality for people of all sexual orientations. These are not merely social movements, but also faith movements, built on the conviction that the gospel of Jesus Christ demands justice for all God's people. Ecumenism and interfaith community are at their heart.

None of these moments stand alone. We do not yet know what the events of 2020 and 2021 will mean to people in 5 or 10 years. Standing in the middle of this time it is tempting to see these events as discrete and purely a result of independent events. But decades of youth engagement around the world have led us to this moment. In the Church and in our larger societies, youth have been coming together to learn and strategize. They have been building coalitions and challenging the status quo.

The prophet Jeremiah tells us that the Lord put words in the young man's mouth and appointed him over nations and kingdoms, "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). It is the job of youth to shake us up—to point out where we have become too staid, too complacent, too unyielding—and to point us toward a new way. Since its beginning in the 19th century, the ecumenical movement has depended upon youth for energy and enthusiasm. At a time

when the structures of Christian life seem weakened, youth are once again pointing the way and stirring up the fervour for justice, peace, and the holy fellowship of *koinonia*.

The book of Jeremiah makes clear to us that disregarding the voices of youth is not new. Even Jeremiah knows that he is too young to be heard. Whether from lack of experience or the expected resistance of older and therefore presumed to be wiser leaders, Jeremiah does not believe himself to be qualified for the task God is asking of him. But God has plans for him. God knows the gifts that Jeremiah brings, and it is exactly his youth that God plans to use to capture the attention of God's people.

Of course, the other primary example of youth leadership in scripture is Mary of Nazareth. She is only a girl when she is visited by the angel Gabriel. Her youth and her unmarried status are not hindrances, but a key aspect of God's plan for her. Because she is young, God's grace will be revealed. And it is her youth that gives her the freedom to say yes to God so openly and freely (Luke 1:26–38).

Despite these shining examples of God's particular invitation to youth leadership, our churches have generally sidelined young people. We place greater emphasis on experience and credentials, too often forgetting that God's ways are not our ways. Young leaders have refused to sit back and wait, though. They have stepped forward and demanded to be heard. They have spoken God's prophetic word time and time again. They often make us uncomfortable, throwing off the restrictions of tradition and ideology in order to open our eyes to what is happening in the world right now. Young people keep the ecumenical movement alive and relevant to the context of our particular time.

A whole history of youth in the ecumenical movement would take many more pages than this introduction will allow.¹ Rather, there are several recurring themes that young ecumenists, in particular, have raised throughout the ecumenical movement. These form a helpful lens and umbrella for understanding their place, purpose, and still unrealized potential in our search for unity in Christ.

The ecumenical movement has always been about bringing together diverse communities of Christians into one *koinonia* or fellowship. In each period, the ways in which ecumenical leaders have reached out to broaden the fellowship have seemed bold and exciting. And yet, it is never broad enough or bold enough. Time and time again youth have advocated and agitated for greater inclusion. In this way, they have pushed the boundaries of ecumenism and urged us into greater faithfulness to God's vision of *oikoumene*.

While the ecumenical movement has spent significant time and energy focused on issues of justice, other concerns have claimed greater resources and attention. As an institution made up of other institutions, and ancient ones at that, there is a powerful

1 Ans Joachim van der Bent offers as thorough an introduction as exists up to the mid-1980s in *From Generation to Generation: The Story of Youth in the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986).

pull toward cautious engagement in social and political concerns. Young people have resisted this impulse, and have been critical in bringing issues of great importance in national, regional, and global contexts to the attention of ecumenical leaders. Their insistence that Christian faith must engage issues of injustice has made it impossible for ecumenical leaders to argue away their responsibilities in this area, or to merely delegate them to confessional or local bodies.

These closely connected concerns for inclusion in the *koinonia* and ecumenical advocacy for justice are themes that fueled the formation of the early ecumenical organizations. They have been carried by young ecumenists for more than 150 years and they are sung anew in the pages that follow here. Young people are prophets within the ecumenical movement and beyond. They have been a beating heart in ecumenism that will not relent, thanks be to God. And yet, youth have continually had to advocate for their full inclusion in the leadership and decision-making processes of the ecumenical movement. Each generation has fought for greater recognition and involvement and has hoped that this time the fight would be won once and for all. Perhaps this is why as young ecumenists move into the ranks of older leaders, they too often forget that the voices of younger leaders will always be essential if ecumenism is going to be more than another bureaucratic institution in the life of the Church.

INCREASING INCLUSION

An ecumenical impulse

The 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh tends to serve as the historical starting line of the ecumenical movement. But, of course, decades of planning, outreach, and community building were necessary for the 1910 conference to come to fruition. It is difficult to decide what to consider the beginning of any historical period. It is clear, however, that the worldwide ecumenical movement would not have developed as it had apart from three key youth movements that grew out of a deep desire to further the gospel and meet the needs of God's people.

The Industrial Revolution was a powerful force that swept through London, England—permanently changing the form and structure of life in the city, as it would in cities around the world. Youth were particularly affected as they sought work in factories, railroads, and the commercial enterprises that supported the rapidly growing population. There were few workplace protections, so hours were long, wages low, and additional support non-existent. Workers lived in overcrowded tenements and boarding houses with few amenities. Health conditions were terrible. Violence, alcohol use and abuse, and sexual abuse were common. While many churches sought to address these concerns, it was young leaders coming together who offered resources to workers where they were.

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was started in 1844 by a group of London sales associates. They offered Bible study, prayer, and fellowship to those seeking alternatives to the city's rough ways. Educational classes and reading rooms soon followed. The organization grew quickly, with two dozen chapters by 1851; also, that year, the first YMCAs were formed in Montreal, Canada, and Boston, Massachusetts, USA. This evangelical impulse was not limited by church membership or socio-economic class, unlike most organizations of the time. It was truly ecumenical in a way that most churches were not. In 1854, the first international convention of YMCAs was held in Paris, representing more than 30,000 members in seven countries.²

Women were also moving to cities seeking work. In London, in 1855, two women sought to meet the needs of single women. Lady Mary Kinnaird founded a hostel for nurses and Emma Robarts organized prayer groups.³ Their organizations merged with others in 1871⁴ and led to the official founding of the worldwide Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in 1894.⁵ Like the YMCA, the young women's movement brought together people from diverse churches and socio-economic classes.

While the YMCA and YWCA sought to serve workers, the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) was formed in 1895 to bring together student Christian organizations in North America and Europe.⁶ YMCA and YWCA leaders were instrumental in creating this ecumenical organization that brought a variety of youth movements together. It quickly became a truly global federation, reaching to Asia, Africa, and South America. It cultivated the next leaders of the ecumenical movement, including John R. Mott, a US Methodist layperson, who led the WSCF for 44 years.⁷ He was one of many ecumenical leaders who were shaped and empowered by the youth movement and whose vision of the *oikoumene* caught the imaginations and hearts of Christians around the world.

The 1910 World Missionary Conference

The 1910 meeting in Edinburgh of North American and European missionary societies was the seminal event for the global mission of Protestant and Anglican churches in the 20th century. John R. Mott, general secretary of the WSCF, served as chair. Other

2 "History of the YMCA Movement," YMCA, 2009, accessed 5 September 2020, https://web.archive.org/web/20100310220044/http://www.ymca.net/about_the_ymca/history_of_the_ymca.html.

3 "History," World YWCA, accessed 5 September 2020, <https://www.worldywca.org/about-us/history/>

4 "Young Women's Christian Association," The 1918 United War Work Campaign, accessed 5 September 2020, <https://unitedwarwork.com/groups/young-womens-christian-association>.

5 "History," World YWCA,].

6 "History," WSCF, para. 1, accessed 5 Sept 5, 2020, <http://www.wscf.ch/who-we-are/the-federation/history>

7 See "Mott, John R. (1865-1955)," on the website of the History of Missiology, Boston University School of Theology, by Norman E. Thomas, reprinted with permission from *Biographical Diction of Christian Missions* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1998), <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/l-m/mott-john-r-1865-1955/>. Mott also served as the chair of the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, did extensive work around the world as chair of the continuation committee of the Edinburgh conference, and then chaired the provisional committee of the WCC.

WSCF, YMCA, and Student Volunteer Movement leaders were delegates to the missionary conference.⁸ Leaders also emerged from this event, such as William Temple, who served there as an usher.⁹ He would go on to become the Archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the Church of England, and an architect of the World Council of Churches.

The meeting was primarily concerned with coordinating the work of spreading the gospel throughout the world. It represented the colonial attitudes of its day, and yet members urged one another to envision a larger and more inclusive Christian community. Looking back, we know that vision was terribly limited. And yet the desire for true community in Christ was an early step that led to today's ecumenical life. The commission report on "Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity" was particularly significant in articulating a way forward for a larger ecumenical movement. A Chinese delegate, Cheng Jingyi, spoke of the Christian Federation of China. He said, "we hope to see, in the near future, a united Christian Church without any denominational distinctions."¹⁰ Following the conference, the continuation committee, once again led by John R. Mott, began to make this vision a reality.

Mott was a unique figure of his time, an international leader in secular and religious circles. As a leader in the YMCA, he encouraged participation of Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians. Later, as an international envoy of US President Woodrow Wilson, as well as a participant and leader of many international student meetings, he had the opportunity to connect with Orthodox communities. He was largely responsible for welcoming Orthodox Christians into the early ecumenical movement. He continued to be an advocate for Orthodox engagement throughout his career.¹¹ Among many other accolades, Mott's ecumenical work earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946.¹²

War and post-war

The First World War called upon the ecumenical youth organizations to live out their mission in new ways. They worked diligently to respond to the needs of those displaced and impoverished by war. The YWCA was particularly engaged supporting women working

8 The Student Volunteer Movement was another 19th-century youth organization. It was started in the USA for young boys and men who pledged to become missionaries. It later was a significant recruiter of missionaries.

See Charles Snyder, "D.L. Moody and the Genesis of the Student Volunteer Movement," 29 May 2020, Moody Center, <https://moodycenter.org/articles/d-l-moody-and-the-genesis-of-the-student-volunteer-movement>

9 Donna L. McNeil [sic], *Work, Pray, and Sweat: The Stewards Programme of the World Council of Churches*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 14.

10 Peter Tze Ming Ng, "Cheng Jingyi: Prophet of His Time," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 1 (January 2012), para. 1, http://www.internationalbulletin.org/issues/2012-01/2012-01-014-ng.html#_ednref1.

11 C. Howard Hopkins, "The Legacy of John R. Mott," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 5, no. 2 (April 1, 1981), 70.

12 "John R. Mott: Biographical," by Emily Greene Balch, from *Nobel Lectures, Peace 1926-1950*, ed. Frederick W. Haberman, Elsevier Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1972, on the website of the Nobel Prize, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1946/mott/biographical>.

in the war effort, who often were in need of affordable housing, better wages, and basic workplace protections.¹³ The WSCF established a fund to ensure that students did not go hungry.¹⁴ The YMCA provided relief stations, mail services, and morale programs for troops.¹⁵ Following the war all three organizations set up refugee units to help displaced people build new lives in a strange country. The ecumenical youth movement began with a desire to meet the needs of youth in the world. Wartime tested and proved that intention like no other period of time. The organizational clarity and strength that this provided would serve them and the whole ecumenical movement well in the years to come.¹⁶

The years shortly after World War II were understandably focused on concerns about the moral behavior of youth. W. A. Visser't Hooft, former general secretary of the YMCA and future head of the World Council of Churches, wrote in *Youth and Church*, in approximately 1929, about his concerns with a lack of religious and moral teaching in schools. He pointed to European doctors stating that “sexual diseases are wide-spread among pupils of the higher classes of our secondary schools” as evidence of the need for churches to be more involved in education.¹⁷

The concerns for the moral state of youth gave way to more pressing matters with Hitler's rise to power in Germany and the growing threat of yet another war. In 1934, the theme of the 5th International Conference of Youth was “Churches and Christians and the Problem of the State.” Now synonymous with the Danish city in which it was held, the Fanø meeting claimed the pre-eminence of the Christian commitment to God above any concerns of the state. Participants further declared that while they must work within nations and political systems they could not be instruments of the state. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was the chief navigator of such measures. He had insisted that the German delegation to the conference include only members of the Confessing Church,¹⁸ which had issued the Barmen Declaration earlier in 1934.¹⁹ This meant that Bonhoeffer's clarion call of faithfulness to God above any earthly power was issued from Fanø.²⁰ It is a call that continues to ring today, 75 years after his execution.

13 “Young Women's Christian Association,” *The United War Work Campaign*, <https://unitedwarwork.com/groups/young-womens-christian-association/>.

14 “History,” WSCF, <http://www.wscf.ch/who-we-are/the-federation/history>.

15 “YMCA During War,” YMCA England and Wales, <https://www.ymca.org.uk/about/history-heritage/ymca-during-war>.

16 Van der Bent discusses the important period after World War I, which saw the 1925 The Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work and the Continuation Committee which did significant work for more than a decade (*From Generation to Generation*)

17 Van der Bent, 4.

18 Bryan Galloway, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Speech in Fanø Denmark,” <https://bonhoefferblog.wordpress.com/2009/08/20/dietrich-bonhoeffers-speech-in-fano-denmark>.

19 “Theological Declaration of Barmen,” in *The Church's Confession Under Hitler*, by Arthur C. Cochrane (Philadelphia: Westminster Presse, 1962), 237-42, accessed 3 Jan 2020, <https://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/barmen.htm>.

20 Van der Bent, *From Generation to Generation*, 5-6.

In the years that followed the Fanø meeting, gatherings of ecumenical youth repeated their commitment to peace and resistance to war, the strengthening of relationships among youth from different nations, and an unwavering commitment to the gospel in the midst of societal upheaval and outright war.²¹ Visser't Hooft, Bonhoeffer, and Mott were just a few of the figures that rose from this crucible. Young leaders were shaped by their participation in the international and regional ecumenical meetings. But they went on to lead and shape the World Council of Churches, the various youth and student organizations, and ecumenical councils on every continent for decades to come. Their clarity of purpose in the first decades of the 20th century and their courage in speaking out to older church leaders and the leaders of nations and armies, set a pattern for the life of the ecumenical movement to come. Their example encouraged future young leaders who would challenge these forebears to be as bold in future years, and in the face of very different challenges.

The World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches is the largest international ecumenical organization. It is the gathering point of other international, regional, and national ecumenical bodies. The assemblies of the WCC are the physical gatherings of these communities. Assemblies are held approximately every seven years, with some significant departures, including the upcoming assembly that has been postponed to 2022 due to the global coronavirus pandemic. The assemblies offer a periodic spotlight on how ecumenism is growing and changing. We will use them here to discuss youth in the ecumenical movement, recognizing that this is far from a complete picture of all that youth have done. The official assembly reports illustrate the unrelenting perseverance of youth, generation after generation, even in the face of significant roadblocks put up by the institutions of the churches and the ecumenical community. Assembly after assembly speaks to a desire for greater youth participation and yet the WCC in particular, and the ecumenical movement in general, has yet to break open its decision-making processes in a way that allows for truly diverse and equal leadership, not only for youth, but also for Indigenous people, those with disabilities, and other under-represented communities.

And yet, youth keep showing up! Successive assemblies see increasing numbers of youth clamoring to be included. They deeply value the time spent together as a single youth body in pre-assembly gatherings, but they are even more eager to be full participants in the work of the ecumenical movement. They are theologically astute, contextually grounded, and eager to widen their perspectives. This is not fully reflected in the assembly reports, though careful reading offers important insights into the history of youth in the ecumenical movement.

Following World War II, the WCC was finally able to officially organize itself. Its structure centers around periodic assemblies that set the agenda for the coming years. The

21 For a fuller discussion of the multitude of youth meetings occurring in this period that fuelled both the ecumenical opposition to war and the growth of the ecumenical movement itself, see van der Bent, 6 - 22.

first assembly took place in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in 1948. As a sign of its particular concern for youth, it established a youth delegation with its own gatherings and reports. Planners also invited another group of young adults to serve as “ushers” and help with the administrative chores of the assembly.²² The youth delegation began meeting together a few days before the assembly began, having already received preparatory information about the theme of the meeting. One side effect of the approach to have a separate youth delegation was that youth concerns were treated as somehow different from those of older or more established ecumenists. The report from the youth delegation makes clear that the youth were determined not to be so limited.

The youth delegation spent considerable time discussing the formation of the youth team of the WCC that would be responsible for carrying out the ecumenical work with youth. However, they did not stop there. As youth delegate Philip Potter, from the Methodist Church in Jamaica, made clear, the delegation wrestled with the assembly’s theme of “Man’s Disorder and God’s Design.” Potter, on behalf of the delegation, articulated a clear commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and then called the Church to task for its disunity that hinders the full expression of the gospel: “We cannot express too strongly how pained we are by the divisions of the churches... We are convinced that the time has come when the churches must speak to each other in love of the stumbling-blocks which mar our fellowship and which drive men and women, and especially youth, away from us.”²³

Reflecting the work and concerns of the youth movements that led them to Amsterdam, the youth delegation also advocated for greater attention to the concerns of families and of the education of young people, to meet the moral and religious challenges of their times. As Potter began his report, he pointed out that the 100 gathered youth represented thousands of others around the world. They were from 48 different countries and had “a fair balance of sexes and callings among us which indicates more nearly the actual situation in the churches from which we come.”²⁴ This, too, set a precedent for the future of the WCC, in which youth would continually push for increased diversity and inclusion.

The Amsterdam assembly made clear what the role of youth was to be in the continuing ecumenical movement. It would not only be an office, or a set of programs offered to youth; more significantly, it was to be a compelling voice calling the whole Church to greater courage, enthusiasm, and unity for the sake of the gospel. The youth ecumenical movement continued through the work of the dedicated youth organizations as well as

22 See McNeil, *Work, Pray, and Sweat*, for more regarding the ushers and stewards programme.

23 W. A. Visser ‘t Hooft, ed., *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Held at Amsterdam, August 22nd to September 4th, 1948*, vol. 5, *Man’s Disorder and God’s Design* (London: SCM Press, 1949), 185.

24 Visser’t Hooft, *The First Assembly*, 183.

the instruments of the WCC.²⁵ The youth department of the WCC worked diligently to observe, connect, and coordinate the various expressions of the movement and to ensure that their voices were heard by the larger WCC.

The 2nd assembly was held in 1954, in Evanston, Illinois, USA. Expanding upon the example of Amsterdam, it held a pre-assembly gathering for youth, stewards, and young visitors. This helped empower and equip youth to participate in the assembly and in the larger ecumenical movement, and would be the dedicated pattern for future assemblies. The pre-assembly gatherings ensured that youth understood the themes of each assembly and were prepared to discuss them in the plenary. They explained the often-complicated structures of the WCC and gave youth access to the decision-making bodies. By the end of each pre-assembly gathering, the youth delegation was prepared to address increasingly older leaders with clarity and conviction. Youth participants have repeatedly cited the pre-assembly gathering as the highlight of their WCC experience. They have returned home with a greater sense of the concerns of young people around the world and are better equipped to advocate for change in their home contexts.

Every assembly of the WCC has raised the question of increasing involvement of youth participants. In Evanston, as was the case in Amsterdam, the youth delegation was seated separately from the full assembly. Philip Potter once again gave the youth report (despite being over 30). Though this report was not included in the official assembly report, Potter discussed the international youth gatherings that had taken place since the Amsterdam assembly as well as the ecumenical work camps and world youth projects²⁶ hosted by the youth team around the world each year.²⁷ The assembly also expressed appreciation for the YMCA, YWCA, WSCF, and the national and regional work coordinated with the WCC's youth team.²⁸

The two WCC Assemblies of the 1960s were a landmark for youth involvement. As youth were demanding to be heard in countries around the world, and at international youth meetings, they also refused to be sidelined at the WCC. The 1961 assembly in New Delhi, India, marked a significant change to youth engagement. The 100 youth participants had voice, though not vote, in the assembly. Philip Potter, now an acknowledged ecumenical leader, presented the youth report expressing the "impatience" of youth with the churches' effort to achieve unity:

25 Van der Bent thoroughly discusses the work of the ecumenical movement between the assemblies of the WCC. (*From Generation to Generation*, It's throughout the book between discussions of assemblies). Given the limitations of this introduction, we will use the assemblies to highlight how the ecumenical youth movement has progressed in the time between gatherings and how the WCC, the official structure of the global ecumenical movement, is supporting and responding to youth.

26 For extensive discussion of the work camp program, see Van der Bent, 30 - 60.

27 Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, 1954 (London: SCM Press, 1955), 66.

28 Visser't Hooft, *The Evanston Report*, 186.

Often the activity of youth in pressing for such changes on local and regional levels results from their taking seriously all that has been said in ecumenical gatherings about the fact that the things which bind us together as Christians are more important than the things that divide us. . . . The “pressure” sometimes felt to be coming from Christian youth and students, is first of all an expression of their prayerful determination that what God has revealed to us (in the ecumenical movement) as his will, shall not be obstructed by our lethargy or fear of change.”²⁹

In the discussion of the structure and work of the youth department, particular encouragement was given to the formation of national and regional ecumenical youth councils.³⁰ These efforts were already well underway as an outgrowth of the robust international youth movement.³¹ Participants in the pre-assembly meeting affirmed ecumenical work camps, in particular, that provided service opportunities, and in some cases income, to unemployed youth.

The 4th assembly in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1968, saw even greater impatience of youth. The expanding war in southeast Asia, the civil rights movement in the USA, and freedom movements around the world, all contributed to a sense of unrest and dissatisfaction. Uppsala became a focal point for the wide-reaching demands of ecumenical youth, demands that had been often discussed but not truly acted on in previous assemblies. In his presentation of the report on worship, Professor John Myendorff asked, “Is not the revolt of youth in all countries a sign that they are longing for a different kind of world?”³² The youth in Uppsala were clear about the sort of world they longed for.

There were 127 youth participants at the assembly and 345 stewards.³³ The pre-assembly youth gathering also included large numbers of youth from Sweden. Once again, the youth participants were given voice in the assembly, but not vote. Their raised voices were not to be ignored. Having learned the power and art of protest that marked the 1960s, youth staged several effective protests during the assembly. They were critical of the hierarchical nature of church leadership and the lack of representation of diverse communities. When a film was shown to introduce the section “Toward Justice and Peace in International Affairs,” the youth participants expressed their profound concern, stating that they viewed the film as “an exercise in Cold War propaganda. Its point

29 Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 221.

30 Visser't Hooft, *The New Delhi Report*, 223.

31 Van der Bent, *From Generation to Generation*, 51 - 64.

32 Vaughan Hinton, ed., *Uppsala '68: A Report on the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Uppsala, Sweden, July 4 to 19, 1968* (Sydney: Australian Council of Churches, 1968), 74. Meyendorff was an ordained priest in the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America (now the Orthodox Church of America), and chair of the Faith and Order Commission.

33 It is worth noting that young adults working at WCC gatherings as ushers or stewards often outnumber youth allowed to participate in the deliberative bodies.

seemed not to be the dangers and destructiveness of war and injustice, but the supposed necessity of maintaining the balance of nuclear terror—a balance always loaded in favour of the West. We deplore the showing of this film before the Assembly, and we ask the forgiveness of our brothers from the East.”³⁴ They raised their concerns about nuclear warfare and other weapons of mass destruction repeatedly during the assembly. As in other areas, the youth were critical of an unwillingness to name both “corporate and individual” responsibility for poverty, a critique that was welcomed by some older leaders who said, “This was the recurrent cry, properly so, of the youth delegates.”³⁵ One especially memorable protest took place during the closing worship service of the assembly. The youth participants processed into the cathedral carrying signs with quotes from assembly resolutions that demanded action on a range of social issues. The point of this protest was to call the assembly to action and not only words.³⁶ Uppsala was the moment when youth involvement in the WCC came of age. There would not be another assembly in which youth settled for a sideline role.

The 1975 assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, saw greater agitation for concrete inclusion of women and youth. The moderator of the “Workshop on Youth” was appointed to serve on the assembly business committee and the workshop was asked to appoint another person under 30 to serve on the committee. This was the first assembly in which data were formally reported on percentages of women, youth, and lay delegates. Ten percent of delegates to the assembly were youth, which indicated significant progress in the inclusion of youth (although more than 30 percent of the global population in 1975 was between the ages of 15 and 30). Whereas there were clear calls from youth on specific social issues at the assemblies in New Delhi and Uppsala, much of the work of youth and about youth in Nairobi focused on increasing engagement in ecumenism. The Youth Department was once again restructured as an autonomous subunit of the WCC, as recommended by the youth workshop. This was especially urgent following large budget and staffing cuts to the youth staff since the Evanston assembly.³⁷ Additionally, two areas for further study were highlighted: 1) Youth participation in ecumenism on local and international levels; and 2) Youth for social justice, including “youth and personhood,” “violence and non-violence,” and “youth and spirituality.”³⁸ The assembly clearly praised the contributions of youth within the WCC and in youth movements around the world. And yet, the assembly also viewed youth as an outside entity that needed to be brought into the work of the WCC.³⁹ By 1975, the WCC seemed to have forgotten that youth were the founders of the ecumenical movement and have always been the engine of ecumenical progress.

34 Hinton, *Uppsala '68*, 57.

35 Hinton, 73.

36 David Enderton Johnson, ed., *Uppsala to Nairobi, 1968–1975: Report of the Central Committee to the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1975), 197.

37 Enderton Johnson, *Uppsala to Nairobi*, 200.

38 David M. Paton, ed., *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975: The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi, 23 November–10 December 1975* (London: SPCK, 1976), 310.

39 Paton, *Breaking Barriers*, 315–16.

The WCC gathered in Vancouver, Canada, in 1983. Two hundred youth gathered for the pre-assembly event which ran alongside the Women's pre-assembly gathering.⁴⁰ In Vancouver, full participation of diverse communities in the life of churches was addressed head on by the assembly. Women, laity, and people with disabilities were considered, as well as both young and old people. This was the first time that inclusion was seriously considered as an issue facing the churches and not simply the structures of the WCC. Of course, youth had been pushing this concern since shortly after the first assembly in Amsterdam. The Vancouver assembly recommended that "opportunities for dialogue which exist should be encouraged."⁴¹ It is interesting that this assembly, like those before and after it, insisted on the importance of ecumenical formation, but continued to keep youth, among others, out of positions of leadership that would affect deeper involvement and formation.

Recognizing the need for increased inclusion in the leadership of the WCC, the Vancouver assembly, like the Nairobi assembly, passed a resolution aimed at increasing youth members of the central committee.⁴² The actual number of youth included in central committee nominations, however, was lower than in Nairobi. A spoken desire to change this reality had not yet been realized.

The Canberra assembly in 1991 brings a number of issues in addition to participation to the forefront for youth. Most clearly, the concerns of Indigenous people were highlighted, which had a permanent impact on the ecumenical movement. The report of the 300 strong youth pre-assembly gathering opened with an acknowledgement of Indigenous land and peoples. The report continues, "We have committed ourselves to struggle in solidarity with all indigenous peoples and to respect and learn from their deep spiritual and cultural traditions; we call on the whole assembly to do likewise."⁴³ This recognition of native culture leads directly to concern for broad environmental stewardship. The youth made clear that they are inheritors of a world in crisis and asked the assembly to take the small step of eliminating the use of disposable cups and to recycle the vast stacks of paper that the meeting uses.⁴⁴ The report then named a range of social justice issues that people in Australia and around the world were grappling with. It is the most clearly articulated focus on social justice from the youth participants yet seen at WCC assemblies. Uppsala was marked by youth protests, but Canberra saw those protests made formal, set within the structures of the ecumenical movement, not against them, by youth who had learned to use those structures to effect change. Canberra is most notable for the election of the first youth president of the WCC. After generations of young adults had agitated for greater participation, and in a year when fewer youth were official delegates

40 This was the second women's pre-assembly meeting. Unfortunately, this structure means young women are only able to fully participate in the youth or women's gathering, not both.

41 David Gill, ed., *Gathered for Life: Official Report, Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Vancouver, Canada, 24 July–10 August 1983* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1983), 56.

42 Gill, *Gathered for Life*, 123.

43 Michael Kinnamon, ed., *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report, Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7–20 February 1991* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), 272.

44 Kinnamon, *Signs of the Spirit*, 273.

than at the previous assembly, the delegates put words into actions by electing Priyanka Mendis, of the Church of Ceylon in Sri Lanka, as one of eight WCC presidents.

By 1998, ecumenism was facing a sea change, reflective of the changes its member churches were facing. The report of the Harare, Zimbabwe, assembly in 1998 articulated this:

“We are witnessing a remarkable outburst of people’s ecumenism in different forms and in different parts of the world. Much of our constituency is disillusioned with the institutional expressions of the ecumenical movement. People, especially the youth, do not want to become prisoners of structures. They want to go beyond established systems, methodologies, procedures and agenda. They are looking for fresh air to breathe and wider space to live and to express their ecumenical concerns and convictions. They are creating new contexts and opportunities to come together. I strongly believe that the future of the ecumenical movement lies with committed and vision-ary young people, not with structures and programmes.”⁴⁵

The WCC had much earlier moved to an understanding of “visible unity” rather than a single worldwide church as the ecumenical goal. In Harare, years of wrestling with the cumbersome nature of hierarchical institutions came to a head. The assembly viewed this as a crisis, and in Geneva it certainly was experienced as one when staffing numbers were reduced and offices consolidated in the years preceding and following the assembly, and included drastic cuts in the youth department.⁴⁶ It would be truer to say, though, that ecumenism was coming to fruition around the world. A century of coming together across denominational lines to speak out against war, to welcome refugees, to demand denuclearization, to resist and topple apartheid in South Africa, and so much more, meant that ecumenism, especially among youth, did not reside in any single institution, but in the streets, neighborhoods, churches, and schools of local communities. In many ways, the WCC became as much a victim of its own success as of its inevitable failures.

Like the previous two assemblies, delegates to Harare wrestled with issues of inclusion. Once again, goals for youth participation had not been met. Bishop Melvin Talbert (United Methodist Church, USA), said, “It is incumbent on us as the assembly to decide now whether we mean what we say or not when it comes to representation, particularly for women and youth.”⁴⁷ As if anticipating this situation, youth in the pre-assembly gathering advocated for another youth president of the WCC and elected the Rev. Kathryn Bannister to this position.⁴⁸ Banister had previously been elected to the central committee and was a member of several committees of the assembly.

45 Diane Kessler, ed., *Together on the Way: Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 3–14 December 1998, Harare, Zimbabwe* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1999), 65.

46 Observations by Donna McNeil, WCC intern, 1995–1997.

47 Kessler, *Together on the Way*, 17.

48 Since then, there has not been another WCC president under the age of 30.

There was no doubting the successful work youth were doing in furthering ecumenism. An internship program instituted since Canberra gave young adults (including myself) an unequalled opportunity to learn about the global ecumenical movement, build important relationships among other ecumenical leaders and youth, and work on issues of importance in the WCC. The gospel and culture process leading to the 1996 Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Bahia, Salvador, Brazil, expanded involvement of Indigenous youth in the ecumenical movement, with the help of a youth intern. Other partnerships between the youth team and specific program units of the WCC benefited from youth participation and offered invaluable ecumenical training to young leaders. But the hope of seeing youth involved throughout the departments of the WCC was not fully realized by 1998. The assembly called on the WCC to redouble its efforts to integrate youth into all its ecumenical work.⁴⁹

Two hundred and fifty youth met for the pre-assembly gathering of the 9th assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006. The central committee had decided that this was to be a youth assembly, with young adults involved in every aspect of the conference,⁵⁰ and this was certainly the case in comparison to the previous eight assemblies. There were more youth participants than in any previous assembly. A committee was chaired by a young adult under 30, and a coordinating committee was appointed to further youth ecumenical engagement.⁵¹ And, yet, the assembly did not quite live up to the high expectations it had set, largely because “many delegations were composed of ecclesiastical leaders—of whom few could be considered young.”⁵² The goal had been to have 25% of delegates under the age of 30, but there was only 15%. The assembly report notes rather enigmatically that “the plenary session was invaded by dozens of young people who, visibly displeased, protested the gap between promise and fulfillment.”⁵³ General Secretary Samuel Kobia, of Kenya, further urged, “We have tried very hard to make this a youth assembly, but we have only partly succeeded. It needs the will and commitment of all of us.”⁵⁴ The assembly moderator, His Holiness Aram I, echoed that sentiment, saying that youth “are called to become actively involved in reshaping and transforming the ecumenical movement.”⁵⁵ The question remained whether the churches would create the opportunities for youth to respond to this call.

To this end, the youth coordinating committee was created. The members once again expressed their “grave concerns” that the goal of 25% youth participation had not been met. They firmly called on “member churches of the WCC [to] assume their responsibility in the development and promotion of youth leadership, in this manner, encouraging

49 Kessler, *Together on the Way*, 53.

50 Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, ed., *God, in your Grace . . . Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007), 10.

51 Rivera-Pagán, *God, in your Grace*, 50.

52 Rivera-Pagán, 10.

53 Rivera-Pagán, 43.

54 Rivera-Pagán, 141.

55 Rivera-Pagán, 132.

and supporting youth to form part of the different committees. We are aware of the many difficulties presented by this goal, but we are seeking constructive ways to make effective contributions through the building of bridges between the youth concerns and the work of the WCC.⁵⁶ They outlined the goals and expectations for the permanent committee to ensure that the churches would follow through on the commitments they expressed. These commitments had, in fact, been expressed since 1910 and youth in Uppsala wrote them on signs and carried them into closing worship in 1968.

The 10th, and most recent assembly of the WCC in Busan, South Korea, in 2013, came closest in many ways to fulfilling the goal of a youth assembly, set by the central committee a decade before. Approximately 600 young people gathered for the pre-assembly youth event. They were official delegates to the assembly itself, stewards, and local visitors.⁵⁷ The assembly also featured the first Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) and the Korean Ecumenical Theological Institute (KETI), which bring together young academics in theology for short-term study programs as part of the WCC's ecumenical education and formation.⁵⁸ And yet, the large number of youth present was not reflected in the number of youth elected to decision-making bodies—a lower percentage than in Porto Alegre in 2006.⁵⁹ In a significant departure from every previous assembly, there was no opportunity for an address from the pre-assembly gathering to a full plenary session.⁶⁰

This was a great loss to the assembly, because like those before them, the youth came to discuss and learn about the substance of issues before the assembly. They discussed migration and the needs of refugee communities around the world. They learned from one another about the concrete effects of the environmental crisis and the efforts youth are making to address the crisis. And they shared insights about the work of reconciliation, which was a significant focus of the whole assembly.⁶¹ A statement from Elizabeth Chun Hye Lee, executive secretary of the young adult mission service of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, sums up the challenge that youth present to the ecumenical movement as a whole. “The real ethos and values of *oikoumene*,” she said, “will never be digested if spaces are limited for young adults. . . . The ecumenical movement’s prophetic witness to the world will likely lose its drive if organizations like the WCC fail to live up to their promises.”⁶²

56 Rivera-Pagán, 363.

57 Erlinda N. Senturias and Theodore A. Gill, Jr., eds., *Encountering the God of Life: Report of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 9.

58 “Ecumenical Theological Education,” World Council of Churches accessed May 6, 2021, <https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/ecumenical-theological-education-ete#global-ecumenical-theological-institute>

59 Senturias and Gill, eds., *Encountering the God of Life*, 28.

60 Senturias and Gill, 29.

61 Senturias and Gill, 10.

62 Young adults lament lack of WCC representation,” UM News, accessed July 22, 2021. <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/young-adults-lament-lack-of-wcc-representation>

LOOKING AHEAD

Every WCC assembly has included young adults in various positions, with a variety of opportunities to share their concerns and exercise leadership. Every youth delegation has included representatives from the very active national, regional, and international youth organizations that are the continuation and inheritors of the original YMCA, YWCA, and WSCF organizations. The history of the ecumenical movement is very much alive and present.

Like the prophet Jeremiah and Mary, the mother of Jesus, today's ecumenical youth are stirring up the churches and calling them to seek justice and peace. Youth are leading the charge for racial and economic equality. They are demanding that governments and corporations take the environmental crisis seriously. They are seeking true equality and justice for marginalized communities. They are leading as generations of youth before them have led. As the Harare assembly stated, "Work with women, youth and Indigenous Peoples . . . [is] significantly more than programmatic work. It is essential to the life of the member churches and the WCC."⁶³

The work of the youth department of the WCC is as robust and far-reaching as it has ever been. There can be no doubt about the deep engagement of young adults in the ecumenical movement around the world, as the following pages demonstrate. The continual cry from these leaders is that they be allowed to fully exercise their role on the decision-making bodies of the Council. There is no danger that youth will somehow leave the ecumenical movement, but at least since Uppsala, they have made clear that they will not be content to be constrained by the formal structures of ecumenism—or by the Church itself. The question before the WCC, then, is whether it will follow their lead, claim its heritage as a change maker and visionary, and fully welcome the energy and imagination of youth, allowing them to change us all for the sake of the gospel.

63 Kessler, *Together on the Way*, 134.

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CHAPTER TWO

COMMON THEMES ACROSS DIFFERENT GENERATIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

JOY EVA BOHOL

In a series of online youth consultations¹ that the WCC hosted with member churches and ecumenical partners from 2018 to 2021, the typical response among young participants was that the church had lost her prophetic voice in today's reality. PEW research shows that more and more young people under 30 are becoming less religious, leaving religious institutions yet keeping their spirituality.² Young people observe that the church has lost her boldness in addressing injustices and pushing herself to uncomfortable spaces to fulfil her calling towards bringing God's kingdom on earth. Issues like young people living in conflict; unemployment; youth representation in decision-making; climate change; mental health; education; gender inequality and inequity; power, culture, dialogue, and spirituality – young people are proactively addressing these and several other issues.

Ans J. van der Bent concluded the WCC book *From Generation to Generation*, published in 1986, with the following questions: “Does the story of Christian youth during half a century reflect the changes in the ecumenical movement itself? Should the adult generation stick to its careful position on a not too fluid relation between the church and the world because the young generation not only continues to extend the frontiers of the church but even does not hesitate to relate to the multi-religious and secular world?”

Nine years after *From Generation to Generation* was published, a young journalist from India published *Ecumenism and the Youth*,³ documenting his observation and reflection on the Ecumenical Global Gathering for Youth and Students (EGGYS, 1993) in Brazil. He asked the same questions.

1 The WCC Youth Engagement in the Ecumenical Movement conducts consultations for many of its its activities. For example, for the 2021 Ecumenical International Youth Day (EIYD), alumni of WCC Eco-School, Ecumenical Continuing Formation for young people; ecumenical partners: World Students Christian Federation, Climate4Change youth, regional ecumenical youth desks, and others were invited for an online conversation to identify the pressing issues among young people. These consultations and meetings were held in February and March 2021, leading to the 12 August EIYD.

2 Young adults around the world are less religious by several measures. in “The Age Gap in Religion Around the World,” Pew Research Center, 2018. <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/young-adults-around-the-world-are-less-religious-by-several-measures/>

3 David Devdas, “Ecumenism and Youth,” in *The Risk Publication series* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995).

In 2011, inspired by the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV), a commissioner of the ECHOS Commission on Youth, Nikos Kosmidis, initiated a publication that brought together eight young voices from different parts of the world to share their perspectives on peace and justice, in time for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC).⁴ Again, they asked, "Where is the church in addressing the signs of the times? How are young people and the older generations working together towards a just and peaceful society?" These same questions continue to resonate today.

This chapter will revisit the past through youth publications from the 1980s to the 1990s and briefly mention prior publications. It will look at the present through existing programmes of the WCC Youth Engagement in the Ecumenical Movement. Finally, it will envision a future that includes more youth-led and youth-initiated publications – about today's young people in the church – among the WCC's member churches and in the ecumenical movement.

CHRISTIAN YOUTH THEN AND TODAY, AS REFLECTED IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

History informs us of young people's crucial role in the ecumenical movement. Leaders who paved the way to the formation of the World Council of Churches were young people—young people from leading movements like the World Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the World Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), among others.

Even before the 1st Assembly of the WCC in 1948, young people had already organized themselves to hold the first World Youth Conference in Amsterdam in 1939. The gathering included more than 1,000 young people from different parts of the world—including unrecorded young Germans who found their way to attend the event, even in the rising tension in the region and the world.⁵

Former WCC general secretary Philip Potter, who first got involved in the ecumenical movement as a young person through the WSCF, a youth delegate to the 1948 Assembly in Amsterdam and programme executive for the youth department (now called Youth Engagement in the Ecumenical Movement), said in his address on behalf of the youth delegates to the Amsterdam assembly,

"We cannot express too strongly how pained we are by the divisions of the churches. At every point in our discussions ... we are brought up against the inability of the churches to be clear and authorita-

4 Nikos Kosmidis, *Echos of Peace* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2011).

5 Ans J. Van der Bent, *From Generation to Generation: The Story of Youth in the World Council of Churches*, (Geneva:WCC, 1986).

tive ... because of their disunity on the basic issue of the nature of the Church... We are convinced that the time has come when the churches must speak of each other in love of the stumbling blocks which mar our fellowship and which drive men and women, and especially youth, away from us... We need not so much ecumenical understanding as ecumenical obedience... The evangelization of the young people cannot be attempted by the senior members of the churches without the young people, vice versa... We cannot resist the hope that at the next assembly not only will there be a larger representation of laymen and laywomen, but that young people will be included as delegates and guests.”⁶

Fast forward to more than 70 years after the first assembly, and young people’s call for the fellowship to increase the representation of their generation in decision-making bodies still resonate.

In one of the consultations done in 2021 by the WCC Youth Engagement in the Ecumenical Movement, where participants represent different generations, a question was raised, “where do you see young people in the church today?” The youth pastor first responded, “they’re invisible.” A young person in the group shared her perspective afterwards and said, “we are not invisible, rather we are not seen.” She added that young people were present in the church, and “we still are.”⁷

During the Pre-Synodal Youth Meeting in Rome in 2018, 300 young people from different Christian families, different religions, and young people without faith affiliations, along with 15,000 online participants, gathered to address the question of Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment. In their final statement, they affirm that “in all these aspects of Church life, young people wish to be accompanied and to be taken seriously as fully responsible members of the Church.”⁸

Young people are still interested in the life and ministry of the church. They are inviting the different generations of the church to stand with them in living out the prophetic call. This is very visible in the several statements, articles, and official publications of WCC, like the annual magazine series *Risk*, which ran from 1965 until 1977.

The *Risk*, produced by the Youth Department of the WCC (1965-1977), invited intentional engagement of young people from the fellowship to contribute articles from their

6 Philip Potter was the youth representative who gave the youth address to the plenary at the first WCC Assembly in 1948 in Amsterdam, who later served as the WCC general secretary 1972-1984.

7 This story is based on a conversation during a session addressing justice issues among young people, which the author facilitated as part of her role as programme executive for WCC Youth Engagement in the Ecumenical Movement.

8 Synod of Bishops, XV Ordinary General Assembly, “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment” Pre-Synodal Meeting March 19–24, 2018, Final Document. Rome. <http://secretariat.synod.va/content/synod2018/en/news/final-document-from-the-pre-synodal-meeting.html>

different contexts around the world. Interestingly, in its first volume, the editorial staff described the title of the magazine as,

“Risk, if it is at all true to the ecumenical movement, will be a risky publication because it will demand that people leave their established positions and wander into a new land. It will ask Christians to ponder other convictions which have grown up in other traditions, and to examine the historical luggage with which we travel ourselves. It will be risky because it will demand that the reader hears and makes up his mind about unpopular questions which are not always readily raised in the churches. . . the constant rethinking of the nature of our faith and the continuous questioning of its application is the task of the whole Church, but the younger generation comes at it with a different attitude.”⁹

The Risk was a platform for young people to be vocal in their stand on justice and peace and their continuing call to the church to keep on transforming with the power of the Holy Spirit. Several voices from different regions were highlighted throughout its publication. Current events were critically addressed. Clearly, young people were not afraid to unfilter their perspectives on the church and society.

A common theme that continues to resonate among different generations of young people is their commitment to action-driven theology: incarnating the Gospel in proactive engagement rather than only in words and texts. In the WCC assembly at Uppsala in 1968, the young people of this period were much less interested in “churchly ecumenism—than in common action on the local scene involving groups from different confessions.” Young people insisted on their participation. They demonstrated at the assembly with placards, “Put up or shut up. Practice what you preach. Be ready for costly self-dedication” (Van der Bent, 1986).

During the Ecumenical International Youth Day (EIYD) 2021 Virtual Hackathon¹⁰ on the theme Young People and Climate Justice, a young person from the Pacific Islands shared in a breakout room (Zoom platform) that young people in her context are experiencing “eco-anxiety” due to the increasing impact of climate change in their island-nations. Eco-anxiety or the fear of environmental doom is a term used by mental health experts that describes the weight of the sole responsibility to solve the climate crisis and emergency on the current generation.¹¹

9 *The Risk: Volume 1*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1965).

10 Hackathons are events where people from different places and backgrounds join to find concrete solutions to a specific problem.

11 Eco-anxiety or climate anxiety is a term used by the United Nations and other organizations to describe the mental health issues of young people in the ongoing call to climate action, addressing the climate crisis and emergency.

Other young people present in the virtual event shared a similar sentiment. They added that churches to which they belong do not create spaces for young people to take leadership in programs and projects on climate justice; church leaders lack trust in their generation. “Young people are facing lack of trust from their church leaders and community adults. There is not political representation within the youth, only adults are making the decisions.”¹²

THE FELLOWSHIP AND THE CALL TO ACTION

A youth delegate to the Uppsala Assembly in 1968, Stephen C. Rose, addressed the plenary, stressing the need to intentionally engage young people in the ecumenical movement, “Perhaps this will be the last world assembly. In case there is another, let us pass an immediate resolution binding the WCC in the future to the elimination of youth participants in favour of delegations which contain at least 25 percent of persons under 35.”¹³

The COVID-19 pandemic has had forced the church to explore new ways of connecting. The church had to redefine and recreate herself during the height of the pandemic globally. In-person gatherings were restricted, and the church had to adapt how to meet in the new normal. Although it took a pandemic to push the church into uncomfortable spaces, it has also opened opportunities for the fellowship to be more connected in different levels and generations – from local to global and vice versa – and virtual. The transition to being more mobile and virtual due to the current reality has seen the church reaching out to the young generation to assist her in this new way of ministry and mission.

Going back to Van der Bent’s (1986) question, “Should the adult generation stick to its careful position on a not too fluid relation between the church and the world because the young generation not only continues to extend the frontiers of the church but even does not hesitate to relate to the multi-religious and secular world?”¹⁴

Radically impatient for change and real action, this phrase describes the current sentiment of young people to both the church and society. The issue of climate change, for example, is forcing young people to mobilize their generation to call on governments, business industry, world leaders, religious leaders, and others to be proactive in addressing the root causes of climate change and implement eco-policies that are just and sustainable for all. This responsibility is not solely held on the young generation’s back but must be taken more seriously by all generations.

12 Quoted from a participant at the WCC-hosted Ecumenical International Youth Day 2021 Hackathon event: Young People and Climate Justice, 12 August 2021.

13 Ans J. Van der Bent, *From Generation to Generation: The Story of Youth in the World Council of Churches*, (Geneva:WCC, 1986) p. 83

14 Ans J. Van der Bent, *From Generation to Generation: The Story of Youth in the World Council of Churches*, (Geneva:WCC, 1986) p. 120

As the participants of the WCC Eco-School 2019 held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, stated in their Call to Action,

“We young people, under 30 years old, make up 50.5% of the world’s population. We are at the higher risk of facing the brunt of the impacts of climate change in the days to come. Today’s young people are at risk of being worse off than the previous generations, in terms of quality of life and access to basic human rights. We have witnessed young people taking leadership in drawing the attention of world leaders to respond to the urgency of climate change.”¹⁵

An important lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic that young people have identified during several consultations¹⁶ is that renewal and transformation are still possible in the church and society. Our churches have transitioned to the digital space for two years in a row since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in early 2020 – a move that changed the way the church does her work overnight. The pandemic forced the church to see and do things differently – to allow herself to be uncomfortable and be vulnerable beyond her traditional structure and bureaucracy. In the same spirit, the church should continually seek more creative ways to proactively respond to the signs of the times and not look back to sometimes ineffective old methods.

Ariel Siagan, one of the authors of the essays in the book *Echos of Peace*,¹⁷ challenges the church to fulfil its crucial role to nurture the imagination of the present generation. He wrote, “our (Christian) message should put emphasis on empowering people to depart from the imperialistic state of mind to a kingdom state of mind ... our missionary engagement has been holistic in approach, concerned not only with personal salvation but the redemption of the oikoumene.”

Devadas¹⁸ offered another perspective of the way young people invite the church in the ecumenical movement. According to his observation of the EGGYS, he points out that “ecumenically-minded young people” in that generation sought to address social justice issues in a more peaceful and non-violent way, starting from deep within. He wrote that young people sought to “change themselves internally” to externally change the different challenges and issues. This is the same appeal to the church – allowing renewal and healing within herself to open more spaces of intergenerational, interreligious, and intercultural dialogues and cooperation.

15 WCC Eco-School is a youth programme for young people between 18 and 30 years old, who learn and share experiences about ecological and economic justice. Eco-School 2019 was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

16 The WCC Youth Engagement in the Ecumenical Movement programme conducts consultations and follow-up conversations with young people from WCC member churches and ecumenical partner, as part of its objective to be a common platform where young people in the network can connect and be in solidarity.

17 Ariel Siagan, “Exodus from the Imperial Imagination,” in *Echos of Peace*, ed. Nikos Kosmidis, (Geneva: WCC Publication, 2011), 13-21.

18 David Devadas, “Traumatized Generation,” in *Ecumenism and Youth*, (Geneva: WCC Publication, 1995) 4.

During an online workshop on community mapping in 2020 by the then programme executive of the WCC Youth Engagement in the Ecumenical Movement, a group of young people from Nepal¹⁹ provided an example. They initiated a community project, inviting the leaders, their local congregations, and the diverse members (interreligious, intergenerational) of the community to explore ways together to identify and address the needs of their community at the height of the strict lockdown²⁰ in their country. Some of the outcomes of this community mapping and planning are church and community gardens (vegetables and fruits) and chicken rearing (coop), providing access to food. The group also initiated the production of cloth masks and distributed them to the community.

CONCLUSION

It is evident in the three major youth publications of the WCC reviewed in this article that young people play a crucial role in the ecumenical movement—with the emphasis on action. Although the need for continuity in providing a platform for young people to share real experiences from the ground to the global level is clear, the struggle to be consistent in doing so is also obvious.

Young people's work is very dynamic and ever-changing. Yet, there was at least a decade gap between the publications mentioned. Between 1986 and today, only three books have been published, with only one of these written by and for young people.²¹ There is a need to revisit this and to keep exploring more creative ways to address this gap in intentionally engaging young people in the ecumenical movement.

In many contexts and regions among the WCC member churches, several young people identified mental health as one of the pressing issues in their generation, intersecting with other key challenges. A young person from Nigeria shared that “depression and mental/physical stress is rampant (in the country), and eight out of 10 young people experience this frequently.” She said that this is due to the “high level of poverty and unemployment in the country,” where young people find it hard to get a job and earn a salary. She added that “the increase in insecurity, gender-based violence and police brutality which has displaced people and leads to loss of lives and property also puts young people at the risk of experiencing traumatic stress, therefore making most people live in fear and anxiety every day.”²²

Unemployment, underrepresentation of young people in decision-making and governing bodies, limited access to education, health, and opportunities; young people's role

19 Nimble Creation Concern Nepal is a team composed of Nepali Christian Youth.

20 The strict lockdown during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic paralyzed essential services, like food deliveries, produce travels, etc.

21 This fact has been verified and confirmed by the WCC Library and Archives.

22 This quote is an excerpt from the WCC Stewards Programme Assembly 2022 application essay, responding to the question, “What are the three issues of young people you observe in your context?”

in peace and security, young people's perspective of faith and justice; power, culture, dialogue, and spirituality – these are some of the common themes that are identified and repeatedly emphasized across the publications referenced in this chapter.

These issues continue to impact young people today—and might even be worse.²³ There is an ongoing and consistent need for different platforms for young people to own their space in the church and the ecumenical movement – and that it should not take another decade or more before the next (WCC) publication. As the young person responded earlier in this article when asked about the place of young people in the church, “we (young generation) are not necessarily invisible, but we are not seen (by the church).”

The pilgrimage of justice and peace – which is the overarching theme and ecumenical call of the WCC for 2014-2022 – invites the WCC as a fellowship to journey together, leaving no one behind, in “celebrating life and in taking concrete steps toward transforming injustices and violence... to encounter the vulnerable, and to find oneself in a vulnerable place and becoming vulnerable to others, is to be purged of one's own prejudices, preoccupations, and priorities – stripped down to face God and God's own aim for the world.”²⁴ This should also be true for the youth.

23 Youth Progress Index. 2018. “Youth Progress Index, 2017: Measuring Young People's Social Progress Globally.” European Youth Forum. <https://www.youthforum.org/youth-progress-index>.

24 World Council of Churches. “About the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.” in the World Council of Churches. 2014-2021. <https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/pilgrimage-justice-and-peace>.

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CHAPTER THREE

A PLEA FOR FORMATION IN WORLD CHRISTIANITY: A WAY FORWARD IN DEALING WITH MEGATRENDS

BENJAMIN SIMON

A WORLD CHALLENGED BY MEGATRENDS

The Christian world has become polycentric.¹ Christianity is (now) at home in all different types of contexts and cultures. A wide variety of expressions of Christian faith can be encountered worldwide. Hence, Christian faith deals with many different challenges it faces in the various contexts where it is lived out. We can subsume most of the challenges under the theme of megatrends.² The megatrends of our globalized world, which has already experienced more than 200 years of industrial revolution, are even more apparent in this time of crisis, and are becoming an even bigger threat for the younger generation, which has to suffer the consequences. Some scientists speak of the Anthropocene in which we find ourselves—the age in which the human being has become one of the most important influencing factors on the biological, geological, and atmospheric processes on Earth.³

1 See Klaus Koschorke and Adrian Hermann, eds., *Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014).

2 Today, the concept of megatrends is widely used and serves as the basis for numerous research and development projects. Megatrends form the basis for the evolution of entire economic sectors and are often the starting point for far-reaching strategies in companies and other organizations. The concept of megatrends makes global changes in the economy and society tangible.

Megatrends have a duration of at least several decades and show effects in all areas of society—in the economy, in consumption, in changing values, in people living together; in the media and in the political systems and also in religious life.

Furthermore, megatrends are global phenomena. Even if they are not simultaneously and equally felt everywhere, they can be observed sooner or later everywhere in the world. On top of that, they are multi-layered and multi-dimensional trends. They generate their dynamics and evolutionary pressure also and precisely through their interactions.

See John Naisbitt, *Mind Set! Reset Your Thinking and See the Future* (New York: Harper Business, 2006).

3 See Erle C. Ellis, *Anthropocene: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.).

Since the COVID-19 virus has been in the world, it has become even more apparent how intricately these megatrends are interwoven; in what unjust systems we are moving and how we are trapped in these “structural sins.”

Megatrends, such as nationalism, digitalization, marginalization, and migration, show their ugly faces more than ever. In addition, poverty, climate change, racism, and secularization, as well as religions, reveal more than ever their interdependencies.⁴ Those megatrends overlap also with the fears of young people, as they analyze their future and what they fear most in their near future.⁵

In a world that is more and more interconnected by globalization and migration, as well as by media and other technologies, theology—and especially theological formation—have to find new ways to respond and to deal with the new challenges that are appearing. Religious identities and theologies need to be reshaped.

To address those challenges, theological formation needs to have the global perspective in mind. It is far too limiting to deal only with theological trends and convictions from one context. A multi-perspective approach in theological formation is needed to deal with those new megatrends.⁶

As world Christianity deals with ecumenical studies, intercultural theologies, as well as interreligious dialogue, I would plead, therefore, that the teaching on world Christianity is a way forward and a helpful tool for reflecting and analyzing from a theological point of view new developments in this world, including megatrends. Using the words of Roland Robertson, world Christianity deals with the “panlocal” dimensions of our world.⁷

In the next chapter, I will look into the three pillars of World Christianity before focusing on four areas, which will show that the study of world Christianity can have a positive effect on the exploration of megatrends and on how to deal with them.

4 See World Council of Churches, *Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity: A Reflection on the Theme of the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Karlsruhe 2020* (Geneva: WCC Publications, n.d.), <https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc/organizational-structure/assembly#assembly-theme-and-symbol>.

5 See the different chapters in this volume, where young people are very often raising questions about their future and the way they are included or rather not included in decision making.

6 I do not want to limit theological formation to those intending to become ordained. Theological formation can be done on several levels and for various purposes. Theological formation can be done on a university level by pursuing fulltime studies, but also in short-term courses, which you can follow selectively by extension and online offers. Theological formation can be for young people but also for church leaders, who need to be theologically trained and skilled in new challenges they are facing. The Ecumenical Institute of Bossey is a good example of how theological formation can happen with theologically-trained students but also with student who have been trained in another academic field.

7 Roland Robertson, “The Conceptual Promise of Glocalization: Commonality and Diversity,” *ART-e-FACT: Strategies of Resistance* 4 (2004).

THE PILLARS OF WORLD CHRISTIANITY

Ecumenical studies

In its etymological understanding, *oikoumene* is the completely inhabited world. Hence, *oikoumene* and ecumenical theology are always dealing with a global perspective. It is a contradiction in itself, if one deals with *oikoumene* without having the global aspect, as well as interculturality and interfaith perspectives, in mind. Most of the faculties of theology in the European context that deal with ecumenical theology have limited their view to an internal perspective, which is still Eurocentric or at least western-influenced. It is high time that key theological themes, especially in the field of systematic theology, take into consideration the understandings and experiences of people of the global South. This can take place by giving their approaches more space in the teachings at Western universities, by organizing encounters with students where they can learn from each other, or by using different methodologies, which would open up new approaches to theological topics. It is very problematic when theologies are imported to the global South and not critically considered in their own context. This type of neocolonial attitude in theology is still present at many places in the global South.

Some mission agencies, amongst them the United Evangelical Mission (UEM),⁸ maintain good practices. They invite colleagues from the global South to give guest lectures at European universities, and vice versa. Lecturers are sent to the global South or they participate in a South-South exchange to learn in the very context they are sent to. It is important that these exchanges are done for a limited period of time, so that they bring their experiences of doing theology in an intercultural setting to their own contexts.⁹ A highly problematic issue that I observe in terms of the future of European churches is that church leaders no longer encourage colleagues to study abroad and do not offer experiential exchange opportunities.¹⁰ This is even more challenging when we realise that interculturality and diversity become more and more prominent in societies and are something that church people will have to deal with even more in the future.

Intercultural theologies

It is important that church people and especially theologians are not stuck with so-called “big names” in theology. Famous theologians are for sure an important foundation for doing theology. But we need always to be reminded that they are coming from a certain context and culture and speaking to a certain time. It is important not to remain only with them and their position. That is a provincialism, which is not helpful in a *glocalized*

8 For more on the UEM, see www.vemission.org.

9 I am personally very grateful to UEM for the experience I gained at the Makumira University College in Tanzania.

10 It is very sad that the University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology in Hermannsburg, Germany will not exist any longer. Due to financial considerations, it was decided to close it down in 2025. (See www.fh-hermannsburg-eng.landeskirche-hannovers.de).

world.¹¹ They might become a “narrative trampoline” by adjusting their insights into the cultural and contextual situations to which our theology should speak. In that way, they might be of existential relevance and be of existential relevance. Propagating a *theologia perennis*, valid throughout all times and contexts and neglecting the intercultural aspects of the theology has problematic consequences. Moreover, it surely does not help finding answers to challenges of a certain epoch, as the megatrends.

Intercultural theology cannot be seen without ecumenical aspects and perspectives.¹² However, the locality of ecumenical studies needs to be widened by the intercultural perspective on a global level.¹³ Intercultural theology must draw its material from a multitude of cultural and contextual expressions and diversities in order to deal with world Christianity.¹⁴

The global approach to intercultural theology is important, perhaps crucial, if one wants to deal with intercultural theology at all. Intercultural theology has to have the ecumenical perspective. Therefore, we must always keep in mind that oikoumene means the whole inhabited world and implies the diversity of world Christianity up to and from the margins.¹⁵

Encounters in interfaith dialogue

Other ways of learning from each other in a globalized world and in developing relevant theologies are encounters of any type: conviviality is the proper term. Conviviality, a term used in mission theology, includes learning from each other, sharing amongst each other, and celebrating together.¹⁶ All three elements can happen in a spiritual way as well as in a pragmatic way. This is something, which should be promoted in theological formation of any type and level. In our days, people, especially the younger generation, are used to travel, are used to having contacts all over the world and being connected via diverse technologies with peers and colleagues from all over the world. Hence, it

11 See Reinhold Bernhardt, “Interkulturelle Theologie—Ihre Programmatik in Systematisch-Theologischer Perspektive,” *Interkulturelle Theologie* 40 (2014), 150.

12 The ecumenical dimension is often neglected when one speaks about intercultural theology. See Benjamin Simon, “Missionswissenschaft und Interkulturelle Theologie: Genese und Notwendigkeit einer neuen Theologie,” in *Transkulturelle Begegnungen und Interreligiöser Dialog*, ed. Uta Andrée, Ruomin Liu, and Sönke Lorberg-Fehring (Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag, 2017): 45–56.

Henning Wrogemann is an exception when he says: “Interkulturelle Ökumene hat um vieles mehr die Entwicklungen des weltweiten Christentums im Blick als herkömmliche Konfessionskunde” (*Interkulturelle Theologie und Hermeneutik: Grundfragen, Aktuelle Beispiele, Theoretische Perspektiven* [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2012], 52).

13 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

14 See Wrogemann, *Interkulturelle Theologie und Hermeneutik*, 13.

15 Jooseup Keum, ed., *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012). Chapter 2 deals with “mission from the margins,” and explains what this means in mission theology.

16 Concerning the term *conviviality*, see Theo Sundermeier, *Konvivenz als Grundstruktur Ökumenischer Existenz Heute*, in *Ökumenische Existenz Heute*, ed. Wolfgang Huber, Dietrich Ritschl, and Theo Sundermeier (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus), 49–100.

is of utmost importance that theologies are also entering this conversation by offering students of theology the possibilities of learning together and encountering each other. Knowing that theologies are not – or at least should not be – developed in the so-called “ivory tower,” the ideal for collecting those experiences would not only be to have classes together with colleagues from different cultural and confessional backgrounds, but also to share lives for a certain period of time. Many existential questions are raised and answered outside the classroom, where they are developed in long conversations.¹⁷

This includes crossing the borders of one’s own faith and entering into dialogues with representatives of other religions too. Even with a clearly established religious opinion – or precisely because of a clearly established religious opinion, which can sometimes be limiting – a fruitful dialogue and fulfilling cooperation between representatives of different religions can be achieved. It should not be difficult to be of a different mind than a person of another faith. It is then only important that spaces are created in which respectful encounters and a common conversation, as well as living together, can take place.

In order to be able to conduct such a dialogue, which certainly follows the basic premise of a hermeneutics of difference, it is necessary that the believers of the religious communities be rooted in their faith and their beliefs. There is hardly anything more problematic than when dialogue partners are unable to provide information about their own faith. It is only together, as people of faith, being rooted in our own faith tradition, that we can tackle problematic and challenging megatrends, as we are all concerned in the same way by their realities and threats. The Anthropocene shows that we can no longer think and react in “religious boxes,” rejecting the one of a different religion and religious conviction. People of faith have many common goals and intentions, so that in a value-driven interaction, dealing with the megatrends is given. The problems that humanity is facing in our days are too existential: people of faith must cooperate and develop synergies to address issues such as racisms and xenophobia, climate change and integrity of creation, as well as questions of justice and peace.¹⁸ All those aspects have been accumulating and becoming more obvious in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

This leads me to another aspect in which classical approaches of doing theology should experience a change: methodologies. Narrative theology can be of tremendous help, if we want to consider genuine contexts and existential settings leading to understanding world Christianity and the way to deal with megatrends.¹⁹ Narrative theology is a

17 A very concrete example is the WCC’s Bossey Ecumenical Institute. See the Institute’s website at <https://institute.oikoumene.org/en>.

18 Those are indeed issues which the World Council of Churches is addressing. Ecumenism embodies the search for reconciliation in eradicating oppression and bringing people of good faith together as well as unity, the collaborative work for justice and peace.

19 See, for example, the contributions in section 3, *Migration and Public Discourse in World Christianity*, ed. Afe Adogame, Raimundo C. Barreto, and Wanderley Pereira da Rosa (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 135–90.

methodological approach, which has its origin in French study of literature at the end of the 1960s. It was only in the 1980s that this methodology was taken up for exegetical discourses and used in biblical sciences.²⁰ One of its findings suggests that most often a story has different perspectives and meanings. A story is always polysemic – it can be narrated from different perspectives. The methodology of narrativity enables one to explain why certain biblical stories are helpful and function in a certain way in a culture, and why others do not. Narrativity does not, however, want to establish criteria for reaching a verdict. Narrations are always true for those who want to hear the truth out of them.²¹ Performativity becomes relevant. The story includes the one reading or hearing it, and one becomes part of it by being transformed and changed. Christianity is, from its very beginnings, a narrative community and so is always concerned with and about topics of its contexts and settings. Those perceptions are helpful for any theology. Theology speaks always from a certain context into a certain context. We are always wearing a “certain pair of glasses” through which we perceive theological insights – most often, they are autobiographically related. Coming with those different perspectives might be helpful in dealing with challenges that we all face, as we have diverse approaches and experiences.

WORLD CHRISTIANITY AS A WAY FORWARD

In this section, I will show in how world Christianity and its three pillars – ecumenical interaction, intercultural theology, and interfaith dialogue – using the methodology of narrativity, might be of help in dealing with megatrends of our societies today. I concentrate on four crucial aspects.

Thesis 1: World Christianity develops common sense for a respectful togetherness.

If one follows mass media and some political parties and their statements about the political situation in Europe, one gets the impression that Europe, and many other parts of the world as well, have fallen back into nationalism, if not tribalism. Several states are dealing with nationalism but also with processes of segregation and autonomy. An individualization of societies is moving forward. One gets the impression that the personal ego is permanently put forward. This must be kept in mind, as the pandemic and the digitization (or should we rather speak of the digital revolution?) are currently leading to a strong individualization. There is no more space for others, for strangers, and especially not for asylum seekers. This is for sure not a crisis of resources; it is rather a crisis of

20 See Dorothea Erbele-Küster, “Narrativität,” in WiBiLex, <http://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/37118>.

21 The case of the Kimbanguist Church from the Democratic Republic of the Congo has shown that inculturation also has its limits and criteria need to be established to determine if an inculturation is still Christian or not. See also Benjamin Simon, *Genese einer Religion: Der Kimbanguismus und sein Abschied von der Ökumene* (Leipzig: EVA, 2022).

values.²² In the COVID-19 pandemic, the decisions are mostly taken on national levels, without looking at the potential of, for example, the European Union. Next, the racism of colour – a racism of privileges, of haves and the have-nots – is rising. Human beings who do not fit the picture of the majority, or at least the ruling class, are pushed to the margins and excluded from the society.

For the worldwide ecumenical movement, represented for instance by the World Council of Churches, questions of xenophobia and racism are also of central importance. The daily struggles of oppressed and marginalized people in all kinds of cultures show that racism is still a virus amongst humanity, including Christian communities. I quote from the former general secretary's report:

The problem of racism is growing quickly in many, if not all, parts of the world. That means that a new programme to combat racism must address this poison as it appears in many forms in many contexts. It must particularly help the churches to be able to analyse its roots and how it appears in attitudes, practices, policies, politics, public discourse and debates, legal systems, and much more. Now is the time to move beyond discussion based on accusations and denials of being a "racist." Most people would deny that, without reflecting on how we are all involved in cultures and practices of discrimination, degradation, prejudice, a sense of superiority vis à vis others, and exclusion. The WCC should use its potential for being a platform of sharing, empowering, analysing, and learning what this is and how to address and combat it.²³

We need to analyze this xenophobic curse and learn about it – and make it part of our curricula. World Christianity has both the local and the global perspective: it does not limit its view to a theological snippet but rather brings in perspectives from different contexts. Hence, the local and global perspectives become *glocal*. Through encounters, prejudices and barriers are eradicated. We learn from each other and learn to accept each other in our differences so that we can build a respectful togetherness. This does not imply giving up own identities. Individual positions and opinions do not have to be given up; they are rather reflected and strengthened.

22 See Gioacchino Campese, "A People of God Who Remembers: Theological Reflections on a 'Refugee Crisis,'" in Adogame et al., *Migration and Public Discourse*, 215–28.

23 The Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, "The One Human Family," Report to the WCC Executive Committee, 20 November 2019.

Thesis 2: World Christianity recognizes our own vulnerability and responsibility for God’s creation.

The phenomenon of migration is as old as humankind. The reasons for migrations differ: they might be political, sociological, economical or ecological, or due to wars. The reasons are more and more interconnected, a phenomenon that excludes monocausality and unilateralism. This is shown best in one of the major reasons of the migration of tomorrow: ecological conditions. At the WCC assembly in 2013 in South Korea, a delegate from the Pacific island of Tuvalu told me in tears that his island would be submerged in fewer than 20 years. An objective truth relying on scientific findings. Nevertheless, it is admirable that their motto as church people and as part of the worldwide ecumenical movement is: “We are not drowning but fighting.”²⁴ World Christianity gives spaces and hearing to the emerging voices from within the many indigenous Christianities around the world.

Climate change makes the vulnerable more vulnerable and it affects all dimensions of life. Therefore, all the United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals, including quality education (Goal 4) become even more crucial. “It is impressive to hear and see how the churches around the world are raising their voices and issuing calls for pilgrimages of climate justice, getting into serious discourse with governments and the finance and business sectors,” the former WCC general secretary said.²⁵

World Christianity deals with those challenges and tries to find solutions. It becomes a prophetic theology that enables theologians and church people to respect cultural features in order to speak into the societies and help the people to raise their voices.

Thesis 3: World Christianity allows for the positive aspects of inner-Christian plurality and the “one family of humanity.”²⁶

Our societies are changing permanently through migration. In the European context, this is not due to asylum seekers who arrived in the last three to five years. People migrate for many other reasons. Migration is an intrinsic human characteristic, and hence, is a part of all of our societies. Dealing with this increasing phenomenon will be one of the main challenges of the future. Concerning Christian migrants, the Indian theologian Felix Wilfred has made an interesting remark about the demographic shift of world Christianity: namely, that it is not simply a shift “from the West to the South, but a

24 Simon Butler, “Pacific Climate Warriors: We Are not Drowning, We Are Fighting!,” *Climate & Capitalism*, 27 August 2014, <https://climateandcapitalism.com/2014/08/27/pacific-climate-warriors-we-are-not-drowning-we-are-fighting/>.

25 Tveit, “On Human Family.” Hence, it is appropriate that the 11th assembly of the WCC will celebrate the Day of Creation on 1 September, with the following focus: “The purpose of God’s love in Christ for all creation—reconciliation and unity.”

26 In his report, referenced above, Tveit uses the term “one human family,” which includes all people in societies in which we live.

shift of Christianity from the rich and middle classes to the poor.²⁷ The most numerous Christian disciples in our world will be those who earn less than 500 dollars in annual income. Worldwide, an increasing number of people will have more and more reasons – such as lack of food and water, and social injustice – to migrate to other parts of the world.

A study of a representative region of my German home context concluded that 55% of people with migrant background are Christians (and not Muslim, as one might think – only 19% are Muslims).²⁸ These migrants are mainly Roman Catholics from Eastern Europe, and Orthodox Christians, but amongst the Christians are also many Africans and Asians from Protestant traditions.²⁹

A common phenomenon of migrants is that they take with them their faith and spiritualities. The diversities of Christianity are brought with them, and have become a part of the contexts in which we are living. To what extent do we recognize and acknowledge those Christian diversities? When I started my research on Christians of African origin in Germany in 1998, it was a pioneering work.³⁰ Since then, fortunately, researchers from different disciplines have studied that phenomenon. Established churches are dealing to some extent with those new ecumenical partners, but only as a marginal topic.³¹ The growing part of Christianity is related to a charismatic Pentecostal spirituality, also in the diaspora, which the ecumenical movement will have to deal much more with in the future.

Already in Acts 2, plurality is seen as something positive. The Spirit helps to understand but does not want to level the differences: “Without a dissolution of diversity and the complexity of its origin, without eradicating other forms of understanding, an unpredictable commonality of experience and of understandings follows.”³²

It is through daily encounters that one starts to understand different spiritualities, worldviews, other religions, and the stranger in general.³³ Through these encounters, one realizes that there are many more themes that unite us than divide us. Hence, it is so important that we interact with each other and that we deal with different intercultural

27 Felix Wilfred, “Christianity between Decline and Resurgence,” in *Christianity in Crisis?*, ed. John Sobrino and Felix Wilfred (London, SCM Press, 2005), 31.

28 Cf. Hessische Integrationsmonitor 2020: <https://info-pa-hsm.hessen.de/presse/infomaterial/13/der-hessische-integrationsmonitor>

29 Benjamin Simon, “Christliche Gemeinden und Migration: Zwei Seiten einer Medaille,” *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt* 5 (2011): 255–63.

30 The thesis was published under the title *Afrikanische Kirchen in Deutschland* (Frankfurt: Otto Lembeck, 2003). An English revised edition was published five years later as *From Migrants to Missionaries* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008).

31 See Benjamin Simon, “Identity and Ecumenical Partnership of Churches of African Origin in Germany,” in *Churches, Blackness, and Contested Multiculturalism: Europe, Africa and North America*, ed. R. Drew Smith, William Ackah, and Anthony G. Reddie (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 133–44.

32 Michael Welker, *Gottes Geist: Theologie des Heiligen Geistes* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1992), 218f. (My translation).

33 See Theo Sundermeier, *Den Fremden Verstehen: Eine Praktische Hermeneutik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).

perspectives and contextualities. When differences occur, the approach of “receptive ecumenism” – a methodology through which we can learn from each other – could be very helpful.³⁴ One listens to the other and is ready to share different perspectives. Self-criticism is welcomed and employed.

As we have seen, to comprehend the stories and concerns of the “one family of humanity,” world Christianity, including intercultural theology, uses different methodologies, amongst them narrativity. It is not only an “attitude and method”³⁵ as Franz Gmaier-Pranzl suggested. It is also a way in which a ground-breaking self-revision of theology can take place.³⁶ And I would add, this is the way an independent and new theological discipline can emerge.

Thesis 4: World Christianity transforms Christianity by raising awareness that identities are fluid.

Church people tend very often to stick to traditions and behaviours that refer to former times and to their so-called “church culture.” A consequence of this is the drastic decrease in membership of the established churches in the European context projected to the year 2060. In Germany, the country of the next WCC assembly, the so-called “Freiburger-Studie” has recently been published, indicating that membership in the Protestant churches in Germany will be halved. It is not due to the age pyramid. It is rather because it is no longer automatic that young parents between ages 25 and 40 will bring their children for baptism.³⁷

The attractiveness of established churches has decreased for that age group. Churches are too much sticking to old-fashioned ways of living their faith and spiritualities. It seems that they have forgotten that Christian identity or rather identities are dynamic and not determined. Christian identity is not a rigid corse; it constitutes itself anew every time through the encounter.³⁸ Identities are fluid.

Missiology and mission studies are amongst the first academic disciplines dealing with the encounter of the stranger. Mission was always about going to the edges and margins and listening to the marginalized, combined with the ability and the willingness to change its own setting and leave the well-known comfort zone. Mission was always about changes and transformation. Mission is not only about *translatio* of the gospel into different contexts, not only about *transmissio*, the being sent, but also about *trans-*

34 Paul D. Murray, “Introducing Receptive Ecumenism,” in *Reforming Theology, Migrating Church, Transforming Society*, ed. Uta André, Benjamin Simon, and Lars Röser-Israel (Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag, 2017), 52–60.

35 Franz Gmaier-Pranzl, “Welt-Theologie: Verantwortung des Christlichen Glaubens in Globaler Perspektive,” *Interkulturelle Theologie* 38 (2012), 422.

36 Volker Küster, *Einführung in die Interkulturelle Theologie* (Göttingen: UTB GmbH, 2011), 13.

37 Matthias Drobrinski, Kirchen Verlieren bis 2060 Fast die Hälfte Ihre Mitglieder, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2 May 2019. Drobrinski refers hereby to the research document from the Freiburger Forschungszentrums Generationenverträge, 2019.

38 Sundermeier, *Den Fremden Verstehen*, 227.

formatio, which constitutes one of the three pillars of mission.³⁹ This accords with the idea expressed in the WCC mission document *Together towards Life*: “Mission spirituality resists and seeks to transform all life-destroying values and systems wherever these are at work in our economies, our politics, and even our churches.”⁴⁰

Learning through intercultural and even interfaith encounters can help in transforming the way Christianity and its spirituality can be lived. Furthermore, the power of transformation shows if a theology is relevant.⁴¹ Theological and spiritual traditions do not have to stick to the way they were. A theological flexibility on identities can lead to an openness towards each other, which leads to reconciliation and even unity.

CONCLUSION

The challenges to theological formation have increased in the past twenty years. On top of this, young people are massively concerned about their future and the challenges they encounter.⁴² It is far too inadequate to deal only with the classical theological disciplines dating back to the 19th century. With the strong support of the younger generation, Christians have become key actors in what we commonly refer to as the public sphere. As such, they are producing new perspectives on the impact of religion on public life and on key issues, such as environmental crisis, migration, nationalism.

To meet those challenges and to develop answers, church life as well as theological formation are in need of transformation in this globalized world.

These topics can only be adequately addressed from an intercultural ecumenical perspective, having the needs of young people in mind. Therefore, this perspective must include reflections on justice and peace, as well as on reconciliation and unity. It would be monolithic if one did not take into consideration the different views and perspectives from the various contexts, cultures, and age groups. World Christianity helps theology to get out of regional, national, and ethnic isolation. World Christianity as a field of study deals with the “things that are crossing (transcultural, transconfessional, transreligious) or things that take place in the interstices (intercultural, interconfessional, interreligious).”⁴³ Irvin reminds us that the crossings and the interstices are generally the places where “we do well to be looking for the transcendence.”

Worldwide, theological formation is in need of transformation towards the existential needs of believers and adherents. World Christianity should be seen on one hand as a

39 Simon, *Mission and Its Three Pillars: Translation, Transmission, and Transformation*, *International Review of Mission* 107, no. 2 (2018): 399–412.

40 Keum, *Together towards Life*, 29.

41 Bernhardt, “Interkulturelle Theologie,” 153.

42 See the chapters in this volume.

43 Dale T. Irvin, “World Christianity: A Genealogy,” in *Journal of World Christianity* 9, no. 1 (2019), 18.

dimension of doing theology, and on the other hand, as a new theological discipline.⁴⁴ Hence, world Christianity explores the contextual and interreligious dimensions of Christian faith; it also takes ecumenical perspectives into account.⁴⁵ A solid formation in world Christianity is the *sine qua non* if theologians, and hence churches, want to be prepared for the challenges to come, including the megatrends in a globalized world.

44 See Küster, *Einführung ind die Interkulturelle Theologie*, 13.

45 See Küster, 115.

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PART II

CHAPTER FOUR

PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES IN MY SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

JODENE MINNIE LOUW

At the age of 12, I was diagnosed with juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA), formerly known as juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. This is the most common type of arthritis found in children under the age of 16. JIA can cause persistent joint pain, swelling, and stiffness. Some children may experience symptoms for only a few months, while others have symptoms for many years. Some types of JIA can cause serious complications, such as growth problems, joint damage, and eye inflammation. The available treatment focuses on controlling pain and inflammation, improving function, and preventing further damage.

This diagnose changed my life from what I had known it to be. I went from being an active child participating in everything that other children would do to struggling with the constant and often debilitating pain caused by JIA. With the love and support of my family, I was able to sustain a belief that I was not defined by the condition that afflicted me, and I continued to pursue those activities that gave me joy, albeit in a much more controlled manner. In spite of the difficulties, looking back, I would not change a thing!

People who live with disabilities have and always will be a part of our lives, our communities, and societies. However, the question that begs to be asked is, have we as society fully integrated them into the activities and experiences of everyday life? Yes, some countries may be doing better than others in terms of inclusivity, especially of disabled/differently-abled persons, but in developing nations, despite our best efforts and intentions, many are still lagging behind in acceptance and inclusivity of people living with disabilities. The definition of *differently abled* may vary from person to person, and it may differ even within countries in Africa.

In this chapter, when referring to people living with special needs, I am speaking of people who are marginalized in terms of physical, mental, health, or even societal differences. A person in a wheelchair is a differently-abled person than one who may freely use their legs, but that does not mean that the person in the wheelchair cannot actively participate in society, and specifically, in the context of service and ministry of the church.

I was confirmed into full membership in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA), at 16 years of age. I did not disclose my condition to the confirmation class leaders and although I did my best to fully participate in the required activities, my experience was not the same as the other confirmation candidates. As candidates we eagerly looked forward to the annual adventure camp, which featured an obstacle course. Despite my best intentions and efforts, my condition did not allow me to complete the course. (Although, I must be honest, a part of me loved the fact that I did not have to roll around in the mud!) It was an awkward situation, and as a 16-year-old, I did not want to be labelled as “the girl with JIA” or be treated differently than my peers. I wanted to enjoy my confirmation class experience and participate as any of my peers would.

Many churches in the South African context have not adequately addressed the needs of their congregation members who are differently abled.

This then takes us to the point of accessibility. Are the pews wide enough to fit a wheelchair, or is there a dedicated section within the church for congregants with wheelchairs? Are the ablution facilities easily accessible to people in wheelchairs? For many of the churches I have visited within the Johannesburg, South Africa, region, the response is no.

If the physical structure of the church is not welcoming to differently-abled persons, how then can these congregants consider serving in the various ministries within the life and mission of the church? In my context within the ACSA, traditional ministries, where able-bodied congregants enjoy the opportunity to serve, may present some challenges for differently-abled members to participate fully and freely. It is our duty as abled persons to ensure that no sheep in our God’s flock are left behind or excluded.

There are opportunities within the body of Christ that offer spaces for disabled persons to participate and contribute to the ministry of the church. For example, if there are two youth leaders, one able-bodied person and one person who is living with disabilities, might it be that the able-bodied youth leader could be given more responsibility than the peer who is differently abled, so as not to increase the burden on the second youth leader? Within the praise and worship team, would a person who is visually impaired with 90% blindness – given their need to move at a different pace than the rest of the group, especially if there aren’t adequate materials to support the visually impaired – be considered a hindrance to the already stressful choir practice sessions? Or does this present an opportunity for the church to develop its ministry for all who want or feel called to participate, irrespective of their physical abilities?

As the church, we have a responsibility to offer the same opportunities of service and ministry to all congregants, so they can fully and meaningfully express the worship to God to which they have been called. The lived realities and experiences of people living with disabilities often go unnoticed within the life and ministry of the church. This can be seen not only in the physical structures that often create barriers of access for people living with disabilities, but also in the minimal efforts that churches make to ensure

that the services they offer accommodate the needs and requirements of people with disabilities. Consider this: Have you ever been to a church service with a sign language interpreter present for the hard of hearing?

When we are unaware of or willfully oblivious to the challenges that confront people living with disabilities, we are in no position to respond or meaningfully address their needs and create an environment of worship, service, and ministry that is inclusive of all God's people. It is also from that space of awareness of the needs of people living with disabilities that fully abled congregation members can begin to reflect on the necessary adjustments that have been made to create and offer inclusivity in all areas of mission and ministry. Herein lies an opportunity for a survey to be conducted in the church to understand the unique needs of the differently abled. I believe that each family would indicate that they have either direct or indirect contact with one or more people living with disabilities. This insight could positively impact the way the differently abled experience church, and inspire change and more inclusivity.

Empathy, the ability to share in the feelings and experiences of others, becomes very important in the process of gaining greater awareness of the needs and lived realities of people with disabilities. It is important that congregations build the deepened sense of empathy and understanding that unlocks the ability to address the needs of those who form and are part of the community of believers. This requires a top-down approach. As a church leader in the various ministries, surely one has the responsibility of teaching lessons of equality and inclusivity in the ability to readily assist both differently abled and able-bodied individuals. Sadly, in my context, I have noticed that differently-abled individuals either do not attend church at all, or if they do, their needs are not met. They are forced to sit as spectators, without the opportunity to participate in the activities of the various ministries offered by the church.

I have been taught that the seed planted at the day of your baptism or dedication is a seed that will forever need to be nurtured. As the body of Christ, we contribute to the nurturing of that seed. How have you as a congregant, Sunday school teacher, youth leader, confirmation leader, first holy communion teacher, praise and worship leader, lay minister, deacon or deaconess, or even priest or bishop, been contributing to the nurturing of that seed?

As an individual who identifies as differently abled, my personal experience is that not much thought has been given to congregants who want to serve the Lord but are differently abled.

If I had been of a different mindset, I might have opted not to attend the adventure camp at all, knowing that I would be the odd one out who couldn't complete the obstacle course. However, the fellowship and camaraderie of our confirmation group allowed me to attend the camp, just as I was. This acceptance and inclusivity led me to question what the experience of other differently-abled individuals was.

After I had completed my confirmation, I was called by the Lord to serve as a confirmation leader, and later as a lay minister among other ministries within the church. In one of our confirmation groups, I met a young man who had been born blind. I was drawn to him, and in hindsight, I see that it could have been because he was differently abled, and I could relate to his experience. This young man displayed strength I had never seen in someone of his age! He was tenacious and resilient, and he knew each person by name. He just had to touch your hand, and he knew exactly who he was talking to. He and I had a standing joke that our hands became our faces as soon as he touched them! As he spent more time with all of us, with just one word he was able to identify who he was talking to. His social survival strategies intrigued me to no end.

When Sello attended his group's adventure camp, we leaders found it challenging to ensure that he had a "normal" camp experience. This reflected how ill-prepared we were to accommodate a differently-abled candidate. However, we were all in for a big lesson. The youth pastor at the Anglican Church of the Transfiguration, Rev. Robert Richard Hendricks, displayed so much compassion towards Sello. He taught us countless lessons over that weekend. Rev. Hendricks, commonly known as Uncle Robbie to us all, journeyed across the dreaded obstacle course with Sello, who was able to complete every single activity with the benefit of some guidance, patience, and support.

I watched in awe, silently following them, and I listened attentively to Rev. Hendricks engaging Sello throughout. He became Sello's eyes in an effortless and graceful way, prompted by a multitude of questions to keep Sello calm, some of which included: "Would you like to know what kind of day it is today, Sello?" to which Sello excitedly said yes. Rev. Hendricks proceeded to say, "The soft blue sky is clear, without a cloud in sight, even though they told us there would be rain today." I watched it all unfold, mesmerized, and it was at that moment that I realized that as a church, we need to extend the same grace to others that we so freely receive from Christ.¹

As a confirmation leader, it was important to me that Sello have the option to be able to take part in the obstacle course, because I was sure that for much of his life there were many activities he was not given the option or opportunity to participate in. Through Rev. Hendricks, he was able to take part in these activities, and you could see the excitement on his face as he completed the last obstacle. While this story had a happy ending, it became clear to me that we are not always fortunate enough to be blessed with someone as patient and understanding as Rev. Hendricks. When I contacted Sello and asked for his blessing to share what had happened, he responded, saying: "I remember you all! At first, I could feel your tension as a team, but the more time we spent together, the easier it became, and you all soon realized that my hands were my eyes. I could tell you all apart by simply feeling your hands. Never in my life will I forget the kindness you all displayed to me, especially Rev. Hendricks. Bless you all."²

1 Rev. Robert Richard Hendricks, conversation with author, 01 October 2020.

2 Sello, 15 October 2020.

We as the church – the body of Christ – need to consciously ensure that differently-abled congregants are able to serve to the full extent of their desire. As daunting as this task may be from the onset, it is our moral and ethical obligation to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Although the African continent is not as resourced as the developed world, we have ubuntu. This is a quality that includes the essential human virtues of compassion and humanity. How can we, as the church, extend ubuntu to the differently abled? How can the principle of ubuntu serve as the engine that drives the vehicle of service, offering a seat on the bus for anyone who chooses to serve God?

This is not to say that the church in Africa is completely lacking in compassion and acknowledgement of the physical challenges of its congregants. In fact, over the past decade the Anglican Church of Southern Africa has added health and wellness days to its annual calendar of outreach activities; many other churches do the same. On these days, congregants have access to free medical support to check their blood pressure and cholesterol; in some cases, simple over-the-counter medications like painkillers or cough medicines, may be available. These activities are undertaken by leveraging the services of the medical professionals within the congregations (doctors, nurses, paramedics) in order to benefit the entire church family. However, are these health and wellness days catering to the medical needs of all congregants, or only the able-bodied?

The ability to host these outreach activities demonstrates that within the life of the church, we have the ability and capacity to do better. It is our duty as the body of Christ to teach and equip the servants of God how to better assist people living with disabilities, not only within the church, but within our respective communities and societies as a whole. We should include all congregants, creating awareness around those living with Down's syndrome, those suffering from depression and other mental health challenges, those who are blind and deaf, and all of those who are afflicted in one way or another.

As we review the churches' ability to be fully welcoming to all congregants, regardless of their physical disposition, we need to address the preparedness of the church to deal with a medical emergency on church premises: for example, a person living with epilepsy who suffers a seizure while in church. Epilepsy is a disorder of the central nervous system, which can't be detected simply by looking at a person. However, seizures and periods of unusual behaviour, and sometimes loss of awareness, can happen at any place and time can be frightening for everyone. As a church, would we know how to assist the individual who suffers a seizure in a church service? Or would the individual be unceremoniously carried out of the prayer auditorium for "deliverance"? The answer to this lies in how those who serve in the various ministries are trained and sensitized.

Service is not only about where support is needed in the church. It's also a calling, and whether those persons – able-bodied or differently abled – who are called to a particular area of service require training before they can serve. It is through these training sessions that more awareness can be brought to the body of Christ about the various needs of the congregants. Earlier, I alluded to the need for surveys to be conducted in church. These

service-oriented trainings would provide the perfect platform for these survey findings to be shared and implemented. It is in these platforms that we can reinforce that we have all been created in God's image, and that no one on this earth is perfect. Think of Jeremiah 1:5: *Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.*

As teachers in the secular world, we are trained to do this through our actions and interaction with the children. Granted, some children may need more attention than others, but through intention and resources, the interaction between the children becomes easier and more manageable for the teacher and the differently-abled child. In the teaching profession, we have a concept called inclusive education, which makes room for children from all walks of life, with their individual talents and their difficulties, to interact and work in one classroom. This too is an example of how we should encourage the body of Christ to love and respect differently-abled individuals. Let us imagine what an inclusive church looks like, and strive to make that a lived reality and experience for all. In this way, we encourage the acceptance and inclusion of differently-abled person in all of life and especially within the societies that we live and work.

In conclusion: As the global church, is it not our duty to actively find ways to better reach and teach the people of God? The year 2020 has taught us that despite our geographical locations, we can still achieve remarkable works with tenacity and resilience. We should be encouraging member churches to host round-table meetings, and to discuss their ability and readiness to be inclusive of differently-abled individuals in service, mission, and ministry. We should regularly be advocating on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Christ for inclusive church communities and societies. We should love Christ's church as we are similarly loved by our Creator.

Through the member churches of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and specifically through the WCC Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN), the WCC continues to equip and empower all our members with information, resources, and strategies to implement the vision of an inclusive church and global village for all God's people.

For a young woman who wishes to sing in the praise and worship team but cannot see, may we be her eyes. For the child who wishes to assist in washing cars at the local fundraising event but who sits in a wheelchair, may we be his ladder in our assistance. In so doing, we fulfil our obligation to others, as set out in Matthew 22:39: *And the second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself*³.

3 This chapter has been cathartic in ways that cannot be imagined. It offered me a renewed healing from parts of my illnesses I had for so many years shelved and never thought of again.

CHAPTER FIVE

COVID-19 AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: CHALLENGE TO THE ECUMENICAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN NIGERIA

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INTRODUCTION

There are many types of coronavirus diseases identified, including some that commonly cause mild upper respiratory tract disease. However, in December 2019, a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was identified in Wuhan, China. COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV-2). The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern on 30 January 2020, and a pandemic on 11 March 2020. The first confirmed case in Nigeria was announced on 27 February 2020. As of Friday, 20 November 2020, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control had reported 65,982 confirmed cases, 30,351 active cases, 61,782 discharged cases, and 1,165 deaths.¹ The spread of COVID-19 in states across Nigeria led to the shutdown or lockdown of states including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Federal, state, and local government civil servants were ordered to stay at home. In addition, state governments banned all social gatherings (such as weddings and funerals), and markets and schools in the states were shut down, starting from 30 March 2020. Furthermore, many states in the country prohibited inter-state travel, and closed their markets.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide, and presents an unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems, and the world of work. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating. It has pushed many more Nigerians into extreme poverty, with increased numbers of

1 "Coronavirus—Nigeria: COVID-19 Case Update," Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, last modified 20 November 2020, <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng>.

undernourished people. In addition to this, the pandemic has resulted in increased cases of gender-based violence (GBV) which was already a worrisome phenomenon. Young women and men are mostly affected by GBV. The lockdown, which was a major strategy to curb the spread of the virus, caused economic hardships, deprivation of opportunities for recreational activities, and general fear in homes.

These scenarios resulted in increased cases of rape, sexual violence, forced marriages, wife-beating, and relationship abuses. Young people fell victim to several types of abuses and violence from their spouses, friends, relations, and law enforcement agents. Within five months of the lockdown period, upsurge in GBV was observed. The lockdown adversely affected youth ecumenical participation, as many youth-friendly church programmes were put on hold and many youth conferences were canceled, and the fear of being raped or harassed even in churches grew among youths. News flying on social media and other media platforms further exposed a lot of violence and criticisms against some pastors, political leaders, and the Nigerian response to the pandemic in general. For instance, Nigeria had just 350 ventilators and 350 intensive care unit beds for its entire population before the outbreak. In April 2020, the country acquired 100 more ventilators, but given the growing caseload, this will not be enough.² This exposed gender injustices and violence against youths and women in the system, further dampening the interests of many youths in church programmes.

According to Rastko Jovic, “the search for gender justice is at the centre of our Christological and ecclesiological preoccupation.”³ This suggests that the ecumenical bodies should be highly concerned about the increase in GBV in Nigeria, so that its impact on youth ecumenical participation can be ameliorated. This chapter explores the upsurge in GBV due to the COVID-19 lockdown, and the challenges it poses to youth ecumenical participation in Nigeria. It demonstrates how youths can be properly engaged at this time to enable them to move from victims to agents of change in the modern ecumenical movement. This raises the need for the church to re-strategize on how to tackle gender injustice in Nigeria, especially to encourage youth ecumenical participation. Doing gender justice is a mission imperative.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is one of the countries identified as GBV-prone areas. According to the UN universal periodic review of Nigeria, in 2018 there was massive abuse of human rights, limited access to education due to high cost, limited access to healthcare due to cost,

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- 2 Siddharth Dixit, Yewande Kofoworola Ogundeji, and Obinna Onwujekwe, “How well has Nigeria responded to COVID-19?,” 2 July 2020, Brookings(blog of the Brookings Institution), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/07/02/how-well-has-nigeria-responded-to-covid-19/>.
 - 3 Rastko Jovic, “Doing Gender Justice as a Mission Imperative,” in *Translating the Word, Transforming the World: An Ecumenical Reader*, edited by Amélie Adamavi-Aho Ekué, Marion Grau, and Atola Longkumer (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2018), 84–89.

high rate of rape and violence against women and children, beatings at homes and schools, high rates of child labour and trafficking, illegal arrests, and long detention, and so forth.⁴ Among all the identified human rights abuses, GBV was pronounced in Nigeria even before the global pandemic. Recent research on COVID-19 and GBV, conducted by Jessica Young and Camron Aref-Adib, reveals some facts about GBV status in Nigeria before the COVID-19 lockdown. It shows that Nigeria had long been facing a GBV crisis with 30% of women and girls aged 15–49 having experienced sexual abuse. The study shows that though there were combined efforts by government and other stakeholders to fight the menace, lack of coordination among those stakeholders, and gender discriminatory norms, thwarted such efforts. The situation of GBV was bad but became worse with the enforcement of the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵

This result shows that the pandemic diverted the attention of stakeholders in the fight against GBV due to the lockdown and its attendant challenges. It accounts for the reports of more cases of rape, sexual abuse, and other acts of domestic violence against women and girls, most of whom were young people.

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AND UPSURGE IN GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Lockdown was a major strategy adopted by many countries of the world to curb the spread of COVID-19. This involved restriction of movement and closure of market-places, workplaces, airports, roads, and waterways to avoid person-to-person transmission as well as object-to-person transmission. In the case of Nigeria, the federal government decided to place Lagos State, Ogun State, and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, under full lockdown beginning 30 March 2020. In mid-April, the lockdown was extended to Kano State, the most populous city in the northern part of the country. However, the lockdowns gradually extended to other states of the federation as each governor observed cases of the virus. The entire country was in total lockdown for five months between March and July, with gradual easing of the lockdown from the ending of July.

Studies conducted by Young and Aref-Adib indicate that “since various versions of lockdown were put in place across the country on 30 March, reported cases of gender-based violence have substantially risen.”⁶ Their studies classify data based on the upsurge of GBV recorded first in the three states of federal government lockdown, and then generally in the entire country. According to them, in the three states, the number of cases rose from 60 in March to 238 in April, an increase of 297%. This data was done

4 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Nigeria*, A/HRC/40/725 February–22 March 2019, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/446/65/PDF/G1844665.pdf?OpenElement>.

5 Jessica Caroline Young and Camron Aref-Adib, “The Shadow Pandemic: Gender-Based Violence and COVID-19,” International Growth Centre (blog post), 19 May 2020, <https://www.theigc.org/blog/the-shadow-pandemic-gender-based-violence-and-covid-19/>.

6 Young and Aref-Adib, “The Shadow Pandemic,” 1.

in contrast to data from three other states, Benue, Ebonyi, and Cross River, which were placed under less stringent lockdowns within the period under review. These states recorded an increase of only 53% between March and April. In fact, in Ebonyi state, where the governor refused to place the state under total lockdown, the number of GBV cases lessened from March to April. This validates the assertion that the COVID-19 lockdown led to an upsurge in GBV cases in Nigeria.

Generally, the data from their studies show also that the number of reported cases for 23 out of 36 states where data was readily available increased by 149%. Imagine this high rate of increase in GBV cases across the country within the lockdown periods! Who are the most vulnerable? It is the young women and girls. These are the same social groups that bring energy and vigor to church activities in the Nigerian context. This is definitely a challenge to youth ecumenical participation.

IMPACTS ON YOUTH ECUMENICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

The last 50 years have seen a steady growth of ecumenical movement in Nigeria. The Christian Association of Nigeria, which is the national coordinating body of Nigerian ecumenism, has women and youth wings. This organization was established in a conscious effort to encourage women and youth participation. Since then, a lot of women and youth ecumenical conferences, fellowships, and meetings have been going on in the country. However, the COVID-19 lockdown and the corresponding increase in cases of GBV have had huge impacts on youth ecumenical engagements in Nigeria.

Young and Aref-Adib identify four main negative impacts of the lockdown and upsurge in GBV not just on women and youths, but also on the entire economy of Nigeria. They include the following: a) compromised life-saving services and access to justice; b) destroyed livelihoods, which can lead women and girls into transactional sex; c) school closures and a rushed academic calendar after reopening, which increased the risk of dropping out of school and child marriage; and d) reduced services of GBV service providers. They focused on women and girls and did not report on the negative impacts of GBV on men and boys. This does not mean that men and boys are never victims of GBV, but according to Paul O. Dienne and Precious K. Gbeneol, the rate of GBV against men and boys is small compared to its rate against women and girls.⁷

The above consequences directly and indirectly affect youth ecumenical participation.⁸ For instance, the rape and murder in a church of Uwaila Vera Omozuwa, a 22-year-old

7 Paul O. Dienne and Precious K. Gbeneol, "Domestic Violence Against Men in Primary Care in Nigeria," *American Journal of Men's Health* 3, no. 4 (2009), 333-339.

8 Bukola Adebayo, "Student Raped and Killed in Church Wanted to Become a Minister and 'Preach the Word of God,' Sister Says," 5 June 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/05/africa/nigeria-student-rape-family-account-as-equals-intl/index.html>.

undergraduate student at the University of Benin, raises the question of the safety of such spaces for youth ecumenical participation. Likewise, on 23 June 2020 the Major Prophet Honesty Jesus of the Living Power of Zion Church, situated at Ndue Eduo, Okon Eket, Eket Local Government, Akwa Ibom State was alleged to have raped a 16-year-old girl, after he drugged her.⁹ This calls into question the safety of church spaces for youth ecumenical participation. It is also clear that the means of livelihood of young people have dropped significantly. As shown by Young and Aref-Adib, the country has witnessed an increasing rate of justice denial, and more young people are dropping out of schools in the face of high education costs and incessant industrial actions by the Academic Staff Union of Universities which prolong the period of their study.

All of these and more have endangered the average young person who is now considering the next available option for survival. It calls for effective mission work to restore these young people and engage them ecumenically again. The church in Nigeria has an urgent missionary task to ensure fullness of life for all, especially these vulnerable youths at this time. As WCC moderator of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, Metropolitan Geevarghese Coorilos explains, “the mission of the church must affirm the life of the Holy Trinity including transformative spirituality, dialogue and mission from the margins.”¹⁰

The ecumenical bodies at this point need to act fast and in the right direction, targeting the young people who are affected by GBV and COVID-19. The task is to win back the youths and properly engage them on the path of the ecumenical movement. This will guarantee a sense of justice which the church must lead the world to practise. Undoing injustice and doing justice is a mandate from God to the church. This will bring about change in all aspects of the country’s life. This change that we desire cannot come in a vacuum: God uses people, including the church, to bring desired change to God’s world. As Paul Isaak states, “God acts in history by choosing to work through religions, political leaders and the people.”¹¹ He explains this in line with *theologia synergia* (theology of synergy) where God builds synergy with humans to fulfill God’s purpose.

In this sense, if properly engaged, the youths in Nigeria have the capacity to move from being victims of this COVID-19 situation to becoming agents of change in the hands of God. It is therefore needful to examine what the church can do at this point to engage youth and turn them into agents of positive change.

9 CletusUkpong, “Pastor Arrested for Allegedly Raping 16-Year-Old Girl Inside Church,” *Premium Times*, 25 June 2020, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/399676-pastor-arrested-for-allegedly-raping-16-year-old-girl-inside-church.html>

10 Metr. Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, “Mission Toward Fullness of Life, 2013,” in *Translating the Word*, 90–93.

11 Paul John Isaak, “Missiological Framework in Africa: The Missional African Church and its Missionary Praxis,” in *International Review of Mission* 108, no. 2 (November 2019), 337–48.

FROM VICTIMS TO AGENTS OF CHANGE

The theology of synergy has already revealed that God is ready to work with and through humans who make themselves available. Acknowledging this fact puts the onus on the church to think of making these young people agents of change instead of allowing them take to crime or other vices for survival. The Nigerian society is in need of agents of change, and it is blessed with vibrant young people who can be useful in the society. The youths constitute the largest part of the population of the country. I hereby propose the following as the possible ways of transforming youths from victims to agents of change.

- a) **Leadership Inclusion:** Ecumenical bodies such as the Christian Association of Nigeria, which is the largest ecumenical organization in Nigeria, the Christian Council of Nigeria, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, the Organization of African Instituted Churches, and the Evangelical Churches in West Africa, and others can engage the youths by advocating for the inclusion of young people in leadership and decision-making processes at all levels and strata of the Nigerian church and society. This will enhance their participation in decisions that affect their needs. Recently in the country, many young people took to the streets in protest against the brutal treatment often meted out to them by the State Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian Police force in charge of robbery crime.¹² The protest, which was captioned #EndSARS#, also featured clamour for youths' inclusion in the country's governance at all levels. This is an indication that the youths need some level of inclusion to enable them to act as change agents, instead of being seen and treated as criminals or victims of societal ills. The church can advocate for and facilitate this inclusion and also can show examples of youths in church leadership.
- b) **Value Reorientation:** The church and ecumenical bodies can plan programmes aimed at gathering the youth for reorientation. This can be a behavioural change communication strategy geared towards changing the value system of some youths, inculcating in them a proper sense of value that will be helpful to them and the society at large. Youths should be reoriented to embrace values such as respect for the human person, love, care, honesty, and humility.
- c) **Ecumenical Engagement:** Different denominations in Nigeria have contributed greatly toward the engagement of young people. They have done this through running schools, healthcare facilities, orphanages, community development services, and gospel conferences involving youths. These efforts have created a lot of employment over the years. Ian Fleck traces these individual efforts from the time of early missionaries, who established schools to educate Nigerians. They also ran hospitals for medical care. Today, many churches are still providing these services.

12 Oluwole Ojewale, "Youth Protests for Police Reform in Nigeria: What Lies Ahead for #EndSARS," Brookings, accessed 2 February 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/10/29/youth-protests-for-police-reform-in-nigeria-what-lies-ahead-for-endsars/>.

Most churches also run faith-based organizations and NGOs to meet developmental needs of young people in the country.¹³ All these efforts are contributing to job creation. Many ecumenical organizations have been set up since the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement in 1910. The Christian Council of Nigeria was first set up in 1929. Other organizations were established later, such as the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, the Organization of African Instituted Churches, and the Evangelical Churches in West Africa. In 1976, all these ecumenical organizations merged to form the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) which is now the national umbrella body of Nigerian ecumenism.

Therefore, the ecumenical movement is already strong in Nigeria, with CAN as the coordinating body nationally, and youths are involved. However, as Ahmed Sule explains, the current efforts of the church are too weak to handle the enormity of injustices the youth are suffering in Nigeria. He says that the situation is alarming, as a strong minority is oppressing a weak majority in the country. He quoted Martin Luther King Jr as saying, “So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an arch-defender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church’s silent and often even vocal sanction of things as they are.”¹⁴ He demonstrates that the church sometimes perpetrates and sanctions injustice affecting the youth. The church should lead by example in its structure, leadership, worker recruitment, and salary structure, as well as in the lifestyle of pastors and members.

Sule further quoted Martin Luther King Jr as saying that “the church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the State but rather the conscience of the State. It must be the guide and the critic of the State and never its tool.” With this, he points out the nonchalant attitude of the church towards its role in the state, which has promoted injustices, vices, and poverty. For Sule, a combination of vision and practicality is needed now in response to the oppression, injustice, and classism currently taking place in Nigeria. He suggests a Nigerian Christian Leadership Conference (NCLC) as a way of responding to this menace. He explains that an NCLC could use various strategies to engage youth, such as advocacy, sermons, dialogue, and mobilization of its large congregational base to carry out nonviolent peaceful mass protests against GBV, vices, and youth exclusion.

13 Ian Fleck, *Bringing Christianity to Nigeria: The Origin and Work of Protestant Missions* (Bukuru: African Christian Textbooks, 2013), 238.

14 Ahmed Olayinka Sule, “A Plea To Seven Ministers of God: We Need a Nigerian Christian Leadership Conference” In Sahara Reporters. Jan 12, 2011. (accessed November 14, 2020, <http://saharareporters.com/2011/01/12/plea-seven-ministers-god-we-need-nigerian-christian-leadership-conference>).

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria actually led to an increase in gender-based violence. This can be attributed to the economic hardships, non-availability of a GBV advocacy and protection organization, and deprivation of opportunities for recreational activities caused by the lockdown. The less busy people became, the more they had time to plan and execute evils. Therefore, the lockdown period witnessed increased cases of rape, sexual harassment, sexual violence, forced marriages, wife-beating, and relationship abuses.

The increase in GBV cases had negative effects on youth ecumenical participation. First, this is because young people were the greatest victims of it. Young people constitute the majority of those who were victimized on the basis of their gender. Second, a few cases of GBV occurred within the confines of the church building/property, which has made many people question whether the church can still be described as a safe place for our young people. Third, some of the suspected perpetrators of the violence are even church leaders, whom people should be able to trust.

Bearing in mind that young people constitute the great majority of the population generally, and of the church in particular, the increase in gender-based violence will not only affect youth participation in ecumenism, it will also affect the future of the church. The church needs to arise to ensure that GBV is tackled decisively, so that it does not lose its youth and by extension, its future. The church can do this by engaging youth through value reorientation, leadership inclusion, and ecumenical engagement. This can transform the youth into change agents.

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CHAPTER SIX

CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUTH IN RELIGIOUS SPACE AND CHURCH COMMUNITY, IN RELATION TO THEIR ROLE IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT: ZAMBIAN CONTEXT

SAMUEL PHIRI

The immediate problem that the ecumenical movement is facing today is not the defining of doctrines or dogmas of various churches. The problem is how the Christian faith and ecumenical movement is to be pursued and preserved in people's lives. How do we foster mission to a changing society that seems to view religion as irrelevant to their lives and their community? There is thus a great need to contemplate the challenges that have affected youth and their role as contributors to the ecumenical movement: a calling for churches to put forward a concerted effort to find a place for youth in ecumenism, if the next Christian generation and ecumenical movement is to exist. This chapter, then, will explore and consider many of the views on ecumenical participation of youth from different spheres of life and cultural backgrounds.¹ This chapter will also highlight the significance of youth in the ecumenical movement.

CHALLENGES IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

To fully understand the role of the young in fostering ecumenism, it is prudent to realize that the challenges faced by youth are not only within their righteous space or church community. Their challenges range from social, climatic, and health, to political and economic, and have had adverse impact on the young as well as on their contribution on the ecumenical movement.

1 Chamma J. Kaunda, "The Day of Prayer and Its Potential for Engendering Public Ecclesiology Ecumenism in Zambia," *Religions* 9, no. 12 (December 2018), 1.

One of the challenges to the youth ecumenical movement is the fact that most ecumenical activities have at times been conceived in a political context. It is unfortunate that at times the political space has had to define the religious space and the church community in which it does its ecumenism. An example of this in Zambia is the National Day of Prayer. As Kaunda asserts, the Day of Prayer has been a political initiative, which makes it a potential neo-colonial space for advancing a dominant political ideology perpetuating corruption and exploitation of the masses. The implication of this is that the ecumenical movement has at times turned into a political movement, with the dominant political ideology taking the upper hand. It can, therefore, be argued that as such, it has made youth vulnerable, and subject to being used as tools of violence in the church and national politics. Thus, there is an urgent need to redress structures and practices that disadvantage, exclude, and endanger people's lives, especially the young.

Not only has the politicization of religion been a tool of violence, but it can also be a source of discrimination.² Kaunda asserts that various churches play a critical role in leading worship on the Day of Prayer. However, the Zambian constitution's explicit affirmation of Zambia as a Christian nation means that other religious groups are not part of this worship. This discrimination reduces members of these groups to second-class citizens, despite the fact that the constitution upholds the individual right to freedom of conscience, belief, or religion, and prohibits religiously-based discrimination. The World Council of Churches (WCC) rejects this kind of discrimination, stating that the church should provide "a public critique of structures and practices that further and contribute to the 'othering,' the discrimination and the violation of human beings."³

Yet it cannot be denied that despite the cons that have come with the Day of Prayer in Zambia, one of the pros is that it has provided a religious space for ecumenical activities for youth as well as various churches. As such, the Day of Prayer as a public space has the potential to bring about a unique form of ecclesiology ecumenism embedded within the common struggle for liberation and emancipation. But this is calling for the church, through its ecumenical space, to prioritize its "missional responsibility to liberate, reclaim and reimagine the Day of Prayer as a site of struggle for political emancipation, economic liberation, gender equality, and sustainable social transformation."⁴ The young must be at the top of the church's agenda of prioritization if they are to actively participate in the ecumenical movement. It is an agenda to develop the young which ought to be holistic. Sakupapa also asserts to this by quoting the WCC assembly in Nairobi (1975) which stressed through the Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development (CCDP) that development should be a liberating process aimed at social justice, self-reliance and economic growth."⁵

2 Kaunda, "The Day of Prayer," 1.

3 *The "Other" Is My Neighbour: Developing an Ecumenical Response to Migration* (Geneva: WCC publications, 2013), 30.

4 Kaunda, "The Day of Prayer," 9.

5 Teddy c. Sakupapa, "The Ecumenical Movement and Development: The Case of the All Africa Conferences of Churches (AAC) 1963-2000 Part 1" *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 44, no. 3 (2018), 5.

The contemporary society, including Zambia, has been faced by health issues, such as the emerging of the coronavirus pandemic as well as HIV/AIDS, to mention a few. These have affected not only individual churches but the universal church as well. As such, these issues threaten the very existence of the church community and the participation of youth in the ecumenical movement. And individual churches can't address these alone but require action from the universal church.

Yet the new trends brought about by the coronavirus have also provided new avenues for youth to have a huge voice in the ecumenical movement within the Zambian and global context. With the surfacing of the COVID-19 pandemic, new practices of ecumenism and ecclesiologies have been forged. COVID-19 has brought more virtual ecumenical conferences, seminars, and so forth. These have allowed youth to play a very active role in fostering a virtual church that is universal and ecumenical in nature.

ROLE OF THE YOUTH IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

The many challenges that have been identified and discovered cannot hinder the participation of the youth in the ecumenical movement. These challenges ought only to serve as stepping stones to the future of youth's involvement in the ecumenical movement – true to the words of Kobia who echoed John R. Mott (first honorary president of the WCC), when he said, “Take your stumbling-blocks and turn them into stepping-stones!”⁶ Therefore, these challenges ought not to be perceived as obstacles but as opportunities for common witness as an ecumenical movement. Through ecumenism, youth are rising to the particular moment, as well as adapting to changing needs.

The relevance of our response to such a crisis as is faced by the universal church lies with the youth identifying their roles in all these challenges. What is their role in advocating on issues of climate change, gender equity, political justice, economic justice, or social justice? How the young position themselves in all these is cardinal and also relevant to the present and future church. A viable theology for youth participation in the ecumenical movement lies in the understanding and broader context of *missio Dei* (God's mission). This concept implies that the integral understanding of Christian witness (*martyria*), proclamation (*kerigma*), service (*leitourgia*) and communion (*koinonia*) is cardinal to how the young will foster the ecumenical movement. Bosch argues that “mission has to be multidimensional in order to be credible and faithful to its origins and character.”⁷ Therefore any participation in the ecclesiological ecumenical movement must strive to be multidimensional in its approach.

6 Samuel Kobia, “Challenges Facing the Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century (keynote address at the seminar on the future of ecumenism, New York, 22 October 2005), <https://archived.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/foundational-texts/challenges-facing-the-ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century>.

7 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 512.

The role of the youth in ecumenical movement in the religious space and ecumenism should be understood as the interaction, dialogue, and reflection among churches, through worshipping, preaching, prayer, and social praxis. This dialogue ought not only to be among their peers but should be intergenerational as well. Any ecumenical movement that creates a gap between generations is farfetched. Thus the results of the survey stressed that intergenerational dialogue between the young and old is cardinal for preservation of the ecumenical movement. The young are the ones forming the next generation of ecumenical leaders, so they must play a paramount role in bridging the gap that may exist between the young and the old in churches as well as communities.

The greatest role of the youth is also to offer public ecclesiology ecumenism, which is the prophetic witness of various churches as a unified body of Christ. It calls for a prophetic voice, creating a religious space, and church communities where youth dialogue and reflect together on what it means to be a prophetic church in the context of human suffering. Sakupapa states, "Ecumenical concern with the poor does not merely belong to the realm of the social responsibility of the church; rather it is a matter of ecclesiology."⁸ It is prudent to note that the prophetic voice of youth is at times compromised in that they fall in the category of the marginalized. Sakupapa identifies them among the marginalized groups in society such as the childless women, prostitutes, and refugees.⁹ Interaction with youth and the survey results indicate that poverty is a challenge that has hampered or prevented youth participation in ecumenical activities.

The WCC argues that "many of the church communities are far from practising *martyria* as a public witness that draws attention to issues of oppression, destruction, death, and human rights violations in the context of migration or in other areas, such as the global economic (dis)order, that threaten the life and livelihood of [the] majority population on this globe."¹⁰ This is not only true in the context of migration it is also true with youth participation in ecumenism.

Hence the need for youth in Zambia to advocate against this social praxis through active participation in ecumenical movement. Kaunda affirms that "'public ecclesiology ecumenism' is a multi-Christian site of dialogue and meaning-making grounded in dialectical social praxis directed toward emancipation of humanity and all creation."¹¹ This is calling youth to a collective prophetic consciousness on social issues and on how to engage with them. Henceforth, it is through the active participation of the young in the ecumenical movement that the prophetic voice of church can be strengthened.

In their ecclesiological ecumenical role, the young are duty-bound to create an inclusive community. This inclusive community is a space of equality without institutional or

8 Teddy C. Sakupapa, "The Ecumenical Movement and Development: The Case of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)1963–2000 Part 1" *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 44, no. 3 (2018), 5.

9 Sakupapa, "The Ecumenical Movement and Development," 7.

10 *The "Other" Is My Neighbour*, 29.

11 Kaunda, "The Day of Prayer," 4–5.

doctrinal privileges, but where churches offer the youth a culturally, socially, and ethnically inclusive community. Sanneh affirms this, stressing that “Christianity has become a genuinely multicultural world religion, thriving profusely in the idioms of other languages and cultures, marked by a lively cross-cultural and interreligious sensibility.”¹²

A typical example of the Zambian context, where culture is playing a paramount role, is the ecumenical movement. The cultural community creates an inclusive ecumenical community. An example is the Lozi people who gather for a service to celebrate the coronation of their king (*Litunga*). During this time, youth and other Christians gather to worship together, with the cultural or traditional space providing a religious space for ecumenism for *koinonia* or fellowship of churches.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the role of the youth today is in developing new ways and approaches in which theology continues to meet and challenge a community that is ever changing and too busy for God. The place of the youth in Zambia’s religious space is in challenging the church to action by embracing and developing structures and practices in which youth potential in ecumenism is developed. Their roles and contributions to the ecumenical movement cannot be undermined.

12 Lamin Sanneh, “Global Christianity and the Re-education of the West,” *Christian Century*, 19–26 July 1995, 715, <https://www.religion-online.org/article/global-christianity-and-the-re-education-of-the-west/>. 715–18.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

BUILDING OIKOPATHOS: TOWARD A PILGRIM YOUTH MOVEMENT IN THE TIME OF PANDEMIC

FEBRIANTO AND ABEL K. ARUAN

INTRODUCTION

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ecumenical organizations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (CCI) recently published statements on how to cope with the crisis. In a joint statement with regional ecumenical organizations, the WCC urged churches to unite in solidarity to “protect life” in the suffering world.¹ The CCI also stressed the importance of “*oikumene* in action,” that is, striving to build a shared home (*oikos*) in which all creation can dwell (*menein*) together in God’s *shalom*.² Aligning with these statements, WCC former general secretary Olav Fyske Tveit stated that Christians must “act in solidarity” and “raise the awareness of the sufferings of others.”³ These calls exhort the Indonesian churches, including the young people, to take part. How do young Indonesian Christians respond? What theological reflection can be offered for the wider ecumenical circle?

We will answer these questions by presenting a case story and proposing a theological reflection. This case is based on the project of making 3400 face shields, initiated by Emaus Indonesia Christian Church (Emaus ICC) in the city of Surabaya, East Java, in April 2020, which then moved several other churches to collaborate by making face shields and other medical needs. Our main proposal here focuses on the imagination of *oikopathos*. We argue that youth participation in solidarity work can be seen as an

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- 1 World Council of Churches, “A Time for Pastoral, Prophetic, and Practical Christianity: A Joint Statement from the World Council of Churches and Regional Ecumenical Organizations,” 26 March 2020, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/a-time-for-pastoral-prophetic-and-practical-christianity-a-joint-statement-from-the-world-council-of-churches-and-regional-ecumenical-organizations>.
 - 2 Communion of Churches in Indonesia, “Pesan Bulan Oikumene 2020: Jadilah Sahabat di Masa Susah dan Senang,” 14 May 2020, <https://pgi.or.id/pesan-bulan-oikumene-2020-satu-tubuh-satu-beban-jadilah-sahabat-di-masa-susah-dan-senang/>.
 - 3 Olav Fyske Tveit, quoted in “WCC Takes Steps to Prevent Spread of COVID-19,” 6 March 2020, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc-takes-steps-to-prevent-spread-of-covid-19>.

embodiment of *pathos*. This *pathos* moves young people to love something they are willing to be vulnerable and suffer and even die for. The unifying power of *pathos* can build the *oikopathos*, which can serve as an essential source for the church's pilgrimage of justice and peace.

We propose this theological imagination based on the Holland and Henroit's pastoral circle method, which includes immersion (or insertion), analysis (or social analysis), theological reflection, and response (or action).⁴ The concept of "pastoral circle" or "circle of praxis" is a tool for voluntarily experiencing a specific context to do a theological reflection and take actions. Its great strength is its "ability to focus on a particular issue or problem and to impact the social, moral, and ethical implications."⁵ By immersion, the method refers to the experience within "the geography of [one's] pastoral responses in the lived experience of individuals and communities."⁶ The second element, social analysis, "looks at the reality [of a situation] from an involved, historically committed stance, discerning the situation for the purpose of action."⁷

We will apply these first two steps in this chapter, firstly, by depicting the project of making face shields. We will also report some relevant data about the movement. Secondly, we will reflect youth involvement in this project through the lens of Kenda Creasy Dean's concept of *pathos* in youth ministry. Drawing from Jewish philosopher Abraham J. Heschel and German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, *pathos* is defined as an attribute of God that allows him to share the world's suffering and also be moved by it. Furthermore, we will shape the imagination of *oikopathos* as an essential source in the pilgrimage of justice and peace, particularly in Surabaya's youth pilgrimage. This proposal of theological imagination is based on the third step of the pastoral circle, which is established "for examining the situation in the light of our faith and shared values."⁸ Finally, as a means of building a new way of living, especially in youth ministry, we shall propose some guiding principles in which *oikopathos* can be used by the church to involve youth in the ecumenical movement.

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- 4 Joe Holland and Peter J. Henriot, S.J., *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983). By 1980, the Center of Concern, a joint project of the Society of Jesus and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), started to focus its analysis on emerging social movements in the USA that focused on the poor, women, or other social issues. Holland and Henroit created their method within this context.
 - 5 John Trokan, "Models of Theological Reflection: Theory and Praxis," *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 1, no. 2 (December 1997): 148.
 - 6 Alicia Brooks et al., "The Pastoral Circle Model for Decision Making," *Shared Vision* 22, no. 1 (2011): 5. https://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/uploads/9/2/4/6/9246931/volume_22_number_1_-_the_pastoral_circle.pdf.
 - 7 Brooks, "The Pastoral Circle Model," 5.
 - 8 Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network, *Manual on Economic Justice for Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation Groups*, vol. 1, *The Pastoral Circle* (Brussels: Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network, 2017), 21. This method is applied by AEFJN as a discernment tool in economic issues.

FACING THE CRISIS BY MAKING FACE SHIELDS: A CASE STUDY OF EMAUS LAWAN COVID-19

After President Joko Widodo and National Health Minister Terawan Agus Putranto announced the first COVID-19 case on 2 March 2020, Indonesian people's lives were pervaded by fear.⁹ Responding to this situation, the president instructed all his people to “study, work, and worship from home.”¹⁰ We, including the community of Emaus ICC, postponed onsite activities entirely. Suddenly, the church was so quiet and looked lifeless. Frightened of being infected by the virus, day to day we only scrolled through online news reporting the rapid spread of the virus, the collapse of the economy, and the scarcity of medical needs. We felt helpless because we couldn't do anything.

The beautiful story started when Elder Budi Darma of Emaus ICC and Diana Rimajanti discussed the possibility of the church's involvement in facing the crisis, mainly to provide medical needs. They shared the urge with Maria Aderina, Meelianawati Sutanto, and me, (Abel Aruan). With the church council's approval, we started to establish a special team to make it happen. On 29 March 2020, we based our vision on the biblical commission to take care of “the city where [God] sent [us] into exile” (Jer. 29:7) and to “love [our] neighbor as [ourselves]” (Matt. 22:39) and then named this movement “Emaus Lawan COVID-19” (Emaus Fighting COVID-19), focusing on the making of 1000 face shields to reduce the scarcity.

I (Aruan) took part as the volunteer coordinator, gathering people to work in a total of 14 shifts with 42 hours of work, during 1–8 April. We decided to gather youth to join this life-preserving project. Although they knew that being outside of their house meant risking their lives in those days, their involvement in this work was immense. Thirty-one of the 51 volunteers (60%) were people aged 14–27. Statements such as, “Finally, there is something we can do!” and “This is the day after two weeks doing nothing!” represented their joy in times of fear. The desire to help medical institutions was more significant than the fear of being infected.

In summary, we completed a total of 2183 sets – more than we had expected. All of those sets were distributed by the COVID-19 task force of the ICC's regional synod – which was also dominated by youth volunteers and led by Rev. Ariel Susanto – to tens of hospitals, not only in Surabaya, but also in East Java, Balikpapan, North Sulawesi, Ambon, East Nusa Tenggara, and Papua.¹¹

9 “BREAKING: Jokowi Announces Indonesia's First Two Confirmed COVID-19 Cases,” TheJakartaPost, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/03/02/breaking-jokowi-announces-indonesias-first-two-confirmed-covid-19-cases.html>.

10 “Minta Masyarakat Tenang, Presiden: Saatnya Bekerja, Belajar, dan Beribadah dari Rumah,” Cabinet Secretary of Republic of Indonesia, 15 March 2020, <https://setkab.go.id/minta-masyarakat-tenang-presiden-saatnya-bekerja-belajar-dan-beribadah-dari-rumah/>.

11 “Dengan #fightcovid19, GKI Sinwil Jatim Salurkan Bantuan,” *Satu Harapan*, 4 April 2020, <https://www.satuharapan.com/read-detail/read/dengan-fightcovid19-gki-sinwil-jatim-salurkan-bantuan>.

During the production period, several other churches joined this movement to make face shields and other medical needs. We were told that this project was done not only by youths but also by adults and elders. In response to this enormous alignment, Emaus Lawan COVID-19 decided to make tutorials and offer instructions to help other churches willing to work on the same project.¹² It was reported that this initiative “moved other [ICC] churches to align themselves to produce face shields. They are Pondok Tjandra Indah Church, Mojosari Church, Mojokerto Church, Citraland Church, and Darmo Satelit Church.”¹³

At the same time, Emaus Lawan COVID-19 began a second phase of production. In this phase, we realized that what had started as a local concern had now become a pilgrimage with other churches, that was meant to bring life protection, peace, and justice in time of suffering. Rev. Sutanto reported, “Emaus had finished 2183 pieces, and they are now starting the second phase which targeting 1500 pieces. Pondok Tjandra Indah had produced 815 pieces. Mojosari had 442. Citraland had 400 and still targeting 800 pieces. Mojokerto has just begun to involve.” “The participation and collaboration of these congregations were extraordinary!” said Rev. Lidya Pristy of Diponegoro Church.¹⁴

PATHOS, YOUTH, AND OIKOPATHOS

The pathos of God and the suffering world

The case presented above shows a glimpse of how the church responds with an act of compassion toward others amid crisis. The reality of this suffering world is inevitable. The church arguably must take part in this fundamental question of human life. How we answer and how we should act, however, depend on our conception of God. By participating in this face shield initiative, the church – especially the youth – showed their solidarity by taking the risk of getting infected. Through reflecting the solidarity which was moved by love and compassion, we propose an imagination of *oikopathos*.

From the enlightenment until the modern era, which has glorified the human being, Christianity in the West has tended to depict God as a supreme and impersonal being, separated from humanity and the world.¹⁵ As a result, the conversation about God has focused mainly on ending the tension between the idea of the existence of a good

12 Emaus Indonesia Christian Church, “Tutorial Membuat Face Shield untuk Tenaga Medis,” YouTube video, posted 7 April 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDTpbt2Neik>.

13 Berita Sukita Terkini, “Terhubung dan Bertolong-tolongan,” East Java Regional Synod of Indonesia Christian Church, 22 May 2020, <https://gkiswjatim.org/artikel/det/terhubung-dan-bertolong-tolongan/99>.

14 Berita Sukita Terkini, “Catatan 30 Hari GT,” East Java Regional Synod of Indonesia Christian Church, 30 April 2020, <https://gkiswjatim.org/artikel/det/catatan-30-hari-gt-/94>.

15 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 292.

God and the reality of this suffering world. Thus, the discourse about God has mainly revolved around treating God as an abstract idea.¹⁶

The Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel attacks this view as being influenced by Greek philosophy, as opposed to the view of God described in the Bible. He rejects the notion that sees God as an abstract idea: a detached, timeless being that is isolated from the world.¹⁷ This perspective is related to the doctrine of divine *apatheia* from the Stoic philosophy, which regards emotion, passion, impulse, or desire as “unreasonable, unnatural, and the source of evil.”¹⁸ People were considered wise when they overcame and freed themselves of emotions that drove them. Also, God, as the supreme cause, must be incapable of feeling suffering or emotions. Therefore, whatever happens to this world should not affect God at all.

As a contrast, drawing from the Hebrew prophetic movement, Heschel asserts that instead of an abstract idea, the biblical prophets see God as the one who is present in history and moved by it at the same time. God is depicted as deeply concerned and involved in the world through *pathos*. *Pathos* – which literally means “to suffer” – is often used in ancient writings to denote someone being filled and affected by emotion. Thus, divine *pathos* means that God is “the one who moved and affected by what happens in the world and reacts accordingly. Events and human actions arouse in Him joy or sorrow, pleasure or wrath.”¹⁹

This divine *pathos* is the ground of God’s attributes and action, especially in the Old Testament. God always acts in relation to the world. In the beginning, God creates the world as an overflow of God’s goodness, creativity, and joy. While human beings keep on sinning, God shows not only regret, wrath, and judgment, but also steadfast love and righteousness. When God calls Israel to be his people through Abraham’s descendants, God “struggles” with them through Egypt, the desert, and in the promised land. God’s emotions throughout this journey with Israel are not just an oversimplified anthropomorphism, that is, a description of God through human characteristics. God is not affected by some irrational and uncontrollable emotions like human beings. Instead, God’s emotions are presented as someone deeply concerned and connected with the world. Therefore, God is not the “unmoved mover,” but the “most moved mover.”²⁰

16 Marie Clara Bingemer, “Seeking the Pathos of God in a Secular Age: Theological Reflections on Mystical Experience in the Twentieth Century,” *Modern Theology* 29, no. 3 (July 2013): 249.

17 Michael Arthur Chester, “Divine Pathos and Human Being: Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Understanding of What It Means to Be Human in the Light of His View of the Divine Pathos” (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2000), 165.

18 Heschel, *The Prophets*, 325.

19 Heschel, 288.

20 Matthew R. Schlimm, “Different Perspectives on Divine Pathos: An Examination of Hermeneutics in Biblical Theology,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (October 2007), 265. After Heschel, some Old Testament scholars such as Terence E. Fretheim and Walter Brueggemann drew on his thinking.

This contrast between the Greek and the Hebrew conception of God is also affirmed by the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, who refers to “apathetic” and “pathetic” theology. Like Heschel, Moltmann sees that both Jewish and Christian theology often tend to be distorted by apathetic theology. He maintains that while the *apatheia* description of God seems to address the problem of human freedom and dignity, it is just a transition to the fuller meaning of the pathos of God. The Jewish and Christian theologies go beyond it by showing the God who is moved by human predicaments. Moltmann said, “If God has opened his heart in the covenant with his people, he is injured by disobedience and suffers in the people.”²¹

Moltmann goes further with a Christian understanding that this divine pathos is embodied in the crucified God. This theology of pathos is both trinitarian and Christological. In the misery of human life, God enters the world and becomes one of us through Jesus Christ. Here is the God who is not only feeling what we feel when he assumes the form of a slave, but also takes all the suffering and frailty of the world into himself. Through the passion of Christ on the cross, God fulfils the covenant and shows deepest longing and concern for the world. It is also then through the resurrection that we participate in the fullness of life in the Trinity.²² Christ took the suffering world to a communion inside the new reality of God’s overwhelming pathos of joy, love, and peace so that he will be “all in all” (1Cor. 15:28).

This new reality based on divine pathos is not intended to deny this suffering world’s reality and anaesthetize us with some abstract utopia. Pathos allows God to be not just an idea, but to be present with us in the midst of suffering. If God, through pathos, is always in relationship with the creation, this gives us a new reflection on human existence.

Both Heschel and Moltmann stressed that the theology of divine pathos is never separated from anthropology. As the image of God, whatever humankind does in the world, it will always be intertwined with the life of God. Heschel refers to this as a “theomorphic anthropology,” which affirms that God shares the feeling, passion, and emotions of human beings. This anthropology is what the prophets embodied in the Old Testament. They are not just messengers who talked about God. Rather, they spoke as witnesses who had experienced God’s presence and intervention in the world. The divine pathos empowered them not only to speak on God’s behalf but also to sense and show God’s revelation in history through their lives as the image of God.²³ In similar but different terms, Moltmann adds that in the pathos of God, humankind becomes a “*homo sympathetica*.” Human beings become the reflection of the divine pathos through their concerns for others in the world.²⁴ What concerns God will concern human beings as well. “In the *pathos* of God, man is filled with the spirit of God. He becomes the friend of

21 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 267.

22 Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 275–76.

23 Heschel, *The Prophets*, 286, 334.

24 Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955), 239.

God, feels sympathy with God and for God.... He is angry with God's wrath. He suffers from God's suffering. He loves with God's love. He hopes with God's hope."²⁵

The oikopathos of youth: something to die for

While the presence of youth in the church began to be recognized during the twentieth century, there is still a tendency to put them in their corner until they are ready for "real adulthood" and considered suitable by older members.²⁶ This kind of ageism undervalues the role of youth participation in the church as a whole. The pathos of God, reflected through the life of humanity, serves as an invaluable resource for the church's understanding and action, especially pathos in the life of young people. Kenda Creasy Dean asserts that young people are "wired for passion."²⁷ They are in the stage of life where the search for passion is at its peak; they are searching for something worthy to die for. While this is often considered misleading and dangerous, their passion for something they love causes them to go beyond the limit and do the extra miles. Drawing from Heschel and Moltmann, Dean calls this pathos passion and describes it as "loving something enough to suffer for it."²⁸

Therefore, if God's pathos is intertwined with the world and human life, it is through the life of young people that we must seek God's concern within the world. Their passions show us what it means to be human. They are not satisfied with just the "weekend faith": they want something they are willing to die for. Thus, when young people are in solidarity with the cries and suffering of the world, they are showing the face of the passionate church and even the face of the passionate Christ himself.

Heschel and Moltmann tend to treat the pathos individually and universally. They didn't go further to address this God-given pathos as a particular collective notion of pathos within diverse communities. Within the spirit of the ecumenical movement, we see the church living together in unity in the same "household" (*oikos*). The church, then, is striving towards *oikopathos* (the household of pathos). This means that the church exists not to achieve uniformity, but to realize unity in diversity. The young people tell us that their unique spark of God-given pathos is living proof of the unity the church has been longing to achieve. Through their particular identity and vocation, they contribute to the pilgrimage of justice and peace in the suffering world. The pathos of God embodied in young people's diverse lives is a showcase for the church to love the world and suffer for it. Therefore, *oikopathos* is an imagination to live in equality, unity, and solidarity. The role of youth in the body of Christ in achieving this kind of unity within the ecumenical movement is indispensable.

25 Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 272.

26 Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1998), 30–31.

27 Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 6.

28 Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 2, 20.

In the beginning, the Emaus Lawan COVID-19 project started small, dominated by young people. Instead of ensuring their safety by staying entirely at home, they showed their willingness to suffer by risking their lives as well. The willingness to suffer with the world in crisis moved other churches to join in their passion for one purpose: to preserve lives, showing compassion and love for others. This call to achieve the common good is a God-given pathos. This unifying, but at the same time particular pathos is a glimpse of hope for the world, the hope that we may participate in the life of Christ, the crucified God who suffers with us.

SOME GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Considering this idea of *oikopathos*, we suggest at least two guiding principles for youth engagement in the ecumenical movement. First, instead of focusing on a ministry to “help and save” youth, we should consider that youth are an invaluable resource for developing church ministry. It is important to let the body of Christ be criticized and built by youth’s concern, desire, and movement, because the *oikopathos* of young people represents the glimpse of God’s cries for this world. Therefore, we have to allow their voices to be heard as a means of listening to God’s desire for the people.

Second, with this theological imagination, the unity of the church could be more effectively achieved by putting Christians—particularly young people—on a pilgrimage of justice and peace, especially in times of suffering. This would train them to enjoy the communion of God’s household. In short, any ecumenical movement should emphasize the common good as a foundation of its activity. It is important to remember what Dean and Foster said, “Youth ministry in the future will require a public theology, an understanding of the gospel that takes us into the world and not out of it, as well as models that both protect and empower young people for the sake of Jesus Christ.”²⁹

29 Creasey Dean and Foster, *Godbearing Life*, 213.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

TOGETHER TOWARD JUST COMMUNITY OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT

HANBEET RHEE

INTRODUCTION

Building just communities of women and men became a priority of the World Council of Churches as it set out on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.... The 10th Assembly recognized that divisive issues, such as gender, have a place in the WCC since it functions “as a safe space to enter into dialogue and moral discernment on matters which the churches find challenging.” This is ... promoting the building of a culture of justice and peace with no violence or discrimination against women in church and society.

–WCC, “Just Community of Women and Men”

In 1948, the WCC began promoting women’s rights in the churches and the world. At that time, most of the targets, purposes, and methodologies were related only to women. However, as times have changed, various perspectives and analyses have changed, leading to the perception that not only women, but men as well need to change for women’s empowerment and gender equality. Accordingly, the WCC altered the theme of “women’s rights” to “just community of women and men,” modifying its direction to pursue change and strive together for just community.

Quoting from Derrida and Namsoon Kang, however, “there is no Justice in general,”¹ – which means that when we consider context-specificity, holistic discourse is not only insufficient, but it hides various faces. In that context, the view that there is no gender

1 Namsoon Kang, “Reconstituting Religion without Religion: Gender Justice in Kyriarchal Religions,” (seminar, Ewha Womans University, Seoul, Republic of Korea), 14 July 2017.

justice of women and men in general is reasonable. It suggests that we need to focus on diverse experiences in different contexts, not just wrap it all up in one bundle. We need to find the diverse places in which each marginalized people is experiencing injustice. In my particular experience in the ecumenical movement for the last seven years within the stream of gender justice of women and men in the WCC, I often felt the lack of the voices of Asian women, especially young women. I have sometimes even felt that Asian women's context is not reflected in the movement at all. Therefore, in expecting diverse voices to be heard and gender justice to come, I decided to write this chapter to testify to the unjust realities of young Asian women in different churches and societies, and the expectations towards just community of women and men in Asia. There is no sexism in general, even in Asia.

I will first clarify that this is not an attempt to represent the stories of Asian women, nor categorize them as "Asian Women." Here, our eyes aim to reach various *Sitz im Leben* (settings in life) by zooming into the experience of individuals. Through deep and sufficient mourning and solidarity, facing multiple lives, we can dream of changes that look unchangeable, impossible possibilities, and the advent of relative utopia.

This chapter is written to show how gender discrimination can be overcome, and how a just community of women and men can be realized in Asian churches. For this purpose, I will offer background on the suppression of Asian women, and on the lives of Asian women, including young voices. Finally, I will discuss practical approaches to achieve a just community of women and men.

DOUBLE SUPPRESSION STRUCTURE FOR WOMEN IN ASIA

What can be learned from the historical facts of religion is that religion plays a role of liberation while at the same time playing an oppressive role. It is a paradox of religion. The same goes for Christianity. In the beginning, Christianity was essentially a religion for the weak, which had to be liberal. Since it became an organized religion, the reason for its existence has been lost. Christianity began to classify and categorize people, thereby discriminating against them. It acted more oppressively to women when it defined them as a secondary sex, composed of inferior beings. Elizabeth Johnson's analysis of the early church's cultural adaptation to the Greek-Roman world showed that the patriarchal and absolute dominant structure was embodied in the model, erasing femininity and forcing women into secondary existence.² Rosemary Radford Ruether has contended that patriarchal anthropology was formed in the formation of theology of those such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Barth. Oppression and objectification continued to strengthen as women were reduced to subordinate beings, who were structurally subjugated by men, and inferior beings, who had to be ruled by rational

2 Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Redeeming the Name of Christ," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine M. Lucugna (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1993), 115–137.

men.³ This trend of theology has also had a strong influence on modern times, allowing dualistic patriarchal ideologies to establish themselves as the church's main ideologies, depriving women of their freedom and rights under the name of "tradition."

The calling of *ecclesia* (ἐκκλησία) and Christianity, as written in the Bible, is simple but clear. It is to be the light and salt of the world, to love one's neighbours. The Bible invites us into the tradition of prophecy and the footsteps of Jesus' life. Historically, however, the Bible was used as a weapon against marginalized people, as a symbol of a different kind of patriarchy and a justification for it: even though the symbol is not the truth, such as *father* is a symbol, not the truth of God. Nonetheless, the church's tradition did not treat the symbol as such, and took it as truth until now. Therefore, the Church is currently hesitant to transform, not accepting light from the society. Thus, even at the global level of the churches, we are still stuck for a long time in front of the problem of gender inequality between women and men, not even able to reach other gender issues and ask the fundamental questions of what genders are.⁴

Another oppression of women in the Asian church results from religious factors deeply embedded in the culture. Lee Sun Ai said that "the concrete manifestation of misogyny and scapegoating of women in Asian societies have deep cultural roots."⁵ Discrimination against women in Korea and other northeast Asian countries stems from a culture which is governed by Confucianism's social and political norms.⁶ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has defined patriarchy as a complex system of structural dependencies and individual oppression in which racism, classism, and sexism interact.⁷ Still, in most countries in Asia, there is another axis called Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam, that operates as a socio-cultural background. It works as a suppression mechanism of women in Asia, and is latent within the consciousness of people and the social-political system, without noticing that it is religious. Accordingly, many women in Asia are discriminated against invisibly, as well as experiencing discrimination in public in an obvious way. According to Sun Ai Lee-Park and Sang Jung Park's analysis, in Confucianism, ideal harmonious relationships in the family and society were to be established by the exemplary virtue of the one in authority, namely the father. It meant the father ruled without any complementarity of the mother. It also meant that the hierarchy of superior

3 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 94–99.

4 WCC Executive Committee, "Statement on Sex and Gender-Based Violence, and the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize," 7 November 2018, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-and-the-2018-nobel-peace-prize>. One of the WCC's movements, "Just community of women and men (JCWM)," uses the term *gender* frequently in its work. The most recent statement by the Executive Committee, referenced here, also uses *gender* as an expression that only distinguishes between men and women.

5 Sun Ai Park, "Asian Women's Experience of Injustice and Reflection," *Asia Journal of Theology* 3, no. 1 (1989), 118–131.

6 Sun Ai Lee-Park and Sang Jung Park, "Woman and Man in Community: An Asian Reflection," *Ecu-menical Review* 46, no. 2 (April 1994), 147.

7 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroads, 1993), 211–231.

and inferior maintained the orderliness and harmony of the relationship. In this worldview, Confucian tradition sought a harmony that could not be maintained without victimizing and domesticating women, yin (陰, the feminine), characterized as yielding, receptive, and devoted. This Confucian tradition of community-building continues to have implications for many Asian societies and the building of a community of women and men among Christians in Asia.⁸ It is the intersectional background of *setting in life* of Asian women experiencing gender inequality.

FACES OF ASIAN WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Signs of our times

Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982 is a book that has received a lot of attention from all over the world, especially in Asia.⁹ It is a novel about the life of an ordinary South Korean woman, Kim Jiyoung. She represents the lives of contemporary women who have been living in a patriarchal culture. It has been published in 17 countries and made into a movie. It was recently chosen as one of the “100 Must-Read Books of 2020” by Time magazine. Its sensational popularity is attributed primarily to the sympathy of many women for the life of discriminated women not only in Asian countries but also in European and North American countries. Especially in Asia, the book’s content has made women look at their lives again from the third-person perspective; it has become a catalyst to resist gender discrimination.

In recent years, the feminist movement (the movement against gender inequality) has begun or resumed among young people in Asia. The wave of the #MeToo movement has affected Asian countries. The movement begins with revelations about sexual harassment, especially Sex crime by abuse of authority. Sexual harassment has not been adequately discussed and resolved, and is broadly concerned with structural, conventional, and cultural discrimination, including sexism by commission and omission. The movement toward an equal society, a nondiscriminatory society, began to touch not only the deeply embedded patriarchal system in our community but also various discriminatory minds, whereby intersectional layers of the discrimination of the “kyriarchy”¹⁰ have been revealed.

The feminist movement also knocked on the doors of religious circles, which are the most conservative. The movement has approached in diverse ways and on different levels. On the one hand, in South Korea, the disclosure of sexual harassment, including

8 Lee-Park and Park, “Woman and Man in Community,” 148.

9 Cho Nam-Joo, *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982*, trans. Jamie Chang (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020).

10 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 122–25. Schüssler Fiorenza coined the term *kyriarchy* to encompass a matrix not only of gender but also of various other power structures, such as race, class, culture, and religion. *Kyriarchy* means multiple oppressive structures in society including patriarchy.

grooming, by church leaders, and the regulations on the punishment of sexual crime in the church were highlighted as significant issues. On the other hand, restrictions on women's roles in the local congregation, a lower percentage of women's participation in the decision-making bodies such as at assembly, and women's ordination, were also raised as important issues. Later these discussions expanded to include various gender discrimination and marginalization concerns, such as LGBT issues. These discussions have continued not only in South Korea but in many Asian countries. However, within the process, a difference between the fundamental church and society regarding gender sensitivity and the inflexible posture of the church caused disappointment and frustrated young people. In most situations where kyriarchal customs and transformation clash, young people's reforms have not been accepted. As a result, some young people were driven out of the church by accusations of heresy, and other young people, searching for a safe community, were exiled from the church. The phenomenon of young people leaving the church seems to be accelerating further as the spread of COVID-19 has weakened the relationship with the physical church.

This social phenomenon is one of the signs of our times, as we are confronted with the fact that women in Asia, especially young women, no longer tolerate gender inequality, and resist it even in the church, in spite of custom and tradition. In short, we are already facing the crisis of young women leaving the church in Asia.¹¹

Unjust realities for Asian Christian women

While the degree and form of inequality vary, depending on factors such as geographical location, socioeconomic status, family relations, and nationality, similar experiences of discrimination, as mentioned earlier, are found throughout Asia. As a result, the movement to overcome these inequalities has similarly developed in other Asian countries. The same is true of churches in Asia. I divide the inequality experienced by Asian women in the church into three dimensions: inequality experienced by 1) laywomen; 2) female seminary students and theologians; and 3) female pastors. Women in these three categories experience inequality in different ways. However, the nature of the discrimination is the same. It is characterized by women being relegated to auxiliary role, being excluded from decision-making processes, and being denied leadership positions.

Unfortunately, recent research and statistics on this inequality in Asian churches is not easy to find. But the unjust realities of the Asian churches can be seen through various gatherings of Asian Christian women. One example is the Asian Women's Assembly and the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly, held by the Christian Conference of

11 Ecumenical Youth Council in Korea and National Council of Churches in Korea Youth Commission, *Korean Church, Young People Are Leaving* (Seoul: Dong-Yeon Press, 2017). (This book is written in Korean and the original name is '한국교회, 청년이 떠나고 있다'.) According to the study described in the book, gender discrimination is the main reason why young people in the Korean church are leaving the church. There is no quantitative study of young Asian church members, but there are several case studies relating to that.

Asia. In the dialogues, presentations, and summary documents of these assemblies, the church's realities have been presented, including stories of inequality and discriminatory treatment and descriptions of the Asian church women's movement. Rachel Cosca, for example, described the Korean church as having a "lack of women in leadership" when she participated in the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute program at the WCC 10th assembly in 2010. She quoted Professor Nam soon Kang as saying, "Women are in principle welcome as leaders, but in praxis largely excluded from teaching and preaching, primarily serving roles that are an extension of those in their households."¹²

Voices of young Asian women

I conducted a case study through an interview method to reveal the discrimination experienced by Asian women, which has not been officially documented. The experiences are not grouped, but are introduced as individual stories to present similar but different Asian women's discrimination experiences. Interviewees were Asian Christian women from 20 to 40 years old who belong to the WCC member churches. I interviewed women from India, Pakistan, Japan, Indonesia, and Taiwan. For their protection, all interviews were conducted anonymously.

Since I do not want to name these women alphabetically, I am borrowing the names of the daughters of Zelophehad, found in Numbers 27:1, according to the order in which I conducted the interviews.

Mahlah. She is a layperson in India. Her denomination does not ordain women, which is one of the main ways the church discriminates against women. The church is slowly changing from the patriarchal culture at the local level. For example, recently, for the first time, women have been included in their local church's decision-making process. But the superstructure of the church is hardly changing; it is centered on the priests, and discrimination against women is still rampant. Despite the changes in her local church, women's leadership is limited to the scope of "women," and women are not welcome in theological education because women's theological education is considered unnecessary. The church also does not feel the need to deal publicly with issues related to women. They hope to deal with these issues only within the women's group and expect that the women's group can resolve them on their own. The women in her denomination have recently begun to express their expectations for just relations. They had not had many chances to speak before, but now they have more opportunities.

Nevertheless, the process of struggle is essential until equality is achieved. Women's entry into leadership is relatively better accepted by young men, who are willing to have proper conversations and discussions. Mahlah has difficulty dealing with stories about gender stereotypes and sexism in the Bible. She says she cannot ignore the Bible because it is the worship document, but she feels uncomfortable whenever she sees the limited

12 Nam soon Kang, quoted in Rachel Cosca, "Just Unity: Toward a True Community of Women and Men in the Church," *The Ecumenical Review* 66, no. 1 (March 2014), 47.

and passive roles of women depicted there. She is proud to be a member of her denomination, but also thinks that how the church will adapt to the dynamic situations is a task to be considered. She urges the church to realize how males are advantaged under these circumstances and to put women on an equal footing.

Noah. She is an ordained pastor in Pakistan. She experienced inequality from the moment she decided to become a pastor, because people around her kept saying that women could not be pastors. Even after graduating from the seminary, the church postponed her ordination (unlike the men's ordinations) on the pretext that no pastoral positions were open. After many twists and turns, she finally became a pastor, but was not appointed to parish minister's work. Even now, she is still unable to hold funerals or weddings. Since the discrimination against women is deeply engrained in her community, society, and church, there is no responsibility for women and no appreciation for them. She says her society has a prejudice that women will ruin their public responsibilities, so the church hesitates to entrust the local church to women pastors. The massive societal stereotype is that women's role is to do housework and take care of children, and the church thinks the same. So in the local congregations, women are only allowed to play only a part in purchasing goods, even though some women think this is wrong in their denomination. Still, there is not much that church women can do because this problem of inequality is not just a problem that occurs in the church, but is also a problem in the overall culture. She said that discrimination in Pakistan was not started from the church but from home; however, it affected the church, which became a male-dominated church. She saw the current situation as "competition is going on who will lead the gender inequality." Accordingly, many women who were denied their existence in the church and deprived of proper positions left the church in Pakistan. She also explained that female pastors are put on the back burner because it is believed that they do not make good judgments about general issues and even on domestic violence. She sees that culture is set by the mind, so she thinks that when the mind is changed, culture can be changed. She emphasizes the importance of education of mindset for children to bring about that change, and she is working hard on it.

Hoglah. She is a theologian from Japan. She said she experienced gender inequality while working as a professor in a university. She was a theologian but not a pastor, so male pastors looked down on her and did not call her by her proper title on purpose. The content she could teach while working at the university was very limited and conservative, so she couldn't even teach about gender equality. There is gender discrimination in the ordination process in her denomination. The church either does not ordain women immediately after graduating from the seminary, or does not provide female pastors positions at local churches even after ordination. She also spoke of women leaving the church because of gender inequality. The church is not a comfortable place for single women in Japan because of gender insensitivity. For example, the church people ask young women private questions based on heterosexual assumptions. This interferes with concentration on the spiritual life, one reason for going to church. So women find it hard to settle down in churches and decide to leave the church. According to a study,

the gender gap in Japan is enormous – almost the worst among many countries.¹³ She said that Korean society, viewed through the lens of *Kim Jiyoung, Born in 1982*, has many similarities with Japan. She stated that Japanese society itself is very conservative, and the church is as well. One example that shows the conservative mindset is that 95 percent of wives in Japanese culture still take their husbands' surnames after their marriage. This example shows how indifferent her society is to gender-based violence. Although her denomination has a clause on sex crimes, details on punishing perpetrators were not explained anywhere. She says, "The authority of the churches has silenced Asian Christian women. Now we are not silenced because we can speak through social media, research papers, etc., but we are ignored."

Milcah. She is an assistant pastor from Indonesia. She explains that she is a seminary graduate who wants to become a pastor, but faces barriers. One of the obstacles is gender discrimination in the denomination, which makes her hesitate. In her denomination, leaders must be men, so women do not have the opportunity to be leaders. Furthermore, there is a requirement that is mainly imposed on women in ordination: the virginity test. She said the test was not even officially explained to the candidates, and it was only conveyed in the testimony of female pastors who had already experienced it. Her denomination has still never apologized or reflected on this discriminatory practice. Because of this test, several women candidates had given up being pastors and left churches.

Regarding gender-based violence, she gave one example: a male pastor committed domestic violence against his wife and child and even committed a sexual crime against one of the church members. But after his crimes were discovered, he was not fired. He just stepped down from the parish and moved to the synod office because he was smart and contributed a lot to the denomination. In her perspective, even though there was no regulation on gender-based violence and sexual crime in the church, he should have been punished according to government regulations. However, the proper punishment was not carried out. Some local churches in her denomination punish perpetrators of sexual crimes, but because there is no clause in the church's constitution, it does not apply evenly to all cases. Her denomination continues to create boundaries such as ageism and sexism and guard them. The synod of the church does not allow essential and strategic positions for young people and women. Female pastors have clear limitations in their roles. She also pointed out that only six percent of professors in the seminary are women, which is another evidence of gender discrimination in her denomination. Young women face more difficulty in playing a leading role in the church because of patriarchal and cultural factors and the church's attitudes. Now, the young women are leaving the church.

Tirzah. She is a laywoman from an Indigenous group in Taiwan. She said that she is experiencing gender inequality because of prescribed gender roles in the church. This is the result of the patriarchal culture of the tribe, which has the notion that women should

13 "Gender Wage Gap," Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD), accessed 2 March 2021, <https://www.oecd.org/gender/data/gender-wage-gap.htm>.

take charge of chores at home and church. The younger the women are, the more they take charge of these chores, mainly by preparing coffee or refreshments for the elder's meeting, and by cleaning the church. In terms of gender equality, she said there is a difference between the Indigenous community and the non-Indigenous community. If not located in a city, the Indigenous community is generally more conservative than the society in Taiwan. In the Indigenous community, even if a woman is a pastor, she should do housework and take care of her husband and children. Church members respect male pastors more than female pastors, even though the workload of female pastors is three times higher than that of male pastors due to various secondary tasks. Although the circumstances are a little better than in other churches in Asia, she feels like important decisions are still made only by men. Men make the significant decisions at different levels in their local church. It is difficult to overcome these gender inequality problems in her local church. She noted that the parental generation and other older Indigenous people do not consider this reality a problem because of its natural and traditional cultural context. Another difficulty in raising these inequality issues is the Indigenous community is almost identical to the church community. Ninety-five to 98 percent of her tribal communities come from Christian backgrounds. As a result, leaving the church or presenting a church problem is practically impossible because it is considered as harming the tribal community. That is why she is trying to teach slowly but steadily, so that there is no objection within the Indigenous community, especially from the older generation. For her, this inequality is both a gender issue and a generational problem. She says her mission is to inform the community and the people around her about gender issues and to lead small changes continuously.

One women's group I belong to once collected cases about Korean women's experience of gender discrimination and produced videos of them.¹⁴ If you watch the video, you will see the discriminatory experiences of the daughters of Zelophehad described above is also the story of Korean women living in this era. Countless women are still continually striving for equal status in the church, for an independent role, and for women's ordination: for making the church community a just *kin-dom*¹⁵ of God.

JUST COMMUNITY OF WOMEN AND MEN IN ASIAN CONTEXT

Then what is a just community that we must pursue in the context of Asia? And what changes do we need for this just community?

14 "Discriminatory stories of Korean Women in the Church," WUMTDA, 31 December 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1ufR_TPWgs.

15 *Kin-dom* is an alternative feminist term meaning full diversity and relationship of the children of God, as opposed to *kingdom*.

Fundamental conditions for a just community

There is no agreed-upon definition for the just community. However, if we look closely at the biblical tradition, we can easily summarize three primary conditions. First, it is a community that does not discriminate according to individual characteristics; second, it is a community where the diversity of all is respected; and third, it is a community without violence. The previous two meanings seem similar but differ slightly, with the first being in the context of protecting fundamental human rights on a passive level, and the second providing for dignity for all in a more active sense. The Bible contains stories that correspond to these two cases.

First, there is the story of the daughters of Zelophehad – Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah – that appears in Numbers 27. At the beginning of the text, they faced the situation that they could not receive their father's inheritance because he had died with no son. However, the daughters came up and challenged the law in front of everyone and, and finally, according to the word of the Lord, they were granted the inheritance of their father. The Bible also reiterates that the fundamental human rights, such as resting on the sabbath and being tried impartially, should be given equally to Israelites and “resident aliens” (Exodus 23:9, 12; Deuteronomy 24:17). Additionally, in the New Testament, Jesus reveals that human beings should not be discriminated against because of their unique characteristics. He does this primarily through his conversation with the Samaritan woman, which breaks down the concrete walls of discrimination against “women,” “other races,” and “other religions” (John 4:6–27). These biblical passages are simple but powerful examples, showing that in the just community, people are not structurally and practically discriminated against because of their individual backgrounds. Likewise, the just community's first condition is that it does not discriminate in any way against the individual's characteristics, namely age, religion, sex, race, and ethnic background.

Secondly, the community that respects diversity is represented by the dining community formed around the table where Jesus sits. Jesus' dining community not only means not discriminating against people because of their characteristics but also, by extension, practising active hospitality. Park Kyung Mi said that the dining community was an important pillar in the Jesus movement while the Jewish community's custom continued to separate people. Jesus denied and broke the wall of separation, sharing meals with people thought of as sinners and prostitutes.¹⁶ The act of eating together like this means not only “accepting” beyond discrimination but actively seeking mutual relations and creating a kin-dom of God in that relationship. Respect means the active act. The just community respects the diversity of beings created by God's countless different images. Its community rejoices and welcomes the diversities.

16 Park Kyung Mi. *New Testament Conveys Hope of New Life* (Paju: Sakyejul, 2014), 190–205. (This book is written in Korean and the original name is '신약 성서, 새로운 삶의 희망을 전하다'.)

The third criterion that should be considered in the fundamental definition of a just community concerns the realities we face. It must be a society without violence. The society in which we live discriminates due to individual characteristics and, further, subjects people to sexual, physical, and mental violence. COVID-19 has revealed discriminatory and violent sides of our society. Gender-based violence, which is a more apparent and frequent manifestation, although *intersectionality*¹⁷ should also be considered, is mainly targeted at women, children, and LGBTIQ people, and occurs through sexual harassment, domestic violence, and sexual exploitation. The spread of COVID-19 has led to quarantine safety and security measures, but because of these, many women and children have become isolated and exposed to more frequent violence. Violence divides the community. Where there is violence, there is neither justice nor peace. Sometimes I see cases in the church community in which surface peace made by someone's sacrifice and silence is regarded as if it were true peace. But Christian peace is the peace of shalom. Shalom means peace built on the justice and reconciliation of all. If any one of them is sacrificed, there is no shalom. The community of shalom built on justice is the kin-dom of Isaiah 11:1-9. The kin-dom of God, which we build on this land, is a community with no distinction between the strong and the weak, in which each forms a harmonious relationship with the other, and becomes a friend and a safe place. The just community we seek is a prerequisite for these shalom communities. In other words, when a just community is established, the kin-dom of God begins to be built on this earth.

Together towards just community

Change of attitude. Several female theologians have taken a similar approach about what churches and individuals in churches should have to create a just community: a change of attitude. Kang Nam-soon saw that the church that consists of human freedom and integrity; the community of justice, peace and love, and a true *Missio Dei* was possible through changes and efforts by both clergy and laypeople, women and men.¹⁸ Fiorenza said the church is called to break up the patriarchal system deeply embedded in it and achieve a community of equal disciples.¹⁹ Elizabeth Johnson said that Christians should cooperate and struggle to achieve a world where discrimination, exclusion, and violence against women and girls ends. Women of all races and classes become equal partners with men instead of being marginalized or serving as dependent assistants.²⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether said that The genuine transition from sexism is only possible by truly joining in the struggle for women's liberation.²¹ At this point, I would like to suggest the importance of "mutual accountability," which is "an attitude and form for

17 *Intersectionality* means that discriminatory factors, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, nationality, combine to affect each other.

18 Namsoon Kang, *Feminism and Christianity* (Paju: Dongnyok Press, 2018), 111-144, (This book is written in Korean and the original name is '페미니즘과 기독교'.)

19 Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals*, 332-353.

20 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 109-110.

21 Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 193-213.

our life together, trusting the power of the gospel to address the needs we all have of liberation from the powers of sin and for the transformation into the life and the values of the kingdom of God.²² A true community of women and men is God's gift and promise for humanity, which is created "in God's image."²³

We must be cooperative with each other to move toward a just community. When taking on the role of a true "helper," according to the original calling of existence, all genders will be freed from stereotypes, and individuals will be able to restore and enjoy integrity before God. There is a common understanding that people should have, which is that our charge is not to harm each other but to move together into our original beings as created equally and diversely. In other words, we must think that we are trying to recover from the ruinous authoritarian, patriarchal, and violent cultures that humans have created in history, and reclaim the original relationship, which is one of cooperation.

We must break down boundaries by discovering hybridity within us, and at the same time, lean toward the marginalized "subaltern."²⁴ Jesus was a person who participated in the setting of others' lives, especially the subaltern's life, rather than staying in his own setting in life. We should go into the margins and experience the entanglement of life in it, joining in a true pilgrimage of justice and peace, as Jesus did.

Changes in theology. Christianity has very precious legacies, especially in Asia. We must enjoy and share the legacies, and move toward change.

First, we must discover lost or hidden history within the Christian tradition and speak more about it. The Bible tells the stories of many women and other marginalized people that we have not noticed. We must move away from the main narratives emphasized by church doctrine and dig out and listen to the stories of those who are not even named but are still in the Bible. Depending on the part of the Bible we read, and from what point of view we interpret, we can broadly understand the various messages of the Bible and even apply them to the setting of our own lives.

Secondly, we should accept the various biblical interpretations that affirm everyone's unique characteristics, and be grateful for God's ability to make creative human beings. Diverse theologies widen the church's boundaries and help it move onto a healthier community, when the theology that is appropriate to overcome that society's problems is applied. Asian women's theology is one of the legacies that we can apply to the

22 Olav Fykse Tveit, "Walking Together, Serving Justice and Peace," *Ecumenical Review* 70, no. 1 (March 2018), 10.

23 "Report of the Report Committee" (7th Assembly of the WCC, Canberra, 1991), *Ecumenical Review* 43:2 (April 1991), 271, quoted in Tveit, "Walking Together," 10.

24 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 21–78. Subaltern is a concept referring to sub-subjects. Gayatri Spivak talks about the various circumstances that prevent subalterns from speaking out and raises the essential question of voiceless people.

unjust Asian context.²⁵ Asian women's theology, which was formed within the reality of inequality, can suggest ways to form a just community for the churches and individuals in the Asian church and society. And it can contribute to the conversion of the thoughts and perspectives of the people in the church. So far, the church has failed to open its doors to various interpretations. It has become conservative because it has attempted to protect its existence. However, we must remember that in this difficult era, we can only preserve the church's existence if it is turned into an equal community by opening to diversity, listening to others, and turning away from androcentrism.

The change in theology naturally leads to a change in worship. In practice, the changes will allow more women to play a leading role in worship; at the same time, there will be changes in the content and messages in the worship service. The church must liberate the repressed terminology of worship, which is no longer sufficient. And the worship service should be filled with more imaginative, diverse, symbolic language, and expressions that people of this age can accept and understand out of their own experiences, as I pray to *G*d*²⁶ and for her kin-dom.

Change of system. The political system in the church must be changed. To become a church and a just community for all, it is necessary to improve the structure into a system that works for all. The church should provide more spaces for those who have not been able to use their own voices to make their own sounds. Women should be part of the church's decision-making body as equal members, and then the decisions and actions of the church will have greater power and meaning. In the synod and the local congregation, the structure should be reorganized to break the silence of those who have so far been isolated within the church's structure.

We must stop the customs that have discriminated against human characteristics. The church should break away from the restrictions on women's ordination and the roles of women in the church – which were imposed simply because they were women – and work together toward a collective calling.

We should also create a safe space within the church to share the experience of oppression, discrimination, and violence. There is an urgent need for a safe space, especially for gender-based violence victims, who are suffering in many places. It requires professional education and the formation of a safe space, which can be a sisterhood community in the Asian context. The safe space should be established at the synod and local church level.

Finally, clauses on sex crimes should be added to the church constitution, and education on the prevention of sexual violence should also be provided. A just community is

25 For those who want to know more about Asian women's theology, I recommend reading *in God's image*, a journal that has been published by the Asian Women's Resource Center for Culture and Society from 1982 to the present. A listing of volumes appears on the AWRC website: <https://awrc4ct.org/publications/in-gods-image/>.

26 *G*d* is an expression that invites people to imagine God in various shapes and images.

created not only through protecting victims but also through prevention of crime. This education should be provided to all people in the church, including ordained pastors and priests. When all of its members, through theological and other education, do our best to make it a community that respects, does no harm, and cares for each other, the church will form a just community, the community of shalom.

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CHAPTER NINE

“THEY’LL KNOW WE ARE CHRISTIANS BY OUR LOVE”

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN ECUMENISM THROUGH A CARIBBEAN MISSIONAL MODEL

CYNARA DUBE-SOOKOO

INTRODUCTION

Andrea Bharatt, that was her name. On 29 January 2021, our country of Trinidad and Tobago held our breath as yet another precious daughter of the land was missing. Days later, her body was found, disposed of in a forest.¹

Andrea is not the first woman to face violence in our home, but she has become the symbol of the movement toward justice. Her brutal story swept across the world and stirred our prophetic voices to rise. The entire nation joined in a variety of protests and prayer vigils.² We affirmed our solidarity with every lit candle placed in the night. Every honking horn and flashing light from one vehicle to another along the highway signals that we stand with each other in this common fight.

Research has shown that pain is like a “social glue” that brings people together.³ Our communal weeping is transformed into our communal strength. The Caribbean has been a violent playground for colonizers. Our people’s skin has been whipped, our

1 Carolyn Kissoon, “They Killed Andrea and Threw Her Away,” *Trinidad Express*, 5 February 2021, https://trinidadexpress.com/newsextra/they-killed-andrea-and-threw-her-away/article_774e45aa-6728-11eb-a392-b73a8a5ddb07.html.

2 Darlisa Ghouralal, “Protests, Vigils Continue for Andrea,” *LoopTT*, 8 February 2021, <https://www.looptt.com/content/protests-vigils-continue-andrea>.

3 Brock Bastian, Jolanda Jetten, and Laura J. Ferris, Abstract, “Pain as Social Glue: Shared Pain Increases Cooperation,” *Psychological Science* 25, no. 11 (November 2014): 2079–85. View abstract at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797614545886>.

ancestor's traditions have been seized and degraded, and our wholeness of life has been threatened. Today, the Caribbean is left to heal from the effects of brutal invasions, including poverty, violence, and many forms of injustice and discrimination. Yet, we have found solidarity in our common journey of healing.

I believe that, throughout the historical pain we have had to endure, our unity has been rooted even more deeply in our Christian love, especially our love in action. As a Caribbean church, we have found our unity in our mission, as Rev. Canon Dr Kortright Davis reminds us that the early beginnings of Caribbean ecumenism were prompted by an awareness that “churches had resources which could be better used in helping the people of the Caribbean to help themselves.”⁴

This chapter proposes mission as an effective vehicle by which young people can engage in ecumenism. It argues its preference for mission based on the role of mission in Caribbean theology, the role of mission in Caribbean ecumenism, and the perspective of mission from our Caribbean young people. Furthermore, as a case study, I use the Young Adults in Mission Workcamp, an ecumenical program that engages young people from different countries in ecumenical mission. Lastly, using elements of this case study, I propose a “Three Ships” Caribbean Missional Model that can be used to create programs that engage young people in ecumenism.

It will be helpful to clarify the meaning of some terms as they are used here:

The Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago defines a *youth* as an individual between the ages of 13 to 30, spanning the stages of adolescence, emerging adulthood and early adulthood.⁵

Mission is the engagement of the people in the *Missio Dei* (mission of God), in the hope of bringing the reign of God's justice and peace on earth, by acknowledging and celebrating the *Imago Dei* (image of God) in all of creation.

Ecumenism is defined as unity among Christians across different denominations.

SECTION 1: WHY MISSION?

Mission is the core of Caribbean theology and identity

The wave of ecumenism across Caribbean waters has been motivated by the missional identity of the Caribbean Church. For the reformed churches in the Caribbean, the foreign missionaries' departure opened a new realm of indigenization. There was a desire

4 Kortright Davis, “The Story of the Caribbean Conference of Churches,” in *New Mission for a New People: Voices from the Caribbean*, ed. David I. Mitchell (New York: Friendship Press, 1997), 135.

5 “National Youth Policy,” The Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago (2001), 5.

to connect with God in a language and culture that Caribbean people could intimately relate to. As churches struggled for selfhood in a post-colonial era, Caribbean minds began exploring the uncharted waters of Caribbean theology. For example, Hamid writes, “The gospel came to us on the back of Colonialism”; therefore, these values have “perverted the gospel.”⁶ Hamid further states that the Caribbean church now needs to “re-read our history, particular Church history, and locate our spiritual lineage on a different historical sphere . . . which would mean that we cease being appendages to European history or European Church History.”⁷

To understand the vitality of mission in the Caribbean ecumenical movement, we first need to appreciate the role of mission in Caribbean theology. One major tenet of this theology is decolonization, which sparked a transition in the understanding of the word *mission*. While we are grateful for the missionaries’ labour in establishing our Caribbean churches, mission during colonial rule is perceived as one of the most brutal forms of violence to sweep our nations. In the name of God, ancestors of our land were oppressed, and our cultures were belittled and erased. The *Imago Dei* was stripped from anyone who wasn’t a Christian.

However, Caribbean theology has flipped the meaning of mission. Roper states that “Caribbean theology is not interested in an armchair discussion about metaphysics or ontology, but rather poses questions that are both ethical and existential.”⁸ Dick describes this theology as “emancipatory” in nature as it encompasses, “a theological discourse that would seek full freedom, equality, and justice.” Furthermore, it would “evaluate historical legacies of injustice and oppression and seek ways to transform the situations, systems, and principalities and powers; it would seek to name, shame, and confront the powers.”⁹

Caribbean theology is a “doing” theology; therefore, the Caribbean church’s identity is characterized by its missional role within society. The Caribbean church realizes its call to lift its prophetic voice and be a source of transformation to bring God’s reign of peace, justice, and love to the earth.

Mission is the core of Caribbean ecumenism

A beautiful feature of the Christian narrative is that although we may be doctrinally divided, our hearts are always longing to be drawn together in unity. Our stories of faith knit us together beyond denominational barriers. In the Caribbean, our missional identity has been the common thread that brought the churches together.

6 Idris Hamid, ed., Introduction, *Out of the Depths: A Collection of Papers Presented at Four Missiology Conferences Held in Antigua, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad in 1975* (self-pub., 1977), vi.

7 Hamid, *Out of the Depths*, ix.

8 Garnett Roper, “The Caribbean as the City of God,” in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue*, ed. Garnett Roper and J. Richard Middleton (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 3–4.

9 Devon Dick, “Caribbean Theology: A Failed Project?” in Roper and Middleton, *A Kairos Moment*, 199.

In the 1960s, the English-speaking territories began gaining independence. The entire region, however, was painfully grappling with the reality of being a postcolonial society. Therefore, the plea for ecumenism in the Caribbean came through the need to address social, political, and economic distress. Socially, racism, as one of the most prominent ills of society, sparked an uprising of the Black Power movement, especially in the countries of Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, and Jamaica. Pasley reminds us how this “movement in Trinidad exploded as thousands of young people took to the streets in massive demonstrations that rocked the island.”¹⁰ The Caribbean also witnessed the trauma of political unrest, especially with the Grenada Revolution from 1979–1983. Meanwhile, although some countries experienced favorable economic thrusts, the overall economic landscape was still plagued by poverty and unemployment.

Within this context, Caribbean ecumenism had its birth. The Garthe-Legge report states many organizations that were formed out of the Caribbean ecumenical movement such as the Caribbean Assembly of Reformed Churches in 1965, the Caribbean Committee on Joint Christian Action), the Ecumenical Committee on Missions in the Southern Caribbean, the Christian Institute of Religious and Social Stud, the Theological Education Committee of the South Eastern Caribbean, and the Latin American Evangelical Commission on Christian Education.¹¹

One notable organization is the Caribbean Council of Churches (CCC), which was founded in 1973. Its mandate is “Promoting Ecumenism and Social Change in Obedience to Jesus Christ and in Solidarity with the Poor.”¹² Today, the CCC strives to respond to the Caribbean’s contemporary context of poverty, violence, crime, and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

Mission is the passion of the youth

Caribbean youth are passionate about mission. In the Caribbean’s early discussions about the church’s role in the newly formed ecumenical movement, Micheal McCormack characterizes youth by their “unwillingness to accept inhuman, depersonalizing influences in their lives,” and the belief that “the world is still to be made and they are capable of making it.”¹³ There is nothing that can stand in the way of our young people’s desire to change the world.

Simone Singh-Sagar, the national youth coordinator of the Presbyterian Church of

10 Victoria Pasley, Abstract, “The Black Power Movement in Trinidad: An Exploration of Gender and Cultural Changes and the Development of a Feminist Consciousness,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 3, no. 1, 24–40, <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol3/iss1/2>.

11 Garth W. Legge, *The Report of a Preliminary Study of the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Grenada* (1965): 185–188.

12 About CCC, Caribbean Conference of Churches, updated 6 June 2021, <http://www.ccc-caribe.org/eng/intro.htm>.

13 Michael McCormack, “Liberation or Development: The Role of the Church in the New Caribbean” *Caribbean Ecumenical Consultation for Development*, Study Paper no. 5, (Bridgetown: Caribbean Action for Development in the Caribbean, 1971), 15.

Trinidad and Tobago (PCTT), highlights the giving nature of Generation Y youth and the altruistic nature of Generation Z youth.¹⁴ Singh-Sagar notes that in 2014, young persons who attended a mission-themed PCTT national youth camp asked for more missional opportunities within the church. Thus, the Souled Out Servants (S.O.S), the youth mission arm of PCTT, was born. Singh-Sagar also notes that this arm is led by young people with an admirable view of mission that extends to all of creation.¹⁵

The Caribbean is to be applauded for its proactive approach in engaging young people in ecumenical missions. Rev. Kendrick Sooknarine of the PCTT spoke fondly of his experience with a 1970s ecumenical youth camp that was hosted at the St Andrew's Theological College, stating, "These camps weren't just secluded Bible Study sessions and worship, but you came out to work ... to paint churches and help those in the community." At these camps, young people engaged in Caribbean theological reflection and discussions, while also getting their hands dirty in a variety of missional projects.

Today, the Inter School/Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship (ISCF/IVCF) has engaged thousands of students in ecumenical worship and mission. One member described her missional projects within the group, which included, "missions to Haiti and St. Lucia ... where we did some medical clinics and ran a youth camp respectively."¹⁶ Although this program is not indigenous to the Caribbean, its influence among young people is seen in its 134 schools in Trinidad and Tobago, spanning a membership of 2200 students and an alumni group of 14,900.¹⁷

The Christian Youth Foundation is another ecumenical gathering of young people in Trinidad and Tobago with a view of transformation of society. Since its relaunch in 2019, the foundation has raised its prophetic voice against injustice faced by youth and has lobbied for change to youth development policy.

SECTION 2: THE PRAXIS

Case study: The Young Adults in Mission Work Camp

The Young Adults in Mission (YAM) Work Camp offered by the Caribbean and North American Council for Mission (CANACOM) is one of the ecumenical youth programmes in the region. This camp provides a remarkable opportunity for youth of different cultures to join in fellowship, education, reflection, and meaningful work of

14 Generation Z are those born from 1997 onward. See Henrik Bresman and Vinika D. Rao, "A Survey of 19 Countries Shows How Generations X, Y, and Z Are—and Aren't—Different," *Harvard Business Review*, 25 August 2017, para. 1, <https://hbr.org/2017/08/a-survey-of-19-countries-shows-how-generations-x-y-and-z-are-and-arent-different>.

15 Simone Singh-Sagar (National Youth Coordinator of the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago) in discussion with the author, April 2021.

16 Cherisse Ratiram (IVCF Member 2008-2013) in discussion with the author, April 2021.

17 See the "ABC's of IV/ISCF" at <https://isivcftt.org/about/> for statistics.

Christ. The camp's philosophy is aligned with CANACOM's desire to "be a platform for common mission action, reflection and learning."¹⁸ It is held every three to four years among its 14 member churches.

It is imperative to note that CANACOM also recognized the pivotal role of mission in engaging young people in ecumenism. Since the camp's beginning in 1994 in Guyana, there have been eight subsequent successful camps that have transformed the ecumenical vision of "YAMMERS."¹⁹ In my own personal experience at the YAM Camp at Cuba in 2015, sub-groups of campers were responsible for leading in worship every morning and evening. It was indeed a blessing as we had the opportunity to glimpse into each other's faith and even learn each other's hymns. My exposure to ecumenism through the YAM Camp cultivated in me an appreciation for ecumenical exchange in my own local setting.

YAM leaders attribute the success of the camps to many factors. WCC Education in Mission secretary, Jennifer Martin, highlights the excellence of international church planning, coupled with excellent reception of the programme by its member churches. The camp seeks to remain relevant by exposing the YAMMERS to significant contextual issues. Additionally, the camp allows individual introspection for the YAMMERS to understand their role in mission. Martin also notes that CANACOM keeps in touch with past YAMMERS on a personal level to maintain fellowship.²⁰

The YAM camp seeks to create a setting where young people can become engaged in the mission of Christ and explore their talents and creativity, all while becoming more aware of God's presence in their lives and forming a regional fellowship.²¹

The duration of each camp is usually one to three weeks. The camp's schedule is geared toward engaging young people in ecumenical mission through the following activities:

- **Worship:** YAMMERS are divided into smaller base groups. Each day, a group is responsible for leading the YAMMERS in worship.
- **Bible study:** These sessions are conducted with an approach to examining pressing societal issues in alignment with the camp's theme, such as human trafficking, gender and violence, and the church's role in mission and poverty.
- **Workshops:** These usually follow Bible studies and theoretical sessions. Base groups are given the opportunity to plan and engage in practical work to prepare them to lead in mission. There are usually group presentations as well.

18 Jennifer P. Martin, *Historical Perspectives on the Caribbean and North American Council for Mission: Commemorating Thirty Years of God's Goodness* (Kingston: CANACOM, 2016), 5.

19 YAMMERS is the name given to participants in the YAM camps.

20 Jennifer P. Martin (Education in Mission Secretary of CANACOM) in discussion with the author, February 2021.

21 *The Caribbean and North America Council for Mission Young Adults in Mission Camp Booklet* (Jamaica: CANACOM, 2019) 3-4.

- **Mission work:** A large time slot is dedicated to engaging the young people in hands-on mission work. YAMMERS may visit different organizations such as orphanages, schools, churches, and homes for the elderly to provide assistance on a variety of projects.
- **Cultural immersion activities:** These include sessions, movies, site visits, and living with a host family to become aware of the cultural context of the host church. There are also sessions that allow the YAMMERS to share aspects of their culture with each other.
- **Group activities:** YAMMERS meet frequently to reflect and discuss their experiences while engaging in fellowship.
- **Journaling:** This is a tool of introspection to assist the YAMMERS in their missional growth and understanding.

Reflecting on the CANACOM's YAM camp success, we recognize that missional, ecumenical youth programs can be guided by the following missional framework. Firstly, the topics being explored need to be relevant to the realities of a young person. Secondly, programs must also allow for moments of introspection so that the youth can have meaningful time discerning their call to mission. Lastly, the programs must celebrate community. There must be moments where participants can form bonds with each other, strengthen one another, engage in reflection and discussions, and labour together toward a common goal.

The missional model

With the above-mentioned framework in mind, I propose the use of the “Three Ship” model to guide the creation of ecumenical missional programs for youth. The symbol of the ship stems from the logo of the WCC and represents the common journey on which we must embark in order to fulfill Christ's mission across and within the islands connected by Caribbean waters.

The model's three ships are highly significant to Trinidad and Tobago. In 1498, Christopher Columbus stumbled upon our land in a fleet of three ships: the Santa Maria de Guia, La Castilla (nicknamed Vaquenos), and La Garda (nicknamed Correo).²² The mission and message of these ships were God, glory, and gold. These ships brought destruction and genocide to our Indigenous people, as well as centuries of suffering and oppression in the name of mission.

However, we are using our creative Caribbean spirit to change the narrative of mission that comes from our shores. The mission and message of the three “ships” of this model

22 Ian Lambie, “Correcting History of Columbus in Trinidad,” email comment in *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, 13 June 2013, <https://www.guardian.co.tt/article-6.2.402644.6c6113c354#:~:text=Despite%20published%20information%20to%20the%20Nina%20and%20the%20Pinta.>

rise from the hearts and voices of a region that knows what it means to be marginalized from the world and to suffer at the hands of the empire. Therefore, the “ships” that carry our mission will be vessels of world transformation: **worship, stewardship, and fellowship.**

Worship. Missional programs for young people must include a dimension of *ecumenical worship*. Here, we see how our common love for God brings us together despite our differences. As different denominations gather for worship, we all disarm our theological arguments to fix our eyes and minds on our one commonality in worship: responding to God’s love through the expression of our faith. An InterVarsity Christian Fellowship IVCF member speaks about his experience in ecumenical worship, saying,

“I am the only Presbyterian, the majority of others is Pentecostal, with probably a few Roman Catholics. Our group is smaller than at other universities, but the interaction is strong, to the point where people share their opinions freely and openly. There is a comfortable exchange of dialogue where we can grow together and learn from each other’s story.” –PCTT youth, age 23.

From this testimony, we see that ecumenical worship creates a space for the most beautiful faith exchange of each other’s faith stories. It is an exchange of the heart, as all the participants put their passion and love of God on display through their songs, prayers, dances, and meditations.

Hamid further emphasizes the relationship between worship and mission stating, “new [Caribbean] missiology will of necessity also create new structures of worship ... theological training and dialogue.”²³ This relationship unfolded in the CCC music workshops that engaged Caribbean young people in hymn writing reflecting our Caribbean struggle. Songs such as our “Caribbean Communion Hymn” and “Glory to God in the Highest,” were produced from these ventures.²⁴

Then, through our unified worship, we are all strengthened and inspired to continue working toward Christ’s mission. One youth states that their ecumenical group “practiced being vulnerable with each other in order to lean on each other and create a family-like environment, because practicing medicine is not easy.”²⁵

Stewardship. The second ship of our missional model is that of *ecumenical stewardship*. Stewardship can describe how we manage the different gifts and resources bestowed upon us, and therefore covers the working element of the missional model. It can be perceived in two categories: *stewardship of self* and *stewardship beyond self*.

Stewardship of self may refer to the introspective element of missional programs, where participants are able to spend time discerning and building their relationship with

23 Hamid, *Out of the Depths*, iv.

24 Patrick Prescod, *Sing a New Song* (Barbados: Caribbean Conference of Churches, 1981).

25 Aaron Paul (InterVarsity Christian Fellowship President 2021-2021) in discussion with the author, April 2021.

God. Stewardship of self also encompasses how the participant's well-being is cared for through the programme. For example, is the participant's mind being stimulated through sessions, workshops and Bible studies? Does the programme allow participants to explore their unique talents and gifts? These factors will determine whether participant experience growth.

Ecumenical stewardship *beyond* self includes how we serve all of creation around us. These are the elements of the program that allow participants to labour in unity toward a common vision of freedom and justice in God's reign. In that moment of work, we are no longer divided, but made one in our common plight. Ideas for such activities include partnerships with existing non-profit organizations like homes for the elderly, orphanages, schools, nature conservation groups. These activities may also be in the form of advocating or lobbying for systemic change and creating educational ventures in mission. The following is a testimony from a youth:

“From a young age, I was fascinated with the idea of “Doctors Without Borders” – going to the deepest darkest places of the world, practicing with bare minimum resources, etc. Then, SOS did a presentation at a SO4C which really changed my perspective. Deepest, darkest places exist right here in my country, it exists literally anywhere you're able to open your eyes and see it. The projects that always have the biggest pull on my heart are those with the animals – and looking back at it now, I don't know how I was ever so caught up with what there was out there when God's creatures are right here craving His love – and we are quite literally the instruments he placed in this very geographic location to do just that. With that being said, SOS has demonstrated just how willing the youths of PCTT are to be part of this hope for God's people here in Trinidad and Tobago – from missions like Build a Blessing and clothes drives to our virtual hamper drives – youths have always been willing to support in whatever way they can.” –PCTT S.O.S member, age 24.

Fellowship. The third and final ship of our missional model for youth is that of *fellowship*. One YAMMER spoke about their fellowship gained in mission saying, “You really get to know each other when you're sweating in the hot sun, trying to fill up holes or pushing the wheelbarrow down the lane.” Indeed, little can compare to the bonds made on the mission field. Even Rev. Sooknarine reminisced on his lifelong friendships with colleagues of the faith, whom he met at ecumenical missional camps. The friendships created on the mission field create a network of sustained support, in which every church is truly able to identify that they are never alone.

Participating in cultural immersion sessions, sharing meals, and just having fun, are activities that promote fellowship in ecumenical youth gatherings. The experiences shared above describe the agape spirit felt by participants in mission. Jesus cherished his agape

moments with his followers.²⁶ The agape feast is a well-celebrated practice within the PCTT that encompasses one's missional orientation. Rev. Daniel Teelucksingh writes, "It was a medium for promoting and strengthening fellowship and unity ... removing social barriers and ... demonstrating care and concern for the less fortunate in the church."²⁷

CLOSING REMARKS

This essay has sought to demonstrate how mission can be a faithful medium for engaging young people in ecumenism, based on the following principles: mission is our Caribbean church's identity; mission is the motivational force behind our Caribbean ecumenism; and mission is a space for young people to express their passion.

We analyzed the YAM work camps initiated by CANACOM. We deconstructed its elements in the hope of finding aspects that can be used to build a Caribbean missional program to engage in ecumenism. As such, we have proposed the Three Ship model of worship, stewardship, and fellowship.

The name of this chapter is, "And They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love," because mission encompasses the radical love by which Christ and the Christian church are identified. In this model, ecumenical worship describes our unity in our love for God, ecumenical stewardship describes the work of our love as we serve all of creation, and fellowship describes our agape, the love that binds us together as a community to carry each other's burdens and wipe each other's tears.

Let us not grow weary in our love for one another. May our common mission unite our young people to love beyond the barriers of this world.

26 See Matthew 26:20; John 21:12.

27 Daniel Teelucksingh, "Convention Notes: The Agape (Love Feast)" in *The Trinidad Presbyterian*, (San Fernando: The Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago, 2010).

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CHAPTER TEN

THE CHALLENGE AND VISION OF ECUMENISM IN TRINIDAD: A PROGRESSIVE APPROACH

STEFAN J. WILSON

It is difficult to promote an ideology of unity and corporation in an ethnically diverse and racially divided society, rooted in mainstream Roman Catholicism and many Protestant factions of Christianity. Yet, the apostle Paul urges in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for agreement to reside with another, absent of division, and perfectly united in mind and thought (1 Cor. 1:10).

The Caribbean region is archipelagic in nature, rich in history and cultural diversity that is inherent in the many faces of Christianity in the region. Yet, questions arise in 2020 as to whether there is a promoted unity in such a diversity. Is ecumenism present, and if so, to what extent are the youth influential in it?

In light of this question, this chapter presents a case study of the island of Trinidad, seeking to examine the relationship between ecumenism and the young leaders of the church within the Protestant framework of the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago. The study concerned itself with two research questions:

1. What are the challenges young people face in the religious space and church community in relation to their role in the ecumenical movement?
2. With the engagement of the youth, what is the vision of the ecumenical movement in moving forward?

A BRIEF BACKGROUND: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Caribbean students are always exposed to the turbulent and traumatic history of their region. From the onset of an age of imperialism in the 15th century, that used the face of Christianity, the Spanish conquest of Columbus began in the region following a period of colonization, closely rivalled by England, France and Denmark. These countries col-

onized the islands like pawns in a chess game; some changed hands continuously. The period of native enslavement was followed by a shipment of enslaved Africans and East Indian indentured labourers into the various islands. This resulted not only in a transformation in cultural belief but in a religious reality that mixed, clashed, and to some extent, became hybridized.

For the Caribbean theologian, an understanding of a theology of imposition is brought into focus, in which Christianity was imposed on persons and cultures that it set out to “redeem,” reordering their perceptions and reinterpreting them from a European point of view.¹ This imposition was met with tension and resistance, resulting in myriad responses from mainstream Catholicism that many years later became enmeshed with Protestantism. *Given this reality, it is safe to say that Caribbean is a term given to multiple islands that are linked by history and culture; yet within each distinct geographical island there is a difference in denomination, practice, and doctrine.*

To illustrate, it is remarkable that the Spanish-speaking islands are heavily rooted in Roman Catholicism, whereas those who adopted standard English planted seeds of Anglicanism and other Protestant traditions. Ecumenism is no stranger to the Caribbean hemisphere. The impetus to find unity in a divided culture began in the early 1900s, as one of the earliest ecumenical councils, the Jamaican Council of Churches, was founded in 1921. This event was influenced by Scottish missionaries, resulting in a unit that linked “Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Church of Scotland, Moravian and Congregationalist denominations.”² But there are in fact more denominations that have become more present in practice through corporate worship, such that the body of ecumenism has expanded. This study focuses on one of these: a Presbyterian framework on the Caribbean island of Trinidad and Tobago.

PRESBYTERIANISM IN TRINIDAD

The Presbyterian influence on Trinidad began in the late-19th century, in two forms. Firstly, in 1835, the Greyfriars Church in Glasgow, Scotland, sent the missionary Rev. Alexander Kennedy to the colony of Trinidad to minister not only to the Scottish planters and their families, but also to Africans.³ Secondly, Presbyterianism was part of the overseas missionary enterprise of the Canadian Presbyterian Church. Ideally, the mission of these leaders evolved primarily among East Indians not only in evangelism but in the goal of educating the once ‘enslaved’, headed by Rev. Dr. John Morton, towards

1 Robert Moore, “The Historical Basis of Theological Reflection,” in *Troubling the Waters: A Collection of Papers and Responses Presented at Two Conferences on Creative Theological Reflection Held in Jamaica*, ed. Idris Hamid (Trinidad and Trinibago: Rahaman Printery Limited, 1973), p.39.

2 Livingstone Thompson, “Ecumenism in the Caribbean,” *The Ecumenical Review* 53, no. 3 (2001),pg. 422

3 Brian C. Rutherford, ed., *Greyfriars of Trinidad, 1837–1987: A Historical Sketch of the Congregation of Greyfriars Church of Scotland, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, to Mark the 150th Anniversary* (Port-of-Spain: Trinidad and Tobago Printing Works, 1987).

the late 1890s.⁴ To date, the Presbyterian church is visible in 107 congregations across the nation and in one congregation in the sister isle of Tobago.

The presence of ecumenism is undeniably real, commencing from the late 1950s. The Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago (PCTT) is a member of many ecumenical organizations, including the Caribbean Conference of Churches, the Christian Council of Trinidad, the Caribbean and North American Council for Mission (CANACOM), and the World Communion of Reformed Churches. In 2020, however, this researcher, a student minister of the church, asks: What is the face of ecumenism today? With a pandemic that has scarred many countries, and has created unsettling socio-political global changes, how have the churches united to combat the prejudices and issues that pervade humanity? In all of this, as Emilio Castro states, “we are called to present the witness of a united church which can symbolize, anticipate and serve the reconciliation and unity of all humanity and the whole creation.”⁵ This chapter seeks to answer these questions, with the primary objective of identifying how youth are part of the ecumenical forefront.

DATA COLLECTION

As the goal of this research effort was to investigate the challenges the youth face in retrospect to the ecumenical movement, alongside defining the vision of ecumenism for the future, I adopted a case-study approach to address the questions above on the basis of the paradigm of pragmatism. Pragmatist philosophy holds that human actions can never be separated from the past experiences and from the beliefs that have originated from those experiences.⁶ Arguably, ecumenism can only be understood when the individual understands the environment and belief that fuel this concept. An ecumenical movement is then shaped by the region’s history and culture.

A questionnaire was disseminated to ten church leaders, seven of whom were under thirty. These included the moderator of the synod of the PCTT, the Rt Rev. Joy Adbul-Mohan. Interviews were conducted with the National Youth Coordinator (henceforth referred to as the NYC), and a recently-ordained minister of the Word and Sacrament (henceforth referred to as Rev. SB.), both of whom have been involved in the ecumenical space. The results are placed under sub-headings that attempt to categorize a Caribbean ecumenical understanding in the 21st century.

4 Jerome Teelucksingh, *Caribbean-Flavoured Presbyterianism: Education as a Prescription for Socio-Political Development 1868–2008* (St Augustine, Trinidad, and Tobago: University of the West Indies Publications, 2008):1–3.

5 Emilio Castro, *A Passion for Unity: Essays on Ecumenical Hopes and Challenges* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992), 1.

6 Vibha Kaushik and Christine A. Walsh, “Pragmatism as a Research Paradigm and Its Implications for Social Work Research,” *Social Sciences* 8, no. 9 (2019).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Trinidadian ecumenism

The findings were that ecumenism is a forum for different faiths to coincide peacefully whilst respecting the differences. In Trinidad, it is possible for an interfaith reality to exist not only on a corporate level, where dialogue may be used to maintain healthy communication, but also on a personal level, as Caribbean families have roots in various denominations. As the NYC stated:

I do think that ecumenism is ... different for Trinidad than it is globally, just because we are a melting pot of religions and traditions and we do operate in quite a peaceful manner in this country in terms of no public war declared against one another ... ecumenism goes beyond just our Christian churches coming together.

However, she noted that there is a gap between the “traditional” mainland churches and the evangelical churches, and one of the main causes is the difference of doctrine. Although ecumenism is known to the region, there is an element of doubt as to whether it is practised:

I do think however that in terms of looking at Christian churches coming together in an ecumenical way ... there is a lot that is missing ... because there is a huge gap between the traditional mainland churches and the evangelical churches and getting that to work in Trinidad because of huge variations in doctrines is a bit problematic.

This reminds me of Castro’s (1992) comment that “we cannot ignore history because the divisions that reveal themselves in doctrinal and canonical divergences have historical, social, political and cultural roots.”⁷ The diverse cultures of the various denominations, although coinciding in one country, may not agree with one another, thereby shaping the Caribbean Church “voice” to be Caribbean “voices” of the church. Ecumenism may be attempted in the country but there is a hindrance to putting it into practice.

Trinidad’s ecumenism and youth: a Presbyterian view

The PCTT is highly involved with ecumenical bodies, but in terms of youth involvement, the church is in the early stages. The NYC noted:

From the youth perspective ... I would have represented our synod at the Inter-Religious Organisation for a youth voice there. I am happy to say we are currently in the process of creating a youth policy for the Inter-Religious Organisation, where we can do some work across religions for the young peo-

⁷ Castro, *A Passion for Unity*, 9.

ple and it would definitely be for the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. I have also worked with the Trinidad Council of Churches ... especially at Christmas time. That is the time we find we can really come together ... so every year in December we have caroling on the square. ... It's a caroling evening and various churches are given an evening to manage on Brian Lara Promenade.... In Tobago it's in their Botanical gardens.

This comment brings to light the fact that ecumenism is mainly seen in public spaces, where unity is promoted in services for festivals, truly promoting a practice of John 17:21: unity so that all may believe in the God who sent Christ. This coincides with the findings of the questionnaire in which all participants, when asked how they have experienced ecumenism, selected the option of corporate services, prayers of unity, and interreligious worship events.

On a deeper note, the survey findings indicate that the inclusion of the youth in ecumenism is in a primary stage and is in need of further development, as elaborated by the NYC:

we also have a Christian Youth Foundation which was re-launched last year and the Presbyterian Church did have representatives to this Christian Youth Foundation and we are seeking to create a National Christian Youth Council so that we can have a prolific voice as well as ... hopefully a youth ethical response to social issues pertaining to our society these days ... The Christian Youth Council became dormant ... It was launched way before, so it was in the process of re-launching and the Presbyterian church was supposed to host one of the meetings but because of Covid it came to a standstill.

In conclusion, it is seen that the past year was intended to be the start of a transformative approach to an ecumenical youth forum but was unfortunately impeded by the global pandemic of Covid-19. Nonetheless, what I see in the year of 2020 is that the trend of ecumenical formation needs a stronger youth arm. This belief is echoed by one of the questionnaire participants, who stated:

There isn't a strong "youth" voice in the ecumenical sphere. There is a generational challenge. We need to kindle the vision, creativity and energy of the next generation in order to value their gifts and encourage their call as the Church.

A significant challenge is then seen in that the division is seen between the senior (40+ years) and younger (18–39 years) leaders of the church, such that the senior voice may be “louder” than the younger voice.

Institution versus passion

One of the interviewees, Rev. SB, has worked with many ecumenical organizations, including the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Caribbean and North

American Area Council. She notes that one challenge of ecumenism is the blurred line between institution and passion.

One must be careful not to equate ecumenism with only an institution. There must be a match between the gifts and passion of those who serve on these organizations.

What I take this to mean is that ecumenism is more than an administrative function. A greater emphasis is needed for the theory of ecumenism to be put into practice, such that the church is not only a physical structure but has metaphorically left the building and gone to the streets.

Rev. SB mentioned social projects in which she participated, painting orphanages and clearing agricultural pieces of land, that enabled young persons to set aside their denominational differences and work for the greater good. A greater space is needed for these mechanisms in order to overcome these challenges.

The issue of race

One of the underlying historical realities that permeates Trinidadian daily life is the issue of race. It is suggested that this is still a problem for the Presbyterian Church, as the church is branded as the “Indian” church. Whilst this does allude to the historical missionary influence on the East Indian indentured labourers, the fact that this facet is still debated shows that a strong link continues to be present. The idea of bringing people together from various churches becomes ticklish as there is a looming racial tension. As the NYC noted:

It is obvious that there are racial lines across our churches in the Christian community of Trinidad and Tobago. The Presbyterian church is known as the Indian church. So that is one hurdle to cross as our young people are also influenced by society’s approaches to different things. So for the young people in the evangelical churches it’s a mix and it’s also more afro-Trinidadian based.... You would find bringing together of races through ecumenism is difficult.

This disturbing truth coincides with my previous studies of racism in Trinidad. Throughout Trinidad’s history, there have been schisms within ethnic, class, culture, religious, and sexual parameters, leading to a lack of social cohesion. The absence of social solidarity has had comprehensive implications for the national identity of Trinidadians. By analyzing the historical relationship between the colonizer and those who were colonized, we can trace the roots of the colonial mentality which plagues many West Indian societies.⁸

8 Nakeba Stewart, “Race and Color in Trinidad and Tobago,” Trinidad and Tobago News Bulletin Board, 2 June 2004, http://www.trinidadandtobagonews.com/forum/webbbs_config.pl?md=read;id=1467.

Based on this finding, it is posited that Trinidad's society inculcates a racial division that begins from the social level as a result of history and may filter through to the denominations to which people belong.

The division of doctrine

A pivotal issue that still hinders ecumenism is the inability to work together despite differences in doctrine. Eight out of the ten participants in the questionnaire (two preferring to refrain from answering) commented that the difference in doctrine becomes a problem when churches are unable to see beyond them and work together in unity for the one Lord all serve, Jesus Christ. The NYC noted this problem is seen especially when leaders discuss the role of baptism:

Infant baptism is not regarded in some evangelical churches as baptism. As well as sprinkling is not seen as baptism as immersion is seen as right.

Even though the PCTT accepts the belief of infant and adult baptism via sprinkling, pouring, or full immersion, some churches do not, and this poses a problem when attempting to work together.

Additionally, Rev. SB narrated one of her experiences that showed how liturgical differences brought a spirit of division rather than unity in one of the ecumenical youth camps in which she worked:

There was this one time when one of the participants couldn't sing the Psalms.... He was extremely upset and angry ... so we see how worship practices differed and caused some disagreement.

In comparison to challenges in other ecumenical spaces, the difference in how worship is conducted is still a very predominant problem, such that feelings and emotions will arise and cause dissension between Christians. This challenge must be resolved in the full realization that each church embodies the body Christ.

WHAT IS THE YOUTH VISION FOR THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT?

The consensus of the findings of the study from both questionnaires and interviews indicates that much more work is to be done for ecumenism to be transformed with a youth voice. In theory and in institutions, ecumenical bodies do function in corporate worship and prayer. However, a greater space must be given for the youth to be involved, so that they can bring their ideas, passions, talents, and services to the country. The NYC noted the importance of

definitely harnessing the power of the young people in terms of their foundational thinking and the expression of their voice for being agents of social

change.... If we don't harness that we run the risk of having another generation of people who grew up without thinking there needs to be a change of how we approach things like race, creative care and the elderly.

As mentioned above, youth involvement is in a budding stage, and a space must be shaped: the ideas of how the movement can progress must first be addressed. Rev. SB also commented:

I would like to see a greater practice of working together for social justice... we need to make connections and actually work together.

It is clear that in Trinidad there is a great level of social inequality, racial tension, and political division, amongst other ills. The vision is for young people to break the generational thinking, mend the broken ties and practically put ecumenism into motion. Through Christian dialogue and also social projects to address poverty, education amidst others, the time is now! The stagnancy must dissolve, and the “house” must be built on “solid rock.”

PERSONAL REFLECTION

As a 26-year-old student minister of the PCTT, the findings of this study have fueled me to consider and revise my previous notions of ecumenism. Firstly, I have seen that the concept of ecumenism is very present, but mainly within an institutional framework. What is meant by this is that the ecumenical bodies function through prayer support and interreligious services. However, more development is needed in terms of practicality and youth involvement. The interviews qualitatively demonstrate that the desire to incorporate youth in the ecumenical space is a bit stagnant, and within the early budding stage. It is my aim to develop this aspect if we are to drive the church forward in the 21st century in Trinidad.

Sadly, the undeniable truth is that Trinidadian society is heavily divided in terms of race. Pragmatically, it is possible that any attempt to bring a youth forum together may bring this vestige of history, where values of “us” versus “them” may still arise in dialogue and practice, resulting in disinterest. We need to revisit this historical pain, forgive what has been said against each other, and foster a communion that promotes a level of theological acceptance for all the diverse views, drawing on the teacher of the one being we all worship: Jesus Christ.

Finally, I have noticed that there is a mainstream division between the traditional churches and smaller ones. If we are to promote unity, not only theoretically, but practically, it must traverse all borders and not reside in just a few denominations. Perhaps a greater emphasis should be placed on conducting ecumenical youth camps—interreligious dialogue platforms solely for the youth within Trinidad. In this way, preconceived

notion of one another can be deconstructed, a breaking of the “us” versus “them” barrier can begin, and a tangible face of ecumenism may be seen in all parts of God’s vineyard here on earth.

CLOSING STATEMENT

This paper does not contain all of the challenges the church may face. What it does create is a metaphorical lens for the reader to see some of the pervasive challenges it faces today. The findings pose an excellent initiative to conduct further “action-oriented research,” whereby ecumenical ideas and suggestions to alleviate the challenges can be put into practice. This essentially is my humble prayer as a student minister who prepares for ordination in the years to come. The time is now to work despite differences, channel all voices into one coherent, accepting, and understanding voice, and to instill confidence in the youth—for they are the present and future of the church.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS AND POSTCOLONIAL CONSCIOUSNESS: ECUMENICAL EXPERIENCES OF THE DIGITAL GENERATION

ALENA HÖFER

INTRODUCTION

The thesis of this chapter is that the current young, ecumenical generation in Germany has grown up in a globalized world, with various intercultural contacts in Germany, as well as all over the world, through physical encounters and digital connections. Intercultural relationships, opportunities for sharing life and world perspectives all over the world, lead many of us to develop a vision of an equal and need-oriented, emancipated, inclusive but diverse worldwide fellowship of churches, which engage the different intersectional issues of justice. The paradigm of a shared community where all are welcomed and accepted is the realization of the call to follow Jesus. Christian discipleship includes the engagement for equity in all dimensions of life. This commitment is shared with many other generations, to which young adults add their own accent.

The research on the impact of an international ecumenical volunteer service program focusing on intercultural relationships and their influence in engagement in ecumenism is based on a small, quantitative case study in written form through questionnaires. The results have shown that young, ecumenical, German perspectives are mainly characterized by a postcolonial consciousness and the awareness of their responsibility and engagement for global equity in all dimensions of life.

Nine Protestant young adults between 20 and 30 years old, who served as volunteers in a foreign country and engaged afterwards in global discussions and globally oriented actions, were asked about their intercultural relationships and the influence of these

on their ecumenical understanding and activity. The survey was conducted in October 2020. Most of the participants (eight to nine) had served with the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) or its partner organization (Norddeutsche Mission), funded by the governmental program *weltwärts*¹ and identify as part of the UEM youth network. The other participant served as part of an intercultural exchange with the non-political and non-religious organization VIA e.V. (Association for International and Intercultural Exchange). This respondent's voice serves as an exemplary reference outside the UEM. Eight to nine of the respondents are members of the Rhenish Church or Westphalian Church, which includes a focus on a special region in Germany. The ninth participant belongs to the Protestant church in Hessen and Nassau. This case study is designed as a limited example of how personal intercultural encounters have a sensitizing influence on global and local perceptions and ecumenical engagements. Their answers in the study are numbered by alphabet, which are used here instead of anonymized names. The study is complemented by relevant academic literature.

DO YOUNG ADULTS IN GERMANY LOSE TOUCH WITH CHURCHES?

Around the turn of the millennium, empirical youth studies in Germany increasingly distinguished between youth and young adults. Rebecca John Klug explains that the emergence of young adults as a new period of life results from a longer-lasting transition between childhood and adulthood. The period can rarely be defined by age, because the life situation of young adults is characterized by several upheavals concerning economic, relational, professional, and social circumstances. That is why John Klug defines young adults as follows: young adults are those who have finished their general education school certificate and are at the beginning of, or are training for their profession, which includes not yet having much professional experience.² The present study follows the definition of John Klug.

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- 1 In Germany, international volunteer service programs after graduation from school have been funded by the governmental program *weltwärts* since 2008. They are carried out by different organizations. After 2013, the government added a program for south-north exchange. See "Weltwärts stellt sich vor," Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, updated 2021, <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/10-jahre-weltwaerts-freiwilligendienst-gut-fuer-den-100.html>. Next to the enabling of long-term exchanges for large numbers of young people, the governmental program is criticized because its funding comes through the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Youth, mostly from the middle-class, profit from development funds that strengthen their self-identity and curriculum vitae. See Theresa Loch and Leander Badura, "Gut für den Lebenslauf —gut für die Welt?," *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, 15 September 2018, https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/10-jahre-weltwaerts-freiwilligendienst-gut-fuer-den-1008.de.html?dram:article_id=428197. Additionally, the program is oriented towards students who have finished high school. That is why only a few young people with less education apply for the program. On the other side, intercultural exchanges with a reflective accompanying program, focusing on the role as a volunteer, cultural sensitivity, and postcolonial awareness, can have a lifelong impact.
 - 2 Rebecca John Klug, *Kirche und Junge Erwachsene im Spannungsfeld: Kirchentheoretische Analysen und eine Explorative Studie zur Ekklesiologischen Qualität Ergänzender Ausdrucksweisen des Christlichen Glaubens* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 79–80.

Germany is known for the loss of youth and young adults in churches. This development is often accounted for by an increase in secularism and religious indifference, as a 2014 study by the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) found: Youth and young adults are “stable in the loss of bindings of the church.”³ John Klug emphasizes, however, that not only are young adults distancing themselves from churches, but also that churches are mostly not reaching the reality of life for young people. The distance between Protestant churches and young adults is reciprocal. John Klug’s empirical study showed that the young adults she interviewed found faith communities outside parochial church structures, but with ecclesiastic characteristics.⁴

Feeling welcome and belonging is an important factor. Most of the participants in my case study identify as members of a worldwide community through networks and projects, which create relationships and belonging. In a few cases, they feel that they belong to a regional congregation and the “digital church” on Instagram. This development shows that the young adults interviewed tend to connect with the worldwide community of churches, outside of one particular church but within network structures, going beyond parochial thinking.

During the last decade the EKD became aware of its lack of contact with younger generations. In 2018, a conference of the EKD synod focused on the faith of young people, and in 2019 the EKD decided to include youth delegates as part of the synod.⁵ Christian Grethlein highlights the necessity of taking contemporary contexts into account to communicate the gospel. The church seems outdated, particularly to young people, if it does not relate enough to the present reality of life because of its long history. That is why the communication of the gospel has to become relevant to different life realities, but at the same time has to remain critical of those social developments that are at odds with the gospel itself. The opening for new expressions of churches and diverse networks is the most important challenge for church leaderships.⁶

To sum up, the young generation tend to develop their own faith communities with ecclesiastic characteristics with changed structures and new visions. The vision of many young Christians engaging in ecumenism is the call to equity in all dimensions of life.

One example of those initiatives is the UEM Youth Network. This network, of which I am a part, was created because of the need for young people to exchange ideas after

3 Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD), “Stabil im Bindungsverlust zur Kirche,” in *Engagement und Indifferenz: Kirchenmitgliedschaft als Soziale Praxis* (Hannover: EKD, 2014), https://www.ekd.de/ekd_de/ds_doc/ekd_v_kmu2014.pdf, 60. Quoted passage translated by author.

4 John Klug, *Kirche und Junge Erwachsene*, 385–7.

5 See: “Wiedersehen: Glaube Junger Menschen,” EKD, 8 February 2021, <https://www.ekd.de/glaube-junger-menschen-perspektiven-38000.htm>; “EKD-Synode Beschließt Quote für Junge Menschen in Ihren Reihen,” EKD, updated 13 November 2019, <https://www.ekd.de/ekd-synode-quote-junge-menschen-51607.htm>.

6 See Christian Grethlein, *Kirchentheorie: Kommunikation des Evangeliums im Kontext* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 285–7.

their voluntary service in Germany, and to have a community for living and sharing the gospel within global perspectives. In recent years, such networks have also emerged in the other two regions in Asia and Africa. This is why UEM Youth Network is actually turning into a global network.⁷ For example, during the first pandemic wave in spring 2020, some young adults from all regions met regularly through video conferences; they exchanged their experiences of life in times of crisis and encouraged each other. To sum up, this global network is another example of being part of the church – it is a space where youth feel welcome and to which they choose to belong.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERCULTURAL AND TRANSCULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS

Networks are based on relationships. The case study clearly shows that intercultural relationships are constitutive and a matter of course for these young adults, who engage in global topics. Eight or nine of the interviewees are still in regular contact with friends they made during intercultural encounters through digital services (messenger applications, videocalls, social media platforms) in different time zones, from a weekly contact to monthly or even semi-annually, depending on the friendship intensity. “C” and others also mentioned challenges because of physical distances and changes in their life:

But over the years most communication got really rare. Several relationships got difficult after a change in my lifestyle. Some relationships stopped because we lacked making new shared memories together because of distance. – “C”

“E” noted that intercultural relationships function in the same way as regional relationships: some are deeper than others and sometimes you lose sight of each other. In terms of content, all the participants talk about topics concerning their own lives. These might be conversations about everyday life, relationships, and professions, as well as about politics and faith.

All interviewees agreed that intercultural relations influence their own perspectives and engagements. “C” and “F,” for example, said the following concerning the influence of intercultural relations on their own perspectives:

The intercultural relations I have, helped me to reflect on my own perspective and upbringing and allow me to take on new perspectives. Through intercultural

7 UEM's self-definition, in terms of its mission history and mission societies, is to be a community of churches in three regions: Africa, Asia, and Germany: “The United Evangelical Mission operates within a network of churches in Africa, Asia and Europe and wherever it may be called upon to serve. Together these churches shall proclaim Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of all people and shall face the challenges of present-day mission” (UEM, *Legal Texts 2018*, pub. 2019, https://www.vemission.org/fileadmin/redakteure/Dokumente/LegalTexts_2018_Druckfreigabe_01.03.2019.pdf).

tural friendships and experiences I am motivated to engage in more intercultural relations. –“C”

I see many things in a more differentiated way than before my voluntary service, and above all, issues such as post-colonialism, differences between global South and North, white saviorism and racism play a more relevant role in my everyday life and have become more tangible than they probably would have otherwise become in my privileged world. –“F”⁸

Ecumenical networks for young adults like the different UEM youth networks are places where these young people stay in contact with each other, exchange information about ecumenical topics, and feel welcomed. Amplifying factors, according to the survey participants, are: relationships which are not based on cultural differences but common interests (“B”); global friends who moved to Germany or met in Germany (“C,” “D”); transcultural marriages (“G”); and encounters through organized intercultural programs (“A,” “F,” “H,” “I”).

The continuous natural exchange about life and own interests is a characteristic of transcultural relationships. Transculturalism implies not only a particular encounter, but it expresses the fact that processes of interweaving, translation, and appropriation, for example, take place in encounters between people with various cultural contexts.⁹ Content is discussed together, and new ideas and approaches are developed through equal negotiations. Transcultural relationships differ from intercultural encounters in that the participants not only get to know foreign contexts through these encounters, but the encounters permanently shape current life together through mutual influence. Increased global movement of people and information influences the young generation’s life experiences. Programs for long-term exchanges and short-term encounters affect the youths’ horizons and the awareness of being part of a transformative community with certain cultural, theological, and ethical impacts. Social media enables lively intercultural friendships through digital sharing of daily life, global learning, and common faith. Moreover, living together with migrants and youth of second and later generations, or identifying oneself with one of these groups, affects changing societies, global connectivity, and ideas.

Transcultural relationships, including their global-inclusive worldviews, are significant for the young generation, which I call “generation equity.”¹⁰ This is what young people bring anew into worldwide ecumenism: their common transculturalism and the resulting awareness of global equity in all dimensions of life, including power and hierarchies.

8 This comment has been translated into English by the author with the permission of the participant.

9 See Klaus Hock, “Transkulturation und Religionsgeschichte,” in *Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Michael Stausberg (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

10 This description is based on various informal discussions of young adults, in which I participated.

THE CALL TO EQUITY: NEW PERSPECTIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN ECUMENISM

The respondents are primarily engaged in the following global issues: racism/postcolonial studies, human rights/justice, partnerships, and climate justice. Consumption-critical actions and the deconstruction of stereotypes and racism are mentioned as part of everyday life reflections. The new perspective that young people bring to ecumenism is the pursuit of stringent equality and justice in all parts of life and societal systems. As previously shown, this engagement is promoted through transcultural networks and connections, in which the topics are negotiated. Moreover, the perspectives are not limited to church encounters, but are interwoven with societal and political engagements.

Many, mostly youth and young adults in Germany, including young Christians, engage in particular political and social discourses like climate change (for example, #FridaysForFuture), in racism (such as #blacklivesmatter) as well as in migration politics (for example, #leavenoonebehind). Through simultaneous regional demonstrations and the use of digital media, these mostly-youth-based movements, which are attended by other generations, have connected globally.

In general, many young people increasingly understand themselves as citizens of the world, and their own national awareness becomes less important as they go their own, political way.¹¹ They are active in particular demonstrations, petitions, boycotts and internet campaigns.¹² But it is important to note that there is also, in contrast, a growing tendency toward a cultural-essentialist understanding focusing on nationalism.¹³ The tension between these two tendencies can be seen in political movements like the young climate movement and Black Lives Matter on the one hand, and increasing national-centered and xenophobic or anti-pandemic-movements, on the other.

The participants of the case study reported that global connections and relationships result in a “longing for equality and relationships” (“A”). “B” reflects this challenge also with a focus on intergenerational conflicts:

Topics, such as racism have been discussed throughout times in different ways and with different focus. Not being part of the long discourse but rather be involved in current insights means to see things much more future-related. We don't have to unlearn what was believed to be right 20 years ago. The challenge is to bring the “older” experienced perspectives together with the “young” ideas and create a common future perspective.... Our experiences of international exchanges happened in a rather globalized world.... We experienced

11 See Luisa Bischoff, “Die Neue Protestkultur der Jungen Wilden,” *zukunftsInstitut*, (April 2017), <https://www.zukunftsinstitut.de/artikel/die-neue-protestkultur-der-jungen-wilden/>.

12 See Martina Gille, “Jugend und Politik—ein Schwieriges Verhältnis,” *DJI Impulse: Das Forschungsmagazin des Deutschen Jugendinstituts* 119, no. 1 (2018).

13 See Andreas Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019), 372.

young adults worldwide rather as “equal” but as “the other” because we were sensitized to topics of racism and asymmetrical relationships. We learned to reflect our experiences very critical along with those focusses. The vision young adults bring to the worldwide community is (at least from my perspective) to work self-critically towards equality.... This might be idealistic or utopian but nevertheless as young adults we try to come closer to this vision.

The described postcolonial consciousness is not new, but people are becoming increasingly aware that a postcolonial reappraisal does not consist solely of giving space to the previously and unjustifiably marginalized.

The main young ecumenical generation in Germany has a cosmopolitan, global self-understanding. They are mostly living a political, self-critical, and global Christianity. Within this global perspective they are very sensitive and reflect on inequalities and exclusions concerning structures, representations, powers, and all issues of life. Even if they are also challenged by contrary movements, there is a call for equity coming from the young ecumenists.

POSTCOLONIAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND RESPONSIBILITIES: TRANSFORMATIONAL POTENTIALITIES FOR THE ECUMENICAL FUTURE

The need to deconstruct and overcome racism and exclusivism in societies and churches has been emphasized by the Black Lives Matter movement that originated in the USA and has become a global phenomenon. Despite the fact that it is only since the movement that racism as a societal problem has been critically discussed by the German public, the critique of racism and postcolonialism has been a relevant topic at least since the end of the colonial era.

Theologians from the global South and those who grew up in a white-dominated society have brought their perspectives and postcolonial theologies to the discourse. Postcolonial theories written by Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak¹⁴ criticized the unreflective Eurocentrism and its scientific heritage and thus triggered various cultural turns.¹⁵ The upcoming sensitivity for the fluidity and hybridity of cultures, and their ability to move and transform, correlates with the slowly developing awareness of white privilege and agency in theological discourse. Michael Biehl, Hanna Stahl, and Klaus Vellguth have summarized it pointedly:

14 See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson et. al. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

15 See Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006).

Whereas the churches of the South realised early on that the theologies they formulated were always influenced by their respective contexts, numerous theologians from Europe and North America still cling at the outset of the 21st century to the illusion that the theologies formulated in their own context have a universal claim to the truth. In epistemological terms, such theologians in Europe need to make up lost ground to avoid future generations categorising this theological and ecclesiastical Eurocentrism as theological provincialism.¹⁶

In 2016, the United Church of Christ published the curriculum *White Privilege: Let's Talk*, which was translated into German last year.¹⁷ The curriculum is addressed to white people and reflects on racism and one's own shared responsibility to overcome it. Currently, numerous scientific and public books and essays are appearing on the subject of racism. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPoCs) tell their stories and experiences in the public and in churches, and the postcolonial heritage is being negotiated in science. White people are starting to think about their own privileges in society and church. Susan Durber, for example, reflects on her position as a white, privileged women in her 2020 article, "White Daughter of Empire."¹⁸

The discourse in white privilege must be conducted at both the scientific and ecclesiastical-practical levels because it affects all dimensions of life. It can be seen as the other side of postcolonial theologies and voices from the global South and BIPoC's in the midst of our societies.

Racism and postcolonial consciousness are not the only paradigms in the call for equity. They relate to other issues like gender justice, the justice for LGBTQ+ people, and climate justice. The relationships of multiple exclusions can be summed up in the term *intersectionality*. Kimberle Crenshaw used the term to address the double exclusion of black woman from feminist discourse – because they are black; and from racial discourse – because they are women.¹⁹ Intersectionality emphasizes the interrelationship of different inequalities.

It is significant that most of the young adults who were interviewed are aware of their postcolonial consciousness and responsibility. These young generations demand equity at all levels. They understand that this also means renouncing power in favor of equal

16 Michael Biehl, Hanna Stahl, and Klaus Vellguth, "Towards an Ecumenical Missiology," in *Witnessing Christ. Contextual and Interconfessional Perspectives on Christology*, ed. Michael Biehl et al. (Stuttgart: W. Kolhammer, 2020), 19.

17 Traci Blackmon, et al., *White Privilege: Let's Talk. A Resource for Transformational Dialogue* (Cleveland: United Church of Christ, 2016).

18 Susan Durber, "White Daughter of Empire: A Pilgrim of Justice and Peace Owning White Privilege," *Ecumenical Review* 72, no. 1 (2020).

19 Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 139–67.

distribution in the areas of climate, society, politics, and economics; and equal representation in structures and institutions, decisions, and power as well as its intersectional interweavings. Therefore, many young people in Europe are changing their lifestyles and thinking about reducing Europeans' power and hegemony in the interest of working toward real equality and fairness as a communal lifelong learning process. With those commitments, youth are challenging their own congregations and creating transformational potential within the ecumenical movement. Overriding the historical heritage of structural injustice and racism is one main approach of young adults in Germany today.

FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR CHURCHES

The case study described here has shown that young people bring their own perspectives to ecumenism. Intercultural exchanges and transcultural relationships shape their vision and commitment. It has become clear that ecumenism is not seen as only one concern of churches next to others, but is integral to all parts of church activities and developing theologies. This vision can be summarized in the call for equity in all dimensions of life. Of course, this concern is closely linked to engagements of the older generations, but with innovative insights. The call for equity necessitates a changing process inside our churches in three points:

1. Listening to the stories and theologies that excluded and marginalized people tell in our local environment and worldwide.
2. Reflecting on one's own privileges and exclusivism in the context of historical and structural injustice, understood as a communal lifelong learning process.
3. Working out new visions together while reflecting on current implicit and explicit agencies in our church as an institution, as community in Christ, and as a social actor in the public sphere.

Being part of the worldwide community of churches means widening our own perspectives on the identities, experiences and worldviews of our sisters and brothers from abroad and in the midst of our society toward equity in all dimensions of life.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

A HEALING GENERATION

FRASER J. OATES

There is latent potential in the younger generations of Christians today to transform the ecumenical movement and lead the Church into a new season of love, dialogue, and reconciliation. In the Western world, young people are shaped by societies where equality, diversity, and inclusivity are prominent cultural trends. Young people are also on the frontlines of social and political change, lobbying against systemic corruption, xenophobia, inequality, and exploitation of the planet. Although the impetus underlying these trends is mostly secular, the present cultural climate is characterized by discontent and a yearning for renewal. This setting presents a significant opportunity for reconciliation and revitalization within the Church, and the gritty resolve of today's young people suggests that young Christians are best placed to lead the charge. As it stands, however, it appears that there is a chasm between the formal organizations working to facilitate deepening ecumenical relationships and the ordinary believers—those who frequent their local churches, who serve in their local communities, and who bear witness to the gospel in their neighbourhoods. Considering the future of the ecumenical movement, efforts must be redirected to the local church context and young people must be placed at the centre of the strategy.

THIS CULTURAL MOMENT

In the Western world today, the dominant progressive agenda is campaigning for equality and unity in diversity, centred around the rights of the individual. This has brought relief and a new lease on life for many groups who have been oppressed in previous generations. It has brought forth a new understanding of liberty, free from the powers of organized religion. There is a sense of irony here, given that the gospel of Christ is the true gateway to human liberty. However, the metanarrative of the secular Western worldview is that every individual has the right to express themselves however they wish, as long as it does not cause harm to another person: “the right of every human being to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others.”¹ In such an environment, claims to absolute morality and authority are rejected, and so the Church stands at a crossroad, where at the very least it has to rediscover its place within a rapidly

1 “The Amsterdam Declaration 2002,” Humanists International, <https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration/#IHEU%20Congress%C2%A02002>.

changing world. For the sake of its mission, the Church is being forced to consider what parts of its life and doctrine can be reshaped. Further still, modern secular voices readily, and often rightly, highlight present and historic failings of the Church. Atrocities such as child sexual abuse and participation in the transatlantic slave trade erode the integrity and mission of the Church and drive the Church to repentance and self-repair. The hope and freedom advertised by the modern secular agenda attempts to replace religion and make it redundant by exposing the failures of religious institutions. In this cultural moment, there are marches celebrating new-found freedoms and ongoing demonstrations advocating for new civil liberties. At the heart of this are young people. A recent study by the Pew Research Center has shown that Generation Z (those born after 1996) and Millennials (those born between 1981–1996) are very much alike.² Both generations are progressive; they are supporters of growing racial and ethnic diversity, more readily accepting of climate change, more likely to acknowledge racial inequality, supportive of gender equality; and they see societal change as a good thing. The Pew study notes that Generation Z's "political clout" will impact the world in the coming years as more individuals reach voting age. According to such research, young people today are influential, progressive, well educated, and they are increasingly making themselves heard. Pioneers such as Greta Thunberg are examples of how young people are ready to fight against systems, governments, and corporations for the sake of the natural world and the wellbeing of future generations.³ Likewise, young people have been central to the Black Lives Matter protests, fighting against the long history of racial injustice and prejudice.⁴ Young people today are zealous and active, and they are fighting for a freedom and future that excludes God.

Inevitably, the wider cultural zeitgeist has implications for the Church. As a result, Christians have been made aware of how the Church has failed in its mission and has lacked integrity, and they have instinctively rediscovered that equality and freedom of expression are actually fundamental components of the gospel. What is important to highlight, as the Church attempts to reconcile itself to the world, is the fact that in many ways the secular cultural narrative resonates with the Christian gospel and the mission of the Church. Notably, three of the five Anglican "Marks of Mission" align comfortably with the present-day cultural trends in the Western world:

- 3) to respond to human need by loving service;
- 4) to transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation;

2 Kim Parker, Nikki Graf, and Ruth Igielnik, "Generation Z Looks a Lot Like Millennials on Key Social and Political Issues," Pew Research Centre, 17 January 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/01/17/generation-z-looks-a-lot-like-millennials-on-key-social-and-political-issues/>.

3 Greta Thunberg, *No One Is too Small to Make a Difference* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2019).

4 Jessica Murray and Aamna Mohdin, "It Was Empowering": Teen BLM Activists on Learning the Ropes at School Climate Strikes," *The Guardian*, 11 August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/11/school-strikes-were-empowering-teen-black-lives-matter-activists-on-their-environmental-awakening-extinction-rebellion>.

5) to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation.”⁵

However, it needs to be made clear that the secular agenda is *not* rooted in Christian orthodoxy and its trajectory is *not* towards the glory and purposes of God. The good news of the Christian faith is that all people are invited into a new covenant of communion with God through Christ’s atoning sacrifice, and the liberty offered through this gospel is unto the glory of God, not human aggrandizement. The gospel presents a paradox: the freedom extended to humanity through Christ’s atonement demands a reciprocal posture of humility and self-sacrifice as modelled by Jesus throughout his life and death. Thus, the secular agenda and the Christian gospel disagree on the very definition of freedom as well as its implementation. As such, the first two Anglican Marks of Mission are uniquely Christian and ignored by secular culture:

- 1) To proclaim the good news of the kingdom,
- 2) to teach, baptize and nurture new believers.

Therefore, as the Church responds to the erosion of Christendom and the progressive anthropocentric worldview, it must maintain its distinctiveness as the holy people of God, and resist assimilating to the false image of liberty advertised by the secular world. The Church must recognize the subtle overlap between the secular agenda and Christian mission to ensure that the secular promotion of liberty is not blindly equated with the liberty found in Christ. To this end, the Church must learn to take the discipleship of young people seriously. Young Christians today have an innate potential to be tenacious protagonists of peace, to catalyze the ecumenical movement, and transform the world around them. Churches and denominations must educate and equip young people so that their zeal is channelled in a wholly Christian way, rather than marching to the beat of a godless world. It is vital that young believers are not sidelined or merely consulted on ecumenical issues; rather they should be placed at the very heart of the movement: “The Church must learn to take youth seriously, not only within the sphere of the Church, but as actual or potential missionaries in the world outside the Church.”⁶

A SURVEY IN CONTEXT

To help substantiate the thesis set out here, a qualitative survey in context was undertaken. The research entailed purposive, maximum variation sampling to collect a broad range of data from a variety of people from different Christian denominations. The sampling included 35 Christian individuals from eight church denominations and inde-

5 “Marks of Mission,” Anglican Communion, accessed October 2020, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>.

6 *Minutes and Reports of the Second Meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, Held at Chichester (England), 9–15 July 1949* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1949), 31, <https://archive.org/details/secondmeetingofc00unse/page/n11mode/2up>.

pendent churches in England.⁷ It was a priority within the sampling methodology to gather data from individuals of different ages, genders, and ethnicities. Thus, the individuals who participated were aged between 15 and 63, male and female,⁸ and from black, white, and mixed ethnic groups.⁹ Furthermore, as part of the sampling methodology, data was gathered from a mix of lay and ordained persons. Two of the participants were ordained—one a minister in the Methodist Church, and another a priest in the Roman Catholic Church—and one participant was training for ordained ministry in the Church of England. The remainder were lay people. The main purpose of this survey was to quantify and bolster presuppositions concerning the current situation of the ecumenical movement in England, particularly in regard to young people. Hence, it was also of major importance to collect data from participants categorized by age: under 30 (the World Council of Churches (WCC) categorizes young people as those aged 18–30) and over 30.

The interview was semi-structured, and individuals were asked questions concerning their perspectives on secular culture, church unity, and involvement in ecumenical activity. This was done via an online survey which allowed participants to reflect on their responses. The data was analyzed thematically to identify repetitions, similarities and differences, and missing data. The findings are summarized below and will help inform the conclusions and recommendations of this paper.

What characteristics of our modern-day culture do you think are worth celebrating? What causes do you believe to be worth fighting for?

According to the whole range of contributors, the key characteristics of contemporary society recognized as worth celebrating were equality, inclusion, and community. Likewise, causes considered to be worth fighting for centred upon the remediation of systemic injustice and discrimination. There was unanimous affirmation of society's quest for togetherness and the fight against sources of division and oppression. These issues are not only significant to younger generations of Christians; they are priorities within the older generations of believers too.

How important do you consider inclusivity and tolerance?

The ideas of inclusivity and tolerance were deemed important by all participants. They were considered important because of how they are intrinsically connected to human dignity and the proffering of equal opportunities. A theme in the responses was the identification of *tolerance* as passive, and *inclusivity* as active. Within the over-30 age group, inclusivity and tolerance were deemed important without challenge or question.

7 The church affiliations of survey respondents: Baptist, Church of England, Elim Pentecostal Church, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Vineyard, Independent Charismatic Evangelical, and Independent Evangelical (Reformed Baptist).

8 The gender ratio of survey respondents: Female, 22; Male, 13.

9 The racial identification of survey respondents: White, 33; Black, 1; Mixed ethnicity, 1.

In the under-30 age group, however, 6 of 21 included a proviso that tolerance and inclusivity cannot be unrestricted concepts. These individuals said that without boundaries to the themes of inclusivity and tolerance, the beliefs of the Christian faith are diluted. Similarly, it was stated that absolute tolerance requires unquestioned toleration of all behaviour and actions, which was deemed unfeasible. Further still, one participant stated that an endorsement of complete tolerance requires an intolerance of intolerance, which is a logical contradiction, and so, therefore, boundaries must exist. The younger contingent appears to have a more critical approach to the concepts of inclusivity and tolerance, although they are not dismissive of their importance.

How important is your denomination to you and why? Have you ever belonged to a different denomination? If so, what were your reasons for changing?

Twelve of the 35 participants communicated that their denomination held value for them. The reasoning given included personal familiarity, confidence in the denomination's expression of orthodoxy, and appreciation of the denomination as a facilitator of Christian communion and a necessary institutional framework. Twenty-three of the 35 have belonged to more than one denomination in their lifetime, primarily due to changing life circumstances. The four contributors from the Roman Catholic Church were more forthright about their affiliation to their denomination, chiefly because they were raised in it and feel comfortable with its practices and beliefs. None of these four had transitioned between denominations. Of note, within the under-30 age bracket, 10 of the 23 participants said that their denomination was not important to them, some choosing to simply identify as "Christian."

The survey respondents expressed a wide range of feelings towards the concept of church denominationalism, but it can be said of all participants that there is a strong sense of mutual respect towards others. Amongst the whole age range, there is an openness to other Christian traditions and a fluidity of association between Christian denominations. Markedly, for the majority of young people, "Christian" appears to be the main label by which they choose to be identified, leaving denominational identification as secondary or even irrelevant. It would be naïve to dismiss the complexity and difficulty that has shaped the Christian church over the centuries, a history that has left the church fractured and scarred. However, there appears to be an openness at present to move beyond the lingering history of division. This may be due to a lack of education relating to church history or denominational doctrinal positions, but nonetheless, this untrodden path, where the dust of historic conflict has now settled, presents an opportunity for fresh engagement and deeper unity. There stands in full view an open door into a new era of the Christian church, characterized by healing, solidarity, creativity, and determined efforts towards a more fully realized one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Considering the shape of modern Western culture – and in particular, the qualities and ethos of the younger generations – young people, with help and encouragement, are perhaps best placed to take the first steps and lead an expedition across this uncharted landscape.

Do you believe church unity is important, and why? What is your experience of church unity/ecumenism?

What emerged unequivocally from the survey was that all participants, of all ages, believed Christian unity to be important. Participants expressed concern for the current state of the church and expressed a desire to be more collaborative and supportive of one another, particularly for the sake of mission and evangelism. Participants also valued unity as a means of enriching Christian spirituality; they deemed ecclesial unity as important because it has such a strong focus in scripture. It needs to be noted that there were nuances in the understanding of Church unity. For example, one participant said that unity doesn't equate to uniformity, reminiscent of St Paul's illustration of the Church as a body (1 Cor. 12), which establishes the idea that difference is held together purposefully in the community of faith. Another participant stated that Church unity can only be tolerated within the parameters of Christian orthodoxy. This individual, in the over-30 category, had not expressed this concern in their response to the earlier question regarding inclusivity and tolerance, which suggests some confusion or contradictory logic. Individual experiences of ecumenical activity ranged from none to limited and lukewarm. Some participants noted that community projects and ecumenical prayer gatherings happened on occasion, whereas others noted ecumenism as a minor concern of their church leaders. Other participants were aware of negative attitudes towards other denominations from within their congregation. Yet, within all this there was a general tone of optimism and hopefulness about ecumenical activity, albeit accompanied by a desire for something more authentic and intentional than has been experienced.

Another unequivocal response from the survey was that no participants had heard of or had experience of either the modern ecumenical movement or the WCC. Only the two ordained participants in the over-30 age category referenced Churches Together in Britain and Ireland or the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.¹⁰ For some reason, the modern ecumenical movement is invisible to the majority of survey participants. As far as Christian young people are concerned, they are not presently active or aware of the modern ecumenical movement. There is a clot somewhere in the systems and structures of modern ecumenical movement that is stemming the flow of vision and resources from reaching those who are best placed to effectuate church unity on the ground. Consequentially, the young people of today are unknowingly on the fringes of the ecumenical movement and unable to fulfil their innate potential as catalysts for change. If today's ecumenical movement is to remain modern, it needs to engage the breadth of the church, not least the young people who have the capacity and resolve to continue the faithful work of previous generations.

10 For more information, see the websites of these organizations: <https://ctbi.org.uk/> and <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en.html>.

GOING FORWARD

The objective of this chapter is to identify the tenacious and reconciliatory nature of young people today and the related potential of young Christians to lead the Church into a new era of healing. As such, young Christians should be at the centre of the ecumenical movement. Secondly, a supposition substantiated through the survey in context, is that there is a lack of awareness of the modern ecumenical movement, particularly at the parochial level, and therefore the strategy of the ecumenical movement needs to be recentred to the local church context, where ecumenism is practised and experienced.

The young Dietrich Bonhoeffer's critique of the ecumenical movement in 1932 highlighted the need for the movement to form a theological groundwork.¹¹ Additionally, Bonhoeffer was adamant that "the will to unify should be practiced ... even in the smallest congregations."¹² For Bonhoeffer, the ecumenical movement needed to be theologically grounded and inseparably coupled with praxis. In 1959, Visser't Hooft picked up from Bonhoeffer's lingering challenge to say, "We need a theology which will help us to bridge the gulf between our theory and our practice – a theology which answers the questions: What is it that makes the ecumenical movement move? How does unity grow?"¹³ At the WCC Harare assembly in 1998 – 66 years on from Bonhoeffer's critique – a succinct and theologically rich vision was formed which asserted that the self-understanding of the WCC is found in "one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world."¹⁴ A theological cornerstone was laid that may have satisfied Bonhoeffer and Visser't Hooft's concerns regarding the undergirding theology of the ecumenical movement. However, two decades later, in 2019, the (now former) general secretary of the WCC, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit said, "I have become more and more aware that our theology, and particularly our reflections on reconciliation and unity, are not abstract issues and objectives."¹⁵ From the engine room of the modern ecumenical movement, there is still a lingering sense of the truth of Bonhoeffer's critique: namely that ordinary believers in the "smallest congregations" are unaware of its work. This was substantiated in the survey, which revealed that for Christians in local church contexts today, ecumenism remains unguided and idealistic. Nearly a century later, a gulf still exists between theory and practice. But who is best placed to build a bridge? What would this look like and how would it work? When should this work take place?

11 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Vol. 11, *Ecumenical, Academic, and Pastoral Work: 1931–1932*, ed. Amelung Eberhard, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 368.

12 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Vol. 1, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, ed. Clifford J. Green (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 202–3.

13 Willem A. Visser't Hooft, *The Pressure of Our Common Calling* (London: SCM Press, 1959), 14.

14 WCC, *An Ecumenical Journey: A Timeline of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, n.d.), accessed October 2020, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/File/riverchart_brochure-web.pdf.

15 Olav Fykse Tveit, "What's Love Got to Do with It?: The Ecumenical Future of the Churches," inaugural Michael Huffington Lecture, 3 April 2019 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2019), <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/whats-love-got-to-do-with-it-the-ecumenical-future-of-the-churches>.

The first sparks of the modern ecumenical movement were active and resolute young people.¹⁶ Tenacity is a timeless characteristic of the younger generations and because of this, young people are best placed to bridge the gulf between theory and practice that has long existed in the ecumenical movement. The present situation suggests that if young people were to forge fresh expressions of eucharistic fellowship, worship, common life, witness, and service to the world, older generations would be unlikely to brand them as anarchists since, according to this survey, they share equal concern for church unity. Although there is irrefutable value in the existence and history of Christian denominations, the scene is set – here and now – for bold exploration, uncomfortable experimentation, and new tangible efforts towards Christian unity.

Theologically speaking, young people are not merely the “next” generation, or a consultative group, they are equal and vital members of the Church. The zeitgeist of today’s Western world is focussed heavily upon inclusivity and equality. Although this is in some ways deleterious to the gospel of Jesus Christ and driven by motives antithetical to Christianity, it provides a setting whereby young Christians are primed to effect a new season of reconciliation and togetherness in the Church. Young people are involved in the upper institutional mechanisms of the WCC, but on the ground, young people are on the fringes of the ecumenical movement. Now is the time to envision and empower young people to be vocal and active in the ecumenical movement. Now is the time to shift the centre of ecumenical efforts to the local church context. Visser’t Hooft said that “ecumenism must begin at home, that is within each congregation, each church,”¹⁷ and over 60 years later this concept still seems so distant. Young people today are primed and strategically placed in their local contexts to help lead the Church into a new era of Christian unity. Young people today have the potential to be a healing generation.

“Great possibilities are presented by the development of a generation of young people who take the ecumenical movement seriously and have experience of it.”

—WCC Central Committee, 1949

16 “History,” World Council of Churches, accessed October 2020, <https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc/history>.

17 Visser’t Hooft, *The Pressure of Our Common Calling*, 77.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX YOUTH IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT: HISTORY AND POTENTIAL FUTURE

IULIU-MARIUS MORARIU

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the ecumenical movement, the Romanian Orthodox Church has been an active part of it. A Romanian Orthodox delegation took part in the ecumenical meeting organized by Bishop Nathan Soderblom in 1925,¹ and later on, people such as Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan from Sibiu had a rich correspondence with him.

Later on, during the interwar period, there were different attitudes regarding potential openness on the part of the Orthodox Church. While some of the intellectuals of the far right, currently known as Christian nationalists,² were totally against cooperating with the rest of the Christian world, the Church, the bishops and most of the theologians were open to dialogue and to an ecumenical exchange of experience.³ During the communist period, there were different attitudes due to the complicated context of that

1 For more information regarding Soderblom's activity and relationship with the Romanian Orthodox Church, see Macarie Drăgoi, ed., *Artisan of Christian Unity between North and East: Nathan Soderblom. His Correspondence with Orthodox Personalities, 1896–1931* (Stockholm: Felicitas Publishing House, 2014); Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Artisan of Christian Unity between North and East: Nathan Soderblom," *Transylvanian Review* 26, no. 3 (2017): 154–55.

2 See Morariu, *The "CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM" of Nichifor Crainic Reflected in His Work from the 4th Decade of the 20th Century* (Cluj-Napoca: Cluj University Press, 2020); Lucian N. Leustean, "For the Glory of Romanians': Orthodoxy and Nationalism in Greater Romania, 1918–1945," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 35, no. 4 (2007): 717–42.

3 Such an example, which pictures a young man as a protagonist, is provided by Ionuț Biliuța in one of his investigations: "In 1932, in the Mândra village, a young student in Theology in Sibiu, Valeriu Beleuță, commenced publishing a local legionary newspaper named Legiunea [The Legion]. His decision to promote such a publication in a mainly rural area was related to the propagandistic agenda of the Iron Guard, encouraging the release of publications and newspapers imagined as catechisms of the movement to promote its political agenda among the large masses of the population" (Ionuț Biliuța, "The Ultranationalist Newsroom: Orthodox 'Ecumenism' in the Legionary Ecclesiastical Newspapers," *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 10, no. 2 (August 2018), 194.

time.⁴ The Romanian Orthodox Church joined the World Council of Churches in 1961, together with other churches and tried to actively take part in all its important events. It responded to the WCC statement “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” (BEM),⁵ it sent delegates to meetings and congresses, and tried to promote the ecumenical values in its life and activity. Unfortunately, as in other communist countries, the participation of the Church in ecumenical activities was sometimes used by the communist regime in order to simulate freedom, transparency, and democracy and after 1989, this gave birth to a segment of fundamentalist faithful who have opposed cooperation and communion inside the Christian family. Nonetheless, until now, despite the fear that they managed to create (which gravitates around the idea of ecumenism, seen as pan-hereticon), there is great openness and availability towards ecumenical dialogue on the part of the Orthodox Church.

Youth formed an important segment of those contributing to ecumenical development. As expected, young people are more open to novelty and dialogue, in contrast to the elderly, who are often more conservative. For this reason, in many situations, the success of dialogue or of an ecumenical enterprise was encouraged by the participation of a Romanian delegation made up of young theologians who had previously studied abroad in a Catholic or Protestant space.

However, if reading this chapter dedicated to the participation of the youth in the ecumenical movement leads to the expectation of finding a clear and well-defined plan that makes young people take part in practical actions or encourages them to organize their own activities, one will definitely be disappointed. In the investigation of such a topic, the researcher suffers not only from a lack of resources, but also because the presence and work of the Romanian Orthodox youth in the Ecumenical landscape is only occasional. Despite this, there are important aspects and contributions which should not be neglected. In order to present them, we will resort to different books and articles which speak about ecumenism in the Romanian space, and we will offer to the reader the landmarks of the cooperation which exists between young people and the ecumenical movement.

THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX YOUTH IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT: HISTORY AND POTENTIAL FUTURE

The ecumenical activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church was previously presented in different syntheses or in the works of theologians such as Metropolitan Nifon Mihăiță from Târgoviște.⁶ In a summary, Nifon Ploiesteanu states:

4 See Anca Șincan, “Inventing Ecumenism? Inter-Confessional Dialogue in Transylvania, Romania in the 1960s,” *Religion in Eastern Europe* 26, no. 3 (August 2006):1–16.

5 Max Thurian, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM*, vol. 3, *Official Responses to the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” Text*, Faith and Order Paper No. 135 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987), 4–14.

6 Nifon Ploiesteanu, “The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement: An Assessment of 25 Years of Membership in WCC,” *The Ecumenical Review* 39 (1987): 352–55.

The Romanian Church has participated since 1961 in all the studies and consultations, promoting the search for unity in faith and witness, for solidarity in justice and service, for participation in education and renewal. The themes of the Assemblies: “Jesus Christ, the Light of the World,” New Delhi, 1961; “I Make All Things New,” Uppsala, 1968; “Jesus Christ Frees and Unites,” Nairobi, 1975; “Jesus Christ, the Life of the World,” Vancouver, 1983, were well prepared by the Romanian theologians and specialists. The above themes were first discussed and elaborated in the country in the framework of the interconfessional conferences (an informal national ecumenical structure), and then presented to the working committee of the respective Assemblies. Not for the sake of statistics, but for underlining the sense of responsibility felt by the Romanian Church we mention that the findings of these conferences met with the appreciation of many ecumenical theologians and thinkers.⁷

Ecumenical meetings often represented a context for young Romanian Orthodox theologians to discover each other, to understand ecumenism at the grassroots and to be apostles of love and dialogue when they went back into their countries. At the same time, the ecumenical context provided prominent researchers such as Father Ioan Bria⁸ with a framework in which young people could study and get in contact with the ecumenical realities in spaces such as the Anglican one. Later on, Father Bria became a man committed to ecumenism, and his approach to the “liturgy after liturgy”⁹ contributed to the development of ecumenical dialogue. There were many others like him.

The Bossey Ecumenical Institute, sometimes called the “laboratory of ecumenical life,”¹⁰ was also a space for young people’s formation in the spirit of ecumenism. As can be seen

7 Ploiesteanu, “The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Movement,” 353.

8 See Morariu, “A Romanian Contribution to Contemporary Ecumenism. Father Ion Bria: 1929–2002,” *The Ecumenical Review* 71, nos. 1–2 (April 2019): 205–15. For more information about his life and activity, see also: Mircea Păcurariu, “Bria, Ion,” in *Encyclopaedia of Romanian Orthodoxy*, coord. Mircea Păcurariu (Bucharest: Press of Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 2010), 104–5; Nicolae Moșoiu, coord., *The Relevance of Reverend Professor Ion Bria’s Work for Contemporary Society and for the Life of the Church: New Directions in the Research of Church Doctrine, Mission, and Unity* (Sibiu: Andreiana Press, 2010); and Daniel Buda, “The Relevance of Reverend Professor Ion Bria’s Work for Contemporary Society and for the Life of the Church,” *The Ecumenical Review* 62, no. 4 (2010): 433–35.

9 Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996); Ion Bria, “The Liturgy after the Liturgy,” *International Review of Mission* 67, no. 265 (1978): 86–90.

10 See Hans-Ruedi Weber, *The Story of Bossey: A Laboratory for Ecumenical Life*, updated by Robert K. Welsh, foreword by Rev. Dagmar Heller (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2016).

from the lists and the research previously published,¹¹ it was not only the place where a Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church taught,¹² and the director of the Institute, Fr Ioan Saucă, received his formation, but also a space where a lot of future leaders of the church and professors got in contact with ecumenism at its very core. Between 1963 and 2002, there were 60 Romanian students at the Institute. Fifty-five were Orthodox and 6 of them became bishops who promoted ecumenism in the Romanian context. Others were notable professors and theologians. Thus, the Romanian Orthodox youth got involved in the educational process and, after going back to Romania, became apostles of peace and love, doing what was possible in the communist context.

After 1989, the proximity to places with an ecumenical vocation such as Taizé helped the Romanian people to not only get in contact with friends from different cultural spaces and to discover that they shared common values and points of view, but also to bring those young people to discover Romania.¹³ Some of the meetings were even hosted under the umbrella of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate. In spaces such as Transylvania, representatives of the ecumenical movement and those from other Christian backgrounds can easily discover that although they have a different denomination and speak different languages, people of all ages are able to live together and to share common values.

Religious orders with ecumenical vocation, such as the Focolare Movement, which also established headquarters in Cluj-Napoca, played a huge role in the meetings of young people and the dialogue around common points of the Christian heritage. In that way, especially after 1989, ecumenism started to become a real journey and not only a way of meeting and saying kind words in an official meeting, sometimes even without a theological background. The famous Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) meetings brought young people together and enabled them not only to develop a dialogue, but also to debate concerns about the future of the ecumenical movement and about the contemporary form of ecumenism.¹⁴ These were real forums where young Romanian Orthodox theologians had the opportunity to make their voices heard and to express their commitment to a better world, where ecumenism must be a main tool.

11 Anu Talvivaara, ed., *50 Years 1952–2002 of Ecumenical Formation at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey: Part of the World Council of Churches Attached to the University of Geneva* (Orthodruk: Białystok, 2003), 38–9. See also Morariu, “Studentii ortodocși români la Institutul Ecumenic din Bossey între anii 1963-2002” (translation: Romanian Orthodox students at the Ecumenical Institute from Bossey between 1963-2002), in *Tinerii istorici și cercetările lor*, vol. 5, ed. Nicolae Dumbrăvescu and Gheorghe Dumbrăvescu (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut Publishing House, 2018), 183–92.

12 For more information regarding this topic, see Maxim Morariu, “Aspecte ale activității PF Părinte Patriarh Daniel la Institutul Ecumenic din Bossey (translation: Aspects of the activity of His Beatitude Daniel at the Ecumenical Institute from Bossey),” in *Renașterea* 28 (2017), 2.

13 “To the Wellsprings of the Romanian Orthodox Tradition,” Taizé, last updated 4 May 2016, https://www.taize.fr/en_article20533.html.

14 For more information on the GETI meetings, see Uta André, Benjamin Simon, and Lars Roser-Israel, eds., *Reforming Theology, Migrating Church, Transforming Society: A Compendium for Ecumenical Education* (Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag, 2017), 324 p.

WHERE DO YOU SEE THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CONTEMPORARY ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT IN ROMANIAN SPACE?: A CHALLENGE FOR TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE

If the aforementioned examples of ecumenism in the Romanian space are positive, it must be noted that there are also negative ones, or at least elements that can be improved. A study aiming to answer a question regarding the future of the work of young people in the ecumenical movement must take into account those aspects too.

During the communist period, an important problem was the lack of freedom of action and expression. The communist regime claimed to be a democratic one, but in fact the Orthodox Church – the majority faith in Romania – did not have the opportunity to work freely, to work with young people, or to host a real ecumenical meeting. There were indeed so-called meetings, but everything took place under the surveillance of the regime and was, one way or another, censored. For this reason, young people could do little except participate in meetings, study abroad, take some small actions in their parishes, or publish brief articles in journals such as *Orthodoxia*.

Moreover, due to the fact that communism used the participation of the Church in order to pretend there was freedom of religion in Romania, many people avoided ecumenism after 1989. Sometimes, when it was possible, young people like Fr André Scrima left the country and became ambassadors of Orthodoxy in an ecumenical context. Therefore, during this period, there was no active ecumenical organization of the youth in Romania. Unfortunately, despite all the attempts, there are still things which must be done. Taizé and the youth who came back from studies carried out in the ecumenical landscape did a lot, promoted ecumenism, and even had debates and fights with the ultra-conservative side. In the Faculties of Orthodox Theology (currently 21),¹⁵ ecumenism and the history of the ecumenical movement is finally an object of study, but much more can be done.

CASE STUDIES: ANDRÉ SCRIMA AND VIRGIL GHEORGHIU, AND THE ECUMENISM OF THE ROMANIAN CLERGYMAN IN EXILE

As has already been mentioned, an important voice both for the Romanian Orthodox Church in exile and for ecumenism, was Fr André Scrima (1925-2000). Born in Gheorgheni, today in Covasna County, he would become one of those who illustrated the force of spiritual ecumenism.¹⁶ After graduating from the Faculty of Philosophy in Bucharest and becoming the assistant professor of the philosopher Anton Dumitriu, he

15 The number has increased since 2001, when a Dutch researcher found about 14 (Huub Vogelaar, "An Ecumenical Journey in Romania: Orthodox-Protestant Relationships since 1989," *Exchange* 33, no. 3 [January 2004], 269–95).

16 See Nicu Dumitraşcu, "André Scrima and the Power of Spiritual Ecumenism," *The Ecumenical Review* 68 (2016): 272–81.

also become the librarian of the Romanian Patriarchate. Here, he also studied theology and received the monastic tonsure. Erudite, he was used by the Patriarch Justinian Marina as a translator when the latter received international guests. Due to the fact that Fr Scrima could speak Sanskrit, on the occasion of a visit made to the aforementioned leader of the Romanian Orthodox Church, he impressed Radjihistan, the vice-president of India, and received a scholarship in Benares in order to attain a PhD dedicated to the comparative theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church and Buddhism. This was the context for his departure in 1956 from Romania.¹⁷ On the road, he visited Mount Athos, the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey (where he stayed for a while), and Paris. After receiving this doctorate, he returned to Paris, where he earned a second degree in theology, and become both a French citizen and the Archimandrite of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople. In this context, he was sent as the personal delegate of the Patriarch Athenagoras¹⁸ to the Second Vatican Council in Rome. As Cardinal Yves Congar remembers, through his erudition and commitment to the dialogue, Fr Scrima made a great impression on the participants there.¹⁹ He also made an attempt to bring the Greek Patriarch to the Council, but, unfortunately, was unsuccessful. Later, he was one of the main organizers of the meeting between the Patriarch and the Pope in Jerusalem and of the lifting of the Anathemas between the two churches.

In his dialogue with both Catholics and Protestants, Fr Scrima tried to present the potential points of dialogue between his and their traditions. After the fall of communism, he retired from teaching (in universities like those of Benares, Le Saulchoir, or Brussels) and returned to Bucharest, in his native country, where he lived out the last years of his life. Here, he was an important presence in ecumenical dialogue in the local context. He was very much appreciated for his ideas and for the way he managed to increase the interest of the local intellectuals in religion. He will remain in the memory of everyone who knew him as an aristocrat and an erudite, always open for dialogue.

Another interesting case study is Fr Virgil Gheorghiu (1916–1992).²⁰ After an interesting life before the Second World War (when as a writer, he received a prize from King Charles the Second), and he was kicked out from the press by the fascist Legionary Movement because he married a Jew. He then went to Zagreb, where he worked in the Romanian Embassy until 23 August 1944. Since he refused to return to Communist

17 Andrei Pleșu, prefață [foreword] to *Timpul Rugului Aprins [Time of the Burning bush]*, by Andrei Scrima (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 1996), 9.

18 Virgil Gheorghiu, *Life of Patriarch Athenagoras [Viața Patriarhului Atenagora]* (Alba-Iulia: Reîntregirea Press, 2009).

19 Jean Puyo, *Une Vie pour la Vérité: Jean Puyo Interroge le Père Congar* (Paris: Editions du Centurion, 1975), 144–48.

20 For more information about Fr Virgil Gheorghiu's life, see Thierry Gillyboeuf, *Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu: Scriitorul Calomniat [Virgil Gheorghiu: Slandered Writer]* (Bucharest: Sophia Press, 2019); Virgil Gheorghiu, *Ispita Libertății: Memorii [The Temptation of Freedom: Memories]*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: All Educational Press, 2002); Virgil Gheorghiu, *Memorii: Martorul Orei 25 [Memories: The Witness of the 25th Hour]* (Bucharest: All Educational Press, 1999); Morariu, "Virgil Gheorghiu's Literary Activity Reflected in Securitate Archives," *Astra Salvensis* 6 (October 2018): 149–55.

Romania, he became part of the exile. After a few years in the prison camp, he lived in Heidelberg for another three years, where he studied theology. In 1948, he arrived in Paris, bringing the manuscript of his masterpiece with him. Published in 1948, *25th Hour* would be translated into 40 languages and transformed the author into a voice known all around the world.

Interestingly, in 1963, Virgil Gheorghiu also became a priest, being ordained by the Archbishop Teofil Ionescu for the Romanians in Paris. In 1968, he joined the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate. In this context, he traveled, giving lectures and attending conferences, speaking about the Orthodox Church, its heritage, and its situation under communism. At the same time, thorough his relationships with personalities like Charles Westphal, he managed to strength the relationships between the Romanian Orthodox Church in exile and the ecumenical movement.

These are only two case studies, two personalities that convey how the Romanian Orthodox Church managed to develop an active presence in the ecumenical field. As young priests and representatives of the youth, these two were only a few of those who developed interesting activities and created bridges between their church and those from other Christian backgrounds.

CONCLUSIONS

As I have tried to show, despite the difficult historical conditions of the past, the Romanian Orthodox youth did get involved in the ecumenical movement. They studied abroad in order to learn the ecumenical realities. They tried to apply what they had learned there and when time allowed, they helped movements such as Taizé, the World Council of Churches, and the Focolare Movement to bring people together and to help them have a better knowledge of the other, of their common values and of the need to see and use them in a responsible way. Recent documents such as *Laudato Si*²¹ or *the documents of the Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete*²² from 2016 have reinforced their efforts and have established directions. However, there are many more things that can be done. In order to convince the sceptics, a huge and sustained activity is necessary, and its main tool must be young people. For this reason, as a young clergyman of my church, I cannot see the future of the ecumenical movement without the involvement of young people. They must be the ones who will prove that a society of love and respect for the other and for his or her values is possible. At the same time, young people represent the future. Without them, it is at least debatable whether there can be a future for ecumenism.

21 http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

22 For more information about the event and its outcomes, see also: <https://www.holycouncil.org/>.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE ECUMENICAL YOUTH AS A POLITICAL AGENT IN BRAZIL

MARIANA JORGE MEDEIROS BATISTA DA SILVA

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this chapter is to describe and analyze the ecumenical initiatives that happened in the 20th century that, from a historical perspective, have helped to develop and strengthen Brazilian democracy. This brief study seeks to analyze the role played by ecumenical institutions and organizations, originating from distinct religious contexts, in the fight for rights and public policies in Brazil. This text also briefly discusses some of the more pertinent challenges faced by the ecumenical movement during this fight, such as repression from political and other church forces.

I cannot possibly introduce the ecumenical movement that emerged in Brazil and Abya Yala in the 1950s, without referring and relating it to the Latin American context and to the international ecumenical movement—especially the inspiration of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Originating from the New Testament and surviving crisis and rupture, the most ancient aspirations for unity in the church of Christ emerged from the desire to build a world of solidarity and fraternity. This aspiration can be easily observed in the ecumenical youth groups referred to in this chapter, such as the União Cristã de Estudantes do Brasil (Christian Union of Brazilian Students) and the Centro Evangélico de Documentação e Informação (Evangelical Centre of Documentation and Information).

It is first important to explain that the genesis of the Brazilian people was marked by heterogeneity. To elaborate on this, I rely on the words of Darcy Ribeiro, a Brazilian anthropologist, in the book *O Povo Brasileiro*, in which he states that Brazil has a “culture made of patchwork.”¹ In other words, the country is the result of the matches and mismatches of Indigenous peoples, African cultures, and Portuguese settlers. Perhaps, that is one of the Brazilian people’s natural endowments: to reconcile diversity. And, in that,

1 Darcy Ribeiro (1922–1997) was a Brazilian anthropologist, writer, and politician. His research is known for its focus on Indigenous peoples and education in the country. His ideas of a Latin American identity influenced the research of several other Latin American scholars. His words, quoted here, are from *O Povo Brasileiro: A Formação e o Sentido do Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995), Page 312.

the ecumenical movement played an important role, as it is not only our culture that is made of patchwork, but also our religiosity.

Lastly, I note that, throughout the following, I refer to the Latin American territory as *Abya Yala*. The word comes from the language of the Kuna people, who have traditionally inhabited northern Colombia. It means “mature earth,” “living earth,” or “flourishing earth,” and is a synonym for America. In this context, *Abya Yala* has been recently used by Indigenous people to name this territory, as opposed to the use of America, an expression that, although used for the first time in 1507 by the cosmologist Martin Wakdseemüller, only became popular in the transition from the 18th to the 19th century. This happened as the mixed elites tried to claim the land in opposition to the European conquerors in their independence process. The use of *Abya Yala* by Indigenous people aims to convey a feeling of unity and belonging, and that is the reason why I adopt it in my writing.

THE BEGINNING OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT IN BRAZIL AND ABYA YALA

Even though events in Europe and North America resonated through churches across *Abya Yala*, the ecumenical movement can be traced back to the Congresso de Panamá (Congress of Panama) in 1916. Since the Congress, important meetings – both nationally and internationally – progressively consolidated the desire for cooperation and unity between Protestants. Those movements culminated in the creation of ecumenical organizations across the continent, such as the Confederação Evangélica do Brasil (Evangelical Confederation of Brazil) in 1933.

At the birth of ecumenism in the region, some sectors of the evangelical churches in *Abya Yala*, intending to correct the denominational missionary endeavor, ended up creating spaces for cooperation between churches. The social background for this was a more consolidated comprehension of the social, economic, and political reality of the continent. Along with these efforts, it is worth highlighting the important and decisive contribution of the WCC in the construction of those ecumenical spaces in the region.

In 1953, in the city of São Paulo, the WCC Church and Society Commission, headed by Dr Paul Abrecht, promoted the Conferência Sobre Igreja e Sociedade (Conference about Church and Society). This event allowed different evangelical groups to meet and articulate their concerns about the motivations and consequences of the relationships between churches and the different national expressions of society in *Abya Yala*. Based on these efforts, in 1961, the Junta Latino-Americana de Igreja e Sociedade (Latin American Board of Church and Society) was created. This body was also known as Igreja e Sociedade na América Latina (Church and Society in Latin America), or ISAL. At first, this group was made up of official representatives of the church departments that developed social works.

In this time period, the majority of the countries that make up this territory were undergoing intense political instability, marked by the rejection of North American interference in the region as well as the growth of nationalism. The Cuban Revolution's unequivocal triumph in 1959 played a catalytic role in the youth and intellectual Christian movements of the time. Political polarization rapidly spread through all these countries, also occupying church spaces, where political and ideological conflicts became topics in the agenda of ecclesiastical leaders.

In his 2009 study, Moises Coppe reports that, in Brazil, the youth ecumenical movement traces its origins back to 1924, in the Colégio Metodista Americano Granbery (Methodist American School Granbery). There, a group of seminarists conceived of a student movement similar to Movimento Voluntário Estudantil (Volunteer Student Movement). These young students brought a lot of inspiration from the legacy of the Protestant Reformation, since it was this event that allowed people like them to freely interpret the Bible – an action previously limited to the Clergy. In this way, in 1939, the Students for the Work of Christ Union was born. That group was later turned into the Christian Students Union (UCEB).²

UCEB AND THE MILITARY COUP

Paraphrasing Edir Cardozo, a former member of the Union, “UCEB was a summer night’s dream.”³ The organization was composed of youth from several different Protestant denominations who, not finding answers to their concerns in Bible study in their own churches, came together, seeking support in the Union. The organization had a short life but was very important and active while it lasted. UCEB spread quickly throughout Brazilian territory, especially in the 1940s. It brought together youth from diverse Protestant churches who were looking for peace and justice. The Union’s last years were marked by the focus on socio-political action. The discovery of politics as a privileged space for Christian testimony was due to the new theological influences emanating from the ecumenical movement, and to the activism and militancy practices of young students motivated by the beginning of the military dictatorship in the country.

To illustrate the historical context of the following events, in 1964, almost a decade before many neighbouring countries, Brazil inaugurated a new socio-economical order, created in the midst of the Cold War and based on the goal of preventing communist ideas from spreading through the country. The military coup of 1964 was a response to the concerns of economic elites, influential sectors of the middle class, and more conservative sections of the churches, whether evangelical or Catholic.

2 See Moises Abdon Coppe, “A Responsabilidade Social e Política Dos Cristãos: História e Memória da União Cristã de Estudantes do Brasil [UCEB] entre as Décadas de 1920 e 1960” [“The Social and Political Responsibility of Christians: History and Memory of the Brazilian Christian Students Union between the Decades of 1920 and 1960”], (MA thesis, Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, 2009).

3 Coppe, “A Responsabilidade Sociale Política,” p. 17.]

The ideological conflict took place in society, including within churches. Reactionary groups in some Protestant churches were big supporters of the alternatives of power offered by the growing right-wing, moving away from the Reform's legacy in which they originated. In the new political scenario, youth movements were strongly repressed. The Juventude Estudantil Católica (JEC, Catholic Students Youth), the Juventude Universitária Católica (JUC, University Students Catholic Youth) and UCEB, as well as other ecumenical groups, agonized over the abrupt end of their activities.

The Evangelical Confederation was dismantled, and its main progressive agents were persecuted inside and out of the churches. This event would later lead this group of people, who were looking for ways they could give continuity to their political choices and faith commitment, to create the Evangelical Centre of Documentation (CEI) that became the Ecumenical Centre of Documentation and Information. This happened in 1965, under the WCC's auspices.

Given this situation, it is not shocking that people in leadership positions handed their peers over to the repression forces. Pastor Anivaldo Padilha, who remains to this day a hero for the Brazilian ecumenical youth, narrates one of these moments: "It is important to remember that this period coincided with a strength ideological, under the Cold War's influence. To talk about poverty in Brazil was considered a subversive attitude. Being ecumenical was confused with being communist. People accused us of being communist because we were ecumenists. Ecumenism rhymes with Communism, doesn't it?"⁴ Padilha also tells how the youth decided to stand up to the conservative leaders in the churches, continuing to defend the country's democracy. According to him, they did it by working on two fronts: "One to encourage youth to participate in political and social movements, and another to fight for the renovation of the church from the inside as well."⁵ However, this was not an easy fight. This engagement culminated in much military repression, incarceration, torture, and murder. Sudden disappearances were recurring events for many young members of that generation, whether they were Catholic, Protestant, or not Christian at all. Padilha himself was sent to jail, along with his wife, Eliana, and other youth members of the Methodist church. They were accused by a pastor. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated case, and the churches played a key role in perpetuating state repression between 1964 and the 1970s.

In counterpoint, according to Professor José Bittencourt Filho, the ecumenical groups and the ecclesiastical Catholic organizations served as a refuge for progressive Protestants, as well as for leaders of unions, opposition parties, and social movements during the dictatorship and the re-democratization process.⁶

4 Anivaldo Padilha. Lecture at ENUM (National Meeting of Methodist University Students). Colégio Metodista Bennett, RJ, September 9, 2007.

5 Padilha.

6 José Bittencourt Filho, "Da Dissidência a Profecia," *Revista Tempo e Presença*, no. 334, Koinonia, São Paulo (March/April 2004), 38.

THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT IN THE BRAZILIAN RE-DEMOCRATIZATION

In 1985, the military dictatorship finally came to an end. This event was a victory for many progressive youths who had confronted the oppressive and violent military regime. It had been almost 20 years of resistance, fear, and losses – very arduous work in which the ecumenical youth movement played an important part. Even under repression, the ecumenical movement actively participated in two essential acts for the democratic recovery of the country: the *Diretas Já* (Direct [votes] now) campaign, and the 1988 Constituent Assembly.

After the fall of the military, Brazil needed to rebuild its democracy. A new generation of ecumenical youth took part in this journey, engaging in the new political parties, presenting demands to the new government, and working for the protection and inclusion of the less privileged. Unfortunately, some of the evangelical churches did not accompany their own youth. Instead, they became more and more reactionary: charismatic and ideologically committed to conservative beliefs, moving away from the liberal and revolutionary Protestantism. This conservative model presented by some churches was also segregationist and opposed to the ecumenical movement. Happily, the movement continued, surviving the repression of the last decades and the new repression from the church itself.

Between the decades of 1960 and 1990, entities linked to the ecumenical movement offered to many revolutionary Protestants a minimal structure to give continuity to the role they played in fighting for a more just and equal Brazil. Bittencourt refers to these spaces as “islands of dissidence.”⁷ They included organizations such as Instituto de Estudos da Religião (Institute for Religious Studies), Ecumenical Centre of Documentation and Information (CEDI), Comissão Ecumênica de Serviço (Ecumenical Commission of Service), Comissão Ecumênica Nacional de Combate ao Racismo (National Ecumenical Commission Against Racism), Centro Ecumênico de Evangelização Popular (Ecumenical Centre of Popular Evangelization) and others. These groups helped to preserve the ideal of an ecumenical and revolutionary Protestantism and form the hearts and minds of young Christians. Those spaces were also seen as a safe harbor, a shelter in moments of political or ecclesiastical persecution. Publications like the periodical *Tempo e Presença* (Time and Presence), created by CEDI, helped to maintain the motivation of liberal Protestants. The maintenance of these organizations never had ecclesiastic support, but they were made possible with the help and collaboration of other ecumenical organizations, especially the ones based in European countries.

Among the cited organizations, I would highlight the work developed by CEDI. The entity ceased to exist in 1994, being divided into three new organizations: Ação Educativa (Educational Action), Instituto Sócioambiental (Socio Environmental Institute), and Koi-

7 Filho, “Da dissidência a Profecia,” 38.

nonia Presença Ecumênica e Serviço (Koinonia Ecumenical Presence and Service). These new organizations are still active, strong, and important in 21st century Brazil.

THE 2000S AND THE EVANGELICAL CONGRESSIONAL BLOC (BANCADA EVANGÉLICA)

Currently, according to the theologian Carlos Eduardo B. Calvani, the traditional Protestant churches in Brazil are becoming more and more intolerant of pluralism, averse to ecumenism, sympathetic to reactionary social movements, and immune to theological self-criticism.⁸ Religious leaders are becoming more related to politicians with theocratic tendencies and speeches that inspire and feed violence against other religions and social minorities. For Calvani, revolutionary and liberal Protestantism seems to have failed, leaving space for a popular Protestantism that subdivides itself into hereditary feuds, which reproduce the patterns of *coronelism* and *caudillism* in Abya Yala. In the midst of this scenario, the Evangelical Bloc (Bancada Evangélica) has emerged; this is the manifestation of the reactionary church in the National Congress. Also known as the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (Frente Parlamentar Evangélica), it is composed of evangelical politicians of distinct political parties in the Brazilian House of Representatives. The Bloc presents itself as opposing social movements such as gender equality, abortion, and same-sex marriage, as well as the criminalization of violence and discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community.

Hence, although still alive and active, the ecumenical movement is attacked and discouraged by those churches. Additionally, the new youth, born and raised in the 2000s under liberal and progressive ideals, do not feel like they belong to that conservative space; they choose instead to use their voices in the academic world or in social movements not tied to the church.

In spite of the setbacks, the ecumenical movement stubbornly continues to play a significant role in social fights and in the defence of minorities' rights. Some of the old ecumenical spaces, such as Koinonia and the Instituto Sócioambiental, remain active in the fight for a more democratic Brazil, plural and less unequal. Along with them, new "islands of dissidence" have emerged, such as the Fórum Ecumênico Brasil (FEBRASIL, Ecumenical Forum Brazil) and the Rede Ecumênica de Juventude (REJU, Ecumenical Youth Network). These gather together people who share the hope that ecumenical principles will return to be spread across the country.

I extend this point further to discuss the REJU specifically, as an organization created and constituted solely by youth. Its members inherited from UCEB the desire to build

8 Carlos Eduardo Brandão Calvani, "Protestantismo Liberal, Ecumênico, Revolucionário e Pluralista no Brasil—um Projeto que Ainda não se Extinguíu (HORIZONTE - Revista de Estudos de Teologia e Ciências da Religião 13, no. 40 (25 December 2015), 2.

a common shelter for all, and to actively participate in the country's political life. Since its beginning, REJU has focused on public events of debate and study. To do so, it campaigns both at national and local levels, sharing the goal of pursuing the effectiveness of youth public policies (Políticas Públicas de Juventude). With smaller groups located in different Brazilian states, the network works on the political strengthening of youth actions, stimulating the ability of youths to occupy leadership positions in both governmental and non-governmental institutions. Its main actions are holding meetings and congresses, and creating other spaces where followers of distinct creeds can come together, discuss and, through interreligious exchange, trace plans for a more just, inclusive, and democratic country.

At the same time, non-ecumenical youth religious groups have also been taking leadership positions in defence of the rights of the youth and social minorities, most of the time opposing the conservatism of the so-called Evangelical Bloc. Among those groups, I would highlight the actions of the *Católicas Pelo Direito de Decidir* (Catholic Women for the Right to Choose), a political movement of international scope that negotiates between non-governmental organizations and also acts in Brazil. Along with them, *Feministas* ("Faithminist" - is the junction of the words "faith" [fé] and "feminist" [feminista] in Portuguese.) is another organized group, which studies feminist theology.⁹ Both organizations have promoted impactful actions in recent national scandals surrounding women's rights; they have stood by the victims of reactionary attacks and promoted dialogue about the secularism of laws and the Brazilian judicial system, which, according to them, urgently needs to be updated to include and protect women.

FINAL REASONS TO REMAIN HOPEFUL

Here, I draw inspiration from Calvani, who, while describing the emergence of neopentecostal churches in Brazil, expressed an almost poetic hope that the ecumenical movement would be the answer to this moment of political and religious crisis in Brazil. I share this same feeling.¹⁰

I believe that after this brief yet intense study, we can agree that it is necessary to bring back the memory of the ecumenical movement's origin in Brazil as a way to situate ourselves in present times, in which many of our institutions are in crisis. Somehow churches in our country seem to have forgotten the commitment they made throughout Abya Yala's history. It does not come as a surprise that Ivan Lessa, a Brazilian journalist, commented that "every 15 years, we forget what happened in the previous 15 years."¹¹

9 The *Feministas* movement brings together young feminists of distinct religions. It is organized by the group "Católicas pelo Direito de Decidir" (Catholics for the Right to Choose) in partnership with "Koinonia Presença Ecumênica" (Koinonia Ecumenical Presence), two organizations studied on this paper.

10 Carlos Eduardo Brandão Calvani, "Protestantismo Liberal, Ecumênico, Revolucionário e Pluralista no Brasil—um Projeto que Ainda não se Extinguiu (HORIZONTE - Revista de Estudos de Teologia e Ciências da Religião 13, no. 40 (25 December 2015), p28.

11 Cite source.

With this short-term memory, the importance of the ecumenical youth movement gets lost in our history. It agonizes when facing repression, the movement frequently needs to be remembered for its fundamental role in the construction of an effective democracy and policies that reach every sector of society and protect those in need.

In conclusion, although there are no records of direct and evident influences of the ecumenical movement in any of the past Brazilian governments, the work done by the organizations mentioned in this paper was and continues to be of extreme importance in Brazilian society—from the projects involving direct aid for marginalized populations to studies, discussions, and youth education, to engagement in the political life.

As I remind myself of these things, I finish my writing with more hope than when I started.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

YOUTH INCLUSION IN RECONCILIATORY PROCESSES: THE METHODIST CHURCH IN MEXICO AND THE WCC DIALOGUES

LANI MIREYA ANAYA JIMÉNEZ

INTRODUCTION

When the World Council of Churches (WCC) was founded in 1948, the Methodist Church in Mexico (MCM) was the only national member in Mexico. Given our ecclesial leadership structure and decision-making processes, the decision to become a member of one of the most representative organizations in the ecumenical movement was the outcome of inner dialogues, consultations, and voting sessions among the different episcopal regions in our country.¹

Nevertheless, the growing inner tensions concerning ecumenism, together with the historical tensions between the Catholic and Protestant movements in our country and some emerging controversies from WCC events (particularly the 7th assembly in Catterra in 1991), led to the suspension of our church's full membership in the WCC and

1 By that time the MCM had experienced its first 18 years as an autonomous church. The decision to join the WCC had to be approved by the two episcopal areas comprising the national body in those days. The episcopal representatives from both regions, united in the General Committee, agreed to pursue the membership as part of their international ecclesial relationships. The current MCM still maintains a General Committee whose representatives – one bishop and one lay representative – come from our six regional episcopal areas (Spanish acronyms): Northwest Conference (CANO), North Central Conference (CANCEN), Oriental Conference (CAO), Septentrional Conference (CAS), Southeast Conference (CASE), and Mexican Conference (CAM). See Oscar Barqueiro, *Metodismo Norestense* (Monterrey: Grupo Rosh, 2010), <https://camporeligioso.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/baqueiro-osca-metodismo-noroeste.pdf>.

in other ecumenical bodies.²

In 2016, the General Conference – the national board composed of ecclesial and lay leaders – decided to form a committee in charge of exploring the potential pathways of the WCC-MCM relationship. Each one of the six episcopal areas chose a representative. Even though each representative was chosen independently, it is interesting to note that there are neither women nor youth in the resulting group. In 2019, then Secretary General Rev. Dr Olav Fyske Tveit came to Mexico and met with the MCM General Committee to study the current status of the WCC-MCM relationship. Since then, intensive talks have taken place between the representatives of MCM and the WCC, Benjamin Simon and Marcelo Schneider. A follow-up meeting was done with Mikie Roberts in November 2020. These encounters are taking place because the MCM plans to make a final decision on whether the MCM will continue in a separate path or reestablish its status as a WCC member before the upcoming 2022 assembly (themed “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity”) in Karlsruhe, Germany.

To date, important decision-making processes like this one are taken by consensus among the six episcopal regions. In regard to participation in the WCC or any other ecumenical movement, it is evident that there is still a clear division of opinion among the episcopal areas. Our conferences in the southern region tend to be more open to collaboration with other traditions, while the ones in the north are more skeptical about joining these networks. The regions which are open to ecumenism are also distinguished for containing youth populations who participate in dialogues and activities with other traditions in local, regional, national, and international spheres.

The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges and opportunities of the MCM-WCC relationship and the potential of the ecumenically-active young people as transformation agents between their church and the ecumenical movement. Firstly, the current youth participation in decision-making processes within the MCM is presented. Secondly, through focus groups and semi-structured interviews with MCM youth and the WCC-MCM committee members, the study explores current challenges for MCM related to 1) the ecumenical concept, 2) intergenerational perspectives, and 3) youth participation in relevant decision-making processes within the MCM. Lastly, concluding remarks and recommendations are presented.

2 The WCC Assembly in Canberra was criticized not only by the MCM, but by other traditions which were also concerned about some understandings about the Holy Spirit and liturgical practices that gave rise to confusion about WCC positions, and the fear that it was promoting syncretism. As part of the lessons learned from that event, the WCC and its Faith and Order Commission have explored more prayer and liturgical practices that can be accepted and shared by the WCC members. See “Comentario de Obispos de la IMMAR sobre Reunión con el Secretario General del Consejo Mundial de Iglesias (CMI),” *El Evangelista Mexicano*, 15 November 2019, <https://el evangelistamexicano.org/2019/11/15/consejo-mundial-de-iglesias/#more-45348>.

MCM YOUTH IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

MCM has local youth groups with young representatives in the districts and the aforementioned episcopal areas. These youth boards are in charge of coordination, finances, spirituality, and social action. Methodist youth in Mexico lead their own groups and are assisted by local pastors and lay people.

This approach has demonstrated positive results. Youth, being mostly in charge of their own groups at local, regional, and national levels discover their talents and gifts, build capacities, and develop leadership skills within and outside the church. The president of the youth board has a seat on the adult boards; nevertheless, youth participation in relevant decision-making processes varies from congregation to congregation. At regional and episcopal levels, youth leaders participate in adult-led events; however, their voices do not have the same leverage as those of the older participants. One concrete example is that the MCM-WCC committee that is composed of 6 persons has only one member who is 35 years old. Thus, although there is a visible presence of young stakeholders in decision-making processes within the MCM, their authority is still limited.

Despite their limited participation in decision-making, youth have demonstrated themselves to be necessary actors within the churches, particularly amidst pandemic times when information technologies are needed for the continuation of the church. Having certain power within their age groups, youth have transformed realities through their voices and action since the very early years of MCM. In regard to ecumenism, young people who have been in contact with other traditions are not only sharing their learnings with their generation and older ones, but they are inviting their congregations to join ecumenical activities.

This chapter was developed through a literature review of acts, document and articles regarding MCM-WCC relationships. These documents use the methodology of triangulation, which alludes to the use of multiple data resources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena and to test validity through the convergence of information from diverse data sources.³ Hence the literature review was analyzed together with one focus group and 3 semi-structured interviews. The focus group was composed of five MCM youth who hold leadership positions at the local, regional, and national levels. They were aged 18–29; two were women and three were men. All of them were asked to meet on two occasions via Zoom, during which we discussed their activities with the youth MCM groups and their perceptions of ecumenical work. In reporting their comments, I assign them each a number, (1) to (5).

Beside the focus group, two semi-structured interviews with one member of the MCM-WCC committee members and one youth MCM pastor were held. These methodologies were chosen as they provide deep information that leads to a better comprehension

3 Patton, Michael Quinn, "Enhancing the Quality and Credibility of Qualitative Analysis" in *Health Services Research* 41(5), 1999. 189-208. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10591279/>.

of the youth and elder perceptions of the ecumenical movement and youth participation in important decision-making processes.

The resulting short analysis notes three main challenges to the MCM-WCC dialogues and youth participation regarding the final decision on MCM membership in the WCC. The main hindrances include, but are not limited to: 1) a negative concept of ecumenism; 2) divergent generational perspectives on ecumenical action; and 3) lack of full youth participation in the decision-making processes.

CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR MCM REGARDING ECUMENISM AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Conceptualizations and narratives of ecumenism

Within the MCM, the concept of ecumenism has generally had negative connotations. For generations, the belief that ecumenism is a movement used by the Roman Catholic Church to achieve a universal domination of Christianity has been shared among MCM. Given a context in which Catholic and Protestant traditions are not geographically far from each other, this narrative engenders skepticism and fear from local members.⁴

Nevertheless, there are diverse views within the national MCC structure. While the southern episcopal regions tend to be more open to joining the ecumenical movement, the northern areas are more inclined to dissolve those relationships. These non-homogenous regional narratives influence local young members. One of the participant pastors shared that in former decades, youth groups pioneered ecumenical meetings in the southern region; however, that is not the case today. “I recently joined an ecumenical activity as individual.... Other participants were surprised by my presence because Mexican Methodists are seen as anti-ecumenical persons.”

We can apply a psychosocial lens to some of the findings on how the MCM narratives regarding ecumenism are related to the construction of the Methodist identity and how other traditions are perceived.⁵ One of the arguments from some of the focus

4 This concern was experienced recently by one of the youth participants. “Our youth region decided to organize a sports event with other local churches. While there was no problem in addressing the activity as *interdenominational*, naming it *ecumenical* would have definitely represented an issue for the local and regional authorities.”

5 Social identity is one of the most explored concepts in social psychology. Social identity theory explains how, by feeling that one belongs to particular groups, there is a likelihood of categorization and discrimination toward “other” groups. Henri Tajfel and John Turner developed three interrelated aspects that lead to intergroup conflict: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. The cognitive dimension involves conceptualizations of the in-group and the out-group, manifested in prototypes and stereotypes, respectively; emotional relates to distinctiveness from the other group, while behavioral refers to the attitudes and actions to the ones considered outside of the group. See Henri Tajfel and John Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. William Austin and Samuel Worchel (Monterrey: Books/Cole, 1979), 33–47.

group participants (2, 3, 4) was that the MCM is not friendly to ecumenism because “we fear from what is different to our doctrine.” One youth participant (3) argued that our Methodist identity lacks “practical theology,” while one member of the committee pointed out the need to come to a Methodist identity that moves outside phrases and goes into deeper doctrine while valuing other traditions.

The current MCM identity at the congregational level seems to be based on taking stands that see other faith traditions adversely. One participant mentioned that “despite [the fact that] some local churches accept the participation of non-Methodist preachers this is not necessarily the case for the episcopal area.” It is clear that, no matter the decision about WCC membership, MCM congregational identity needs to be transformed into a deeper knowledge and treasure of the Methodist doctrine, while simultaneously discarding negative narratives concerning other traditions. That would be a first step toward deconstructing negative narratives about ecumenism and finding common ground to work with other traditions. One youth participant remarked, “Some leaders are afraid about youth thinking.... They fear that youth [will] find in ecumenism a world beyond MCM, one world that is more interesting. Instead of it, we should teach youth a healthy way to see doctrine and look at the added-value of having relationships with other churches.”

Generational gaps

Divergent perspectives from one generation to other are common in churches around the globe. For the MCM, generational gaps overlap with the aforementioned regional perceptions about ecumenism but are not limited to other aspects that deepen the negative perceptions from youth about elderly members and vice versa.

Some youth perceive that the ecclesial structure is oppressive rather than liberating. “We are becoming a generation of change that does not fit the institution,” one of them concluded. The young participants think that the MCM bureaucracy limits the possibilities to develop action outside their structure due to the lack of spaces; hence the need to find new ways to connect youth and older generations through crosscutting groups that are not necessarily part of the MCM structure, although they are formed by MCM members: “I am part of a feminist collective formed by MCM women, this group has been a space where we have been able to reach a great impact and find other women from all ages with common perspectives,” stated a soon-to-be pastor.

We can see that despite divergent narratives and perceptions at the generational level, many MCM youth have shown their activism in addressing current problems and even mention spirituality as a relevant element of their identity.⁶ Beside the gender violence

6 According to a 2012 worldwide study by the Pew Research Center, the median age of those interviewed who perceived religion as a central element of their identity was 28. See “The Global Religious Landscape,” para. 15, 18 December 2012, <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>.

issue that is gaining attention from the youth groups in the three southern episcopal regions located in southern Mexico, MCM youth learnings and experiences have been related but not limited to theological aspects, environmental issues, peace and justice, migration, and youth work.⁷ These areas of interest reflect young people's concerns related to their local context, their professional and informal skills, their proactivity, and their (limited) agency within the current church mechanisms of action.

The structural limitations have led some young people to begin initiatives that respond to their contextual needs throughout mechanisms outside the MCM structure. As one pastor noted, "There should not be the need to ostracize these youth, but rather plant their initiatives and make them grow. The church should become an open space where youth can develop these concerns, which would represent that our body wants to walk beyond our comfort zone."

Unfortunately, those who develop projects outside the structure or who are open to collaborating with other traditions tend to be stereotypically seen as "rebels." This counternarrative enlarges the generational gap among young and adult perspectives on how the church should be, although these differences vary in the different episcopal regions.

Amid the challenges and generational gaps, some youths are nevertheless taking important steps toward developing practices that are very aligned with the ecumenical movement. One of the recent events was a sports and arts competition organized by MCM youth where participants from other traditions were invited. "Youth from my region stopped asking for permission; they just attend events from other traditions," a youth leader observed. Additionally, young people have organized themselves and held Taizé-inspired prayers and ecumenical liturgies within their local churches. Finally, activities relating to migration, gender violence, and environmental causes have been carried out by MCM youth in cooperation with people from other traditions.

Full inclusion of youth in decision-making processes

A third observation on what hinders youth involvement within the ecumenical movement is related to their active participation as decision-makers in relevant processes within the tradition. While MCM has been characterized as having inclusive processes on decision making within the different groups and episcopal regions, there are pending opportunities to include 18–29-year-olds in relevant decision-making processes.

At the local level, youth have certain degrees of participation. They are usually appointed as learners, participants, or doers of work involving information technology; nonetheless there are only a few churches in which young people are explicitly eligible to become

7 Episcopal regions, mostly called Conferencias under the MCM language, refer to the regional boundaries which divide the MCM work. Each region has its own lay and ecclesial boards that are elected every four years (see footnote 1). While each region has developed a unique culture and interactions, all of them follow the decision-making procedures that are established in our national manual of procedures known as *Disciplina*.

part of the local board. This situation is reflected in the regional, episcopal, and national pastorates and lay boards. The boards include only a small proportion of youth who have had to demonstrate that they are spiritually, professionally and technically capable of being elected and playing active decision-making roles at the church. The MCM-WCC Committee is a clear example; while there are young people who have been involved in ecumenical activities and education, only one out of the six members is 35 years old.

Fortunately, the need to narrow generational gaps and foster instead a larger scope for young people within MCM decision-making seems to have been initially tackled with the current pandemic. “While it is clear that we lack youth participation within the local boards, the COVID-19 impacts have shown the need to transform the church. Pastors and lay leaders are becoming more aware about the relevance of young people to serve with their digital knowledge.... Hopefully this will bring MCM youth closer to the decision-making processes,” concluded a pastor.

FINAL REMARKS

The purpose of this study has been to explore the challenges and opportunities of the MCM-WCC relationship via a more active participation of young people as transformational agents among these two actors. Challenges include, yet are not limited to, negative connotations about ecumenism, generational gaps among young and adults at MCM, and the lack of full participation of MCM youth in decision-making processes that go beyond their youth-led organizations.

In regard to the first challenge, there is a need to deconstruct the ecumenical concept and to promote a deeper and constant exploration of our doctrine in a positive manner. Building a Methodist identity has to go hand in hand with avoiding hate speech towards other traditions. Theological education needs to move outside the seminaries and be reflected in the local congregations. A positive Methodist identity that treasures the tradition while valuing others may be a first step to mitigate stereotypes and negative narratives of out-group churches. As youth have a better understanding of both their own tradition and ecumenism, intergenerational dialogues and youth inclusion in decision-making processes (for example, as members of the MCM-WCC dialogue) may enhance the discussions and outcomes regarding this relationship.

The second challenge involves an inner reconciliatory process among generations. Both youth and older participants are relevant for the MCM pilgrimage. It is necessary to find innovative and creative pathways to build trust and better relationships among these age cohorts. Having different perspectives must not be seen as something negative but rather as an opportunity to find common ground in which all ages are valued. Elders must listen to youth concerns on the contextual challenges and be open to discuss the structurally-based opportunities for the MCM. Simultaneously, youth must listen to

and learn from the valuable experiences that elder leaders provide to the church. Both actors can benefit from common dialogue spaces at all levels and across them. An integrated church is able to respond to larger challenges in and out the structures, including the decision regarding MCM membership in the WCC.

Finally, as other organizations are appealing to an intergenerational co-leadership, the decision-making processes must include larger and more active participation of the young MCM members. Young people have proved globally, and within the MCM as well, that they are valuable stakeholders with a tireless participation despite their marginalization from power structures. These times have demonstrated the great contributions of young generations within church dynamics. Hopefully, this will be reflected at local, regional, and national levels, and in the MCM-WCC relationships.

Some youth at the MCM are potential catalysts for church participation in the ecumenical movement. However, there are limitations to be overcome. For instance, the regional narratives on ecumenism impact youth perceptions towards the reflected unity of the church. Moreover, while the 18–29-year-old generation is trying to work and act with shared interest in the ecumenical movement; a new generation is about to take the youth place. The current context is leading people to position themselves in two opposing camps: one more open to collaborative work with churches versus one which tends to be extremely proud of the tradition while “othering” others.

In the middle of these divergent positions, MCM youth are capable of pioneering an inner transformation about our identity as Methodists, while building a positive identity that values others. Many young leaders are already working in spiritual, social, and missionary tasks that involve collaboration with other traditions in local, regional, national, and international spheres. Whereas the MCM adult leaders tend to have a closed perspective about the ecumenical movement, youth actions are at least bringing this relevant matter into the discussion of the MCM structures. This offers the possibility, even if only regionally, of a true reconciliation on the MCM-WCC relationship in which youth will be able to participate as positive agents.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE CLASH OF IDENTITIES OF THE PALESTINIAN CHRISTIAN YOUTH AND ITS IMPEDIMENTS ON THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

YASMINE RISHMAWI

PALESTINE AND PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

Palestine

Throughout history, Palestine has been occupied, conquered, and invaded by many armies and empires: The Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Tartars, Crusaders, Ayyubides, Mamluks, Mongols, Ottomans, British and now the Israelis (Raheb, 2014). Palestine today is shaped by the intricate web of this complex history.

Since the end of the British Mandate, enshrined in the UN Partition Plan of Palestine in 1947- and later on the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Palestinians have been further expelled, persecuted and ghettoized. Consequently, Palestinian communities became increasingly isolated from each other and from the outer world: creating a grim reality on the ground today.

Today, more than seven decades since The *Nakba*,¹ Palestinian Refugees constitute nearly 8.7 million which amount to 66.7 percent of the total Palestinian Population (Badil, 2019). And despite the other crises in the Arab world, the Palestinian Refugee's plight, according to UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is "by far the most protracted and largest of all refugee problems in the world today". Palestinian Refugees are still denied reparation

1 An Arabic term meaning "catastrophe," referring to the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians between 1947 and 1949 due to colonization and ethnic cleansing by Zionist militias and Israel – Definition by (Badil, 2019).

Add to that the incarceration of around 20% of the Palestinian population in Israeli prisons since 1967 (Richard Falk, 2013) and the thousands of prisoners who are suffering in Israeli prisons today.

Additionally, Jerusalem, our capital city “has become a city of discrimination and exclusion, a source of struggle rather than peace” (Kairos Palestine Document, 2009)

Land is shrinking by the day, as Israel confiscates more land for the expanding the settlements, erecting the wall and for creating military zones, add to that the Annexation plan of the West Bank, in addition to the green light granted by the U.S. government for Israel embodied in Donald Trump’s “Peace Plan” that aims to liquify our rights in our land and resources and disregards our aspirations for self- determination and for a dignified life in our own land.

Our *Nakba* still goes on.

Palestinian Christians

“Just like Jesus Christ, we were born in Palestine, in the Holy Land” (Kairos Youth statement, 2019). Our presence in this land is an extension of its intricate history; a continuous and extended presence since the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Palestinian Christians therefore “view themselves as an extension of the first church and the first Christians” (Issac, 2017), we are an integral part of the Palestinian people, and the Arab world at large. As Christianity did not commence in the West as many behave like, but it was birthed here in Bethlehem, and disseminated from Palestine to the West and all the world. It is here in this land that Jesus Christ lived, performed miracles, crucified, died, and rose from the dead. “It is in this land that Christians have, longer than anywhere else, experienced the presence of Christ in scriptural, liturgical, and orally expressed memory, and as a felt, living presence” (Bailey, 2008). It is in this land where you can touch “the experienced presence of Christ, as it were as a living neighbor in his homeland” (Calder, 2019).

The Holy Land today – Historical Palestine – is home to less than 200,000 Palestinian Christians (IMEU, 2012), with nearly 50,000 in the West Bank and around 3,000 in Gaza Strip (PCBS, 2017), and around 120,000 inside the Green Line (Mansour, 2012). Palestinians in the Holy Land belong to thirteen churches (Isaac, 2017), with the majority belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church, and lesser percentages belonging to the Armenian Orthodox, Copts, Syrian Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Latin Catholic, Maronites, Lutheran, Evangelicals and Episcopalians, among others. Most Christians in the West Bank are concentrated in Bethlehem (50%), East Jerusalem (18%) and Ramallah (13%) (Collings et al, 2012).

As Palestinian Christians, we are facing many challenges of various dimensions, Father Rafeeq Khoury narrows these challenges down into three main categories: Societal, ideological, and ecclesiastical. As the ideological and ecclesiastical dimensions are beyond

the scope of this article, the following will shed a light on the main societal challenges faced by Palestinian Christians.

The most pressing societal challenge today is emigration. By the end of the British Mandate, there were around 143,000 Palestinian Christians comprising around 7 percent of the Palestinian population (ibid), by 1948, 50,000 Palestinian Christians were forcibly displaced by the state of Israel. Since then, the population of Palestinian Christians have been decreasing sharply, with high rates of emigration and lower birth rates, the Christian share of Palestine dropped over the decades to reach 1 percent today (PCBS, 2017). Palestinian Christians have been emigrating mainly because of the Occupation and its associated cloudy political future. Furthermore, the absence of any durable just solution (which essentially means the lack of any secure, dignified, and peaceful prospects). Adds to economical factors that are associated with this instability, high rates of unemployment and uncertainty.

Furthermore, as part of the broader Palestinian society, Palestinian Christians face the challenge of the entrenched patriarchal system, in our homes, churches and society. This patriarchal structure impedes us as women from accessing our full leading potential, and from accessing our social, political, and legal rights as equal humans and citizens in our own society.

Additionally, as Palestinian Christians we are facing the rising phenomena of religious extremism, which laid the ground for questioning one's citizenship, especially with the introduction of the Jewish nation-state law in Israel two years ago, and our status as a "minority" in Palestine. This minority status has compelled Palestinian Christians into three directions as Rifat Kassis explains (Kassis, 2016): The first one perceives Christians as a minority, one that should have minimum religious rights as long as it survives, the second perceives Christians also as a minority, albeit one that demands access to political rights as well. The third direction views Palestinian Christians as an integral part of the Palestinian society and demands access to exercise its full citizenship.

Another pressing challenge that is facing Palestinian Christians, is the identity clash which is essentially tied to the upsurge of Christian Zionism in the US and around the world. The next section will delve deeper into this.

A CLASH OF IDENTITIES

"Why would I worship a God who wants to deprive me the right to my own land? I am a Palestinian, and I'd rather give up my Christianity than surrender my right to live in dignity, justice and freedom in my own land" I have heard those words often from family, friends and colleagues, and, in fact, those words resonated with me for a long time. As Palestinian Christians, and as youth especially, we witnessed, growing up, the calls from many politicians, theologians and lay people affirming – through some fundamentalist

interpretations of certain texts in the Bible – that our land; Historical Palestine does not belong to us, the original inhabitants of the land. We heard the growing voices of those around the world, affirming that our land is the Promised Land, and we as Palestinians do not belong here. We also witnessed our land being confiscated, our family members being incarcerated, our rights being liquidated, our water, culture, language, traditional food all being stolen before our own eyes, and we were required to keep silent, because otherwise we will be breaching “God’s Promise,” and we will be going against God’s will.

However, does God, good and just God, require us to give up our rights to be “good Christians”? Does God ask us to surrender our dignity, our independence and existence in our own land? Is God a real estate agent? Or are these “beliefs” imposed on us by a *colonial* theology? A theology that weaponizes the bible and justifies our oppression?

A Colonial Theology

On June 1st, 2020, US President Donald Trump posed outside St. John’s Church across from the White House, with a Bible in hand. This Bible, turned into a tool of violence and oppression as Trump’s administration, backed up by some 50 million evangelical Christians, is allegedly seeking to speed up the second coming of Christ through its limitless blind support for the State of Israel. Founding their political structures on certain interpretations of the bible, Christian Zionists disregard our presence as Palestinians in the Holy Land. Indeed, Robert Smith defines Christian Zionism as “political action informed by specifically Christian commitments, to promote or preserve Jewish control over the geographic area now containing Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. It is best understood as a political application of Anglo- American apocalyptic hope” (Smith, 2012).

These commitments and interpretations have turned our Bible into an enemy for us as Palestinians and as Palestinian Christians. It made us think and rethink, Is God against us? Does God not love us?

With these certain theological interpretations and translations, our Bible – the Good News – was transformed into an active participant in our persecution. Such translations and interpretations of the Bible are molding Christianity to match the colonial, imperial, and hegemonic ideologies. Hence, a colonial theology, that reinforces and maintains the unjust status quo. A Colonial theology because of its hegemonic power to strip us as Palestinians from our right to exist in our ancestors’ land, and our right to live in peace and dignity. A colonial theology because the interpretation of the Bible in those terms and in this frame acts actively as a colonizing tool that is subjugating and oppressing us. And as Gayatri Spivak explains colonization is “not just a historical act whereby one people is subjugated to another, more powerful people, but an imaginative act that changes the way people come to think about, articulate and experience the world in which they live, or have come to live.” (Spivak,1988).

Colonial Alienation²

As such, this theology disturbs and modifies our perception of ourselves, it distorts our image of God, as it stresses that we, as Palestinian Christians are not loved by God, and our existence is an afterthought to the Almighty, and that we should also alienate ourselves from our land, as we do not belong there. This colonial theology results in a sort of a disassociation of the sensibility that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o terms as the “colonial alienation.” This alienation in our Palestinian Christian society is embodied in the wide dissemination of apathy, indifference, and helplessness especially among our youth. With a deep sense of unbelonging and powerlessness, Palestinian Christian youth are finding themselves at a crossroad, where our two identities are conflicting and incapable of co-existing. Many of us choose our Christianity, and thus resort to what Fr. Khoury refers to as “self-cancellation” (Khoury, 2014); where Palestinian Christians abandon the public life, isolate and constrain themselves within their own churches and organizations; this self-cancellation is also accentuated by the ‘minority mentality’ stemming from our small-scale population. On the other hand, many of us choose to be Palestinians and abandon our Christianity, Fr. Khoury also identifies this situation as “absorption/assimilation” (ibid); Where Christians feel that their Christianity has become a burden, for them and for the society, so they renounce it to assimilate themselves within the Palestinian society.

Youth Engagement in the Ecumenical Movement

From my observations, I will also contend that both states: self-cancellation and absorption have substantial effects on the Palestinian Christian Youth’s engagement in the Ecumenical Movement. The self-cancellation state – with the overwhelming effect of the minority mentality – is essentially an abandonment of power to change and challenge the unjust status-quo, it is a state of isolation and fear from others and their differences, it thus accentuates the refuge in one’s own church, and therefore constrains any open dialogue or experience with Christians from other churches, and other non-Christians as well. This also results in a negative role and a passive presence in our Palestinian society, that might also extend to animosity and hostility against the other.

The state of absorption on the other hand, is an abandonment of Christ, with the prevailing idea, that God is unjust, unloving to us as Palestinians, and “promised” our land to another people. Such a status essentially results in an abandonment of the Ecumenical Movement at its core.

Therefore, this colonial theology, that justifies occupation, apartheid, and domination of one people over the other is further alienating us from ourselves and inciting our clash of identities.

As such, and for an active and involved role in our churches and public life as Palestinians and Christians, a reconciliation of our identities is vital and necessary to move forward.

2 Ngugi wa Thiong’o. (1994).

A RECONCILIATION OF IDENTITIES

A reconciliation between both of our identities as Palestinians and Christians is only possible through a Christianity and a theology that recognizes our humanity, dignity, and right to exist in our own homeland. A theology that recognizes the injustices befalling on our people and aims for working together to make peace and justice prevail.

Palestinian Theology

Through the years, several Palestinian theologians have utilized their voices to introduce a defined Palestinian Theology; among those, and maybe the most prominent is Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek, who also founded Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, in addition to Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, and Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac, among others.³ Palestinian Theologians perceptions and writings do not only stem from their drive to defend the rights of their own people but also, from a higher drive that stems from a deep faith in God, as a good and just God. A God that stands on the side of the oppressed, who does not keep silent of injustice, and is not apathetic to our pain and suffering. A God that is good, just and loves each one of us. Thus, our theology as Palestinian Christians is a contextual theology as no one writes theology in a vacuum (Kairos, 2014). In fact, Dr. Rev. Munther Isaac defines Palestinian Theology as the theology that seeks to answer the questions that we ask ourselves as Palestinian Christians: Where is God within our *Nakba*? Where is God within the occupation? This injustice and oppression? He clarifies that Palestinian Theology is coming closer to God and the Word of God that is embodied in our Palestinian reality, as a people and a land (Issac, 2017). It is, as he further explains, connecting theology to our own suffering, by putting Christ at the checkpoint (Kairos, 2014) whereas “Our theology starts with Christ at the checkpoint: Christ as the center of our faith, and checkpoint as the symbol of our reality.”

And from this reality, the ecumenical call of “A Moment of Truth,” the Kairos Palestine document was also initiated. The Kairos document affirms that “The Word of God is being used as a weapon in our present history in order to deprive us of our rights in our land.” It also stresses that “any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice... transform religion into human ideology and strip the Word of God of its holiness, its universality and truth” and consequently, the document declared that “the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God.” It also called upon theologians and the Churches of the world to “revisit fundamentalist theological positions that support certain unjust political options with regard to the Palestinian people.” (Kairos Palestine Document, 2009)

3 Also, H.E. Michel Sabbah, the late Geris Khoury founder of Al-Liqa' centre, Mr. Rifaat Qassis, Fr. Rafeeq khoury among others.

A Palestinian Christian Identity

As such, the Palestinian theology acts as an empowering tool for Palestinian Christians as it accentuates our sense of belonging to our land – Palestine – and to our Christianity. It helps us accept, build, and reconcile our identities and thus empowering us to take action, and become active participants in challenging the colonial theology and the unjust status quo. It is only when we reconcile our identities that we are enabled to engage proactively in the Ecumenical Movement, locally and globally.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AUTHORITY FROM A PALESTINIAN/ISRAELI YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

SALLY AZAR

Growing up in a pastor's family, attending many church services, and participating in many church events, I have had the privilege of interacting with many people from different backgrounds, Muslims as well as Christians. In school, I spent most of my time with my Muslim classmates and therefore learnt more about their religion. It was always very interesting for me to learn about our differences in terms of religion, considering that we all were Palestinians, shared the same culture, and had very similar lifestyles. On the other hand, as a Christian in such a big mixed community of Muslims and Jews, it was and is hard to live out the Christian values I was being brought up in. Being a Christian minority in such a big diverse community is quite challenging, not only in terms of religion but also culture. Jerusalem is very intercultural as well as interreligious; it is the city in Palestine and Israel that has most interactions with Israeli Jews as well as with Palestinian Christians and Muslims.

Sadly, because of our political situation, it has become hard to communicate and correspond with each other. This was one situation that led me to think of the different religious perspectives that could develop from a study on this. The next generation makes a huge difference to the upcoming events and future of the country. Therefore, it is important to make it clear that the youth are not only the future, but also the present of any country and the political turmoil it faces. That's why we should not wait until later for things to change, but try to effect positive changes now.

In this study I examine the lives of the people living in Jerusalem, especially the lives of the youth, and the perspectives that unite us, in spite of our different religious beliefs and upbringings. How *authority* is regarded by youth is one aspect that caught my eye when talking to the youth in our churches. I was also interested in the way they view their neighbors. In this chapter, I hope to answer the many questions that have crossed my mind while living here in the conflict zone of Jerusalem, while looking for the things that unite us rather than the things that separate us.

In order to do this, I found the text from the letter to the Romans in chapter 13 to be quite suitable, as it addresses this issue and I could relate it to the situation very well. The ancient Roman church also went through struggles similar to those faced by the Christians and

churches in Jerusalem today. In Rome, the political and religious authority collaborated, and we see the same kind of collaboration claim being made today in Israel.

I analyzed verses 1–10 of Romans 13 contextually. In order to understand the text, I reviewed the nature of authority in the city of Rome in ancient times, which is connected with its history, and is the background of the letter to the Romans. Then, I unpacked the biblical understanding of the letter, analyzed it exegetically, and figured out Paul's reason for writing to the Romans. Using my methods of research, I came up with what the youth in Palestine have to add in terms of their understanding of the contemporary situation they face in Jerusalem as Palestinian Christians.

Originally, I had planned to do face-to-face group discussions but due to COVID-19, I wasn't able to do that: instead I used online surveys. I had also planned to use research from all the youth groups (Christians, Muslims, Jews) but sadly, because I did not have contacts with Jewish youth organizations, I was unable to talk to Jewish youth. Nevertheless, I managed to send out surveys discussing the topic of authority and Paul's text. Unfortunately, not many of the recipients took part in the surveys, and the answers of the ones who did were not detailed enough for me to draw clear conclusions. Keep in mind, [then?/also?], that this article is written from a young Christian woman's point of view.

The research is based upon my master's thesis, entitled "The Topic of Authority from the Youth Perspective in Palestine/Israel."¹ In my research, I wanted to get the understanding of Romans 13:1–10 from the perspective of today's youth. This is quite an interesting chapter dealing with authority of God and the relation between the state and authority. I wanted to investigate if the different times in which we live and the perspective of a younger generation influence the reading of a text, and how that affects their political views. The results were quite impressive even with very few responses. There were a variety of opinions, which were very interesting and insightful. The differences were quite minimal from a political point of view; religiously, however, there was some variety.

I decided to do case studies in order to get more interaction and insight from the youth today, leading to updated understandings of their daily life and struggles. In Palestine, there are not a lot of books containing information about youth and their daily life struggles. Due to the political situation, the youth in Palestine/Israel grow up surrounded by the Occupation and politics. Authority therefore becomes a different question for them, as they might view it in a different way than other youth around the world do. I have more of a Christian theological perspective whilst others, in this case the youth, view things from another angle, whether it be religious or secular. I believe the youth of today have a big role to play. I believe they are not only the future, but the also the present and it is essential to listen to them. Therefore, the question is, How do the youth today view the powers of authority, and how do they deal with them?

1 Azar, Sally, "The Topic of Authority from the Youth Perspective in Palestine/Israel," (Unpublished Master's thesis, Göttingen University, 2020).

WHAT IS AUTHORITY?

Authority has different shapes as well as different meanings. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, authority means “the power to control or demand obedience from others” as well as “the official power to make decisions for other people or to tell them what they must do.”² The word *authority* that is used in Romans 13:1 comes from the Greek word “ἐξουσία,” meaning “power” or “exercising authority over,”³ as well as having authority to rule. This kind of authority can lead to abuse of authority or power.

In Arabic, they use the word *lilsalateen al fa'ika* (للسالطينة الفايكة),⁴ which literally means being obedient to the supreme sultans, or even the super-sultans.⁵ In the Arabic language, the words could have multiple meanings. In this case one meaning translates to the ones in power (authorities or sultans). Even in different English-language Bibles, the word *authorities* differs in the first verse; Eugene Peterson, for example, paraphrases it as “all governments.”⁶

Further meanings mentioned in *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* are the Hebrew words *sholtan* (שולטן)⁷ and *memshallab* (ממשלל). *שולטן* is actually very similar to the Arabic word coming from the root *שָׁלַט* meaning “to rule, to have dominion over.”⁸ *ממשלל* means “dominion, rule, or reign.” Thus, both Hebrew words do not directly state the word authority but refer instead to “a person who rules or dominates.”

Nevertheless, all these meanings are connected with each other. We conclude that at the time of ancient Rome, power and authority were invested either in an emperor or a governing authority, which can be applied today to presidents of all countries, as well as to leaders and rulers around the world.

In the Bible, however, authority starts from God in the Old Testament, where authority was mainly God’s voice acting through people. The ruler was appointed by God, the one who was speaking God’s word to the rest of the people. It was always connected

2 Cambridge Dictionary Online, s.v. “authority,” <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/authority>.

3 H. G. Lindell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 599.

4 “The Van Dyke Arabic in PDF Format,” Arabic Bible Outreach Ministry,” <https://www.arabicbible.com/arabic-bible/pdf/van-dyke-arabic.html>.

5 “Arabic-English Online Translator and Dictionary,” Yandex Translate. Accessed 26 July 2020.

6 Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: Nav-Press, 2002).

7 Selig Newman, *An English and Hebrew Lexicon Composed after Johnson’s Directory, Containing Fifteen Thousand English Words, Rendered into Biblical, or Rabbinical Hebrew, or into Chaldee. To Which Is Annexed a List of English and Hebrew Words the Expressions and Meanings of Which Appear to Be the Same in Both Languages* (London: Printed for the author and sold by Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1832), <http://archive.org/details/englishhebrewlex00newmuoft>.

8 Karl Feyerabend, comp., *A Complete Hebrew-English Pocket-Dictionary to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Berlin-Schöneberg: G. Langenscheidt, n.d.), 182, <https://archive.org/stream/acompletehebrew00feyeuoft#page/182/mode/2up>.

with God in earthly figures like judges, kings or others.⁹ However, human authority was controlled by God; just as it was given to them by God, God could also take it away from them.¹⁰

Paul, writing the letter to the Romans, was in a different time. The Roman empire had developed over many years. Especially in Rome the authority was complicated, as there were many types. There was legal power for political offices, social authority, and the *paterfamilias* – the father as the authority of the household.¹¹ It was mostly seen as a military and legal authority. Different authorities played different roles in Rome.

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

In the letter to the Romans chapter 13, written about 57 CE, around the time of Nero (the successor to Claudius), the people were dealing with the expulsion of the Jews and paying taxes.¹² Nero's reign was cruel; nevertheless, he still gave the Senate freedom, which resulted in political conflict, as the Senate was the authority intervening between Senate members in the case of disagreements, rather than the Emperor, as it should have been.

Paul's letter was written to a church he had not founded but was interested in financially and morally. The purpose of Chapter 13 is mainly to teach the church in Rome about the relationship between the political powers and how to be a Christian within such a context. Paul's main message in this letter is that a person is only justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law. Righteousness is by Christ alone. When a person believes in Christ, that person becomes dead to sin and the law and becomes alive through Christ.

The focus of this chapter, on which I am basing my research, lies on authority. Paul is differentiating between the earthly and heavenly authority. The earthly authority is the servant of God, who acts upon the people through their understanding and wisdom they receive from God.

There are three important topics that Paul is trying to convey. One is that the authority of God being higher than all the kings and higher authorities. Thus, God's servants contrast emperors with divine beings. Second, God being the higher authority, and therefore them[Word(s) missing here] subjecting themselves to the authorities as they are not higher than God but God's servants, responsible for keeping order. Last but not least,

9 See, for example, Daniel 7:6, Isaiah 39:2, and 1 Kings 9:19.

10 Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 1: A–C* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 351.

11 Jesse Sifuentes, "Authority in Ancient Rome: *Auctoritas, Potestas, Imperium, and the Paterfamilias*," *World History Encyclopedia Online*, 5 November 2019, <https://www.ancient.eu/article/1472/authority-in-ancient-rome-auctoritas-potestas-impe/>.

12 This will be further explained in the discussion of religious authority.

is the full subordination of the people to the authorities, honoring and respecting the authorities, but still conditional.¹³ There are two reasons for subjection to the authorities, one is the wrath/state punishment of evil doers on behalf of God and the second is the state's approval of those who do good on behalf of God. The wrath is to refer to the states execution of God's wrath mentioned in the letter and the reference to conscience of subjection to the state. The interpretation of this periscope has swung from hopeless subservience of political authorities viewed as virtually divine to critical submission based on their advancement of justice.

Politics and religion come together perfectly, especially in ancient Rome. Therefore, the emperor is God's follower as well, and should make his decisions accordingly. Nero didn't like this kind of ruling; he was more interested in the arts and social events, and didn't care about making himself politically lovable.

It is important to note that in this letter Paul is addressing the issues raised about Jews and Gentiles. He assures them that they are all equal through their faith in Christ and the love they show towards each other. Concerning subordination to the authorities, he mentions in this Letter that it is for their own good.

HISTORY OF THE REGION

When talking about authorities and Israel and Palestine, it can be quite complicated. There are many political powers involved in Palestine and Israel. Today, Israel has taken over more than 80% of Palestinian land and settlements. The Palestinian history is a long one. My research showed that authority has changed a lot throughout the years. Palestine was occupied by many nations and, therefore, the occupants had power over the country. Palestine has not been an independent state since the fall of the Crusades in 1299. This included 400 years of Ottoman rule being under control of the British mandate from 1916 to 1948. Then in 1948, the land was divided into three parts: one part became Jordan (the west bank of Jordan); one part became Egypt (Gaza); and the last and third part became the state of Israel.¹⁴ In 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Jerusalem was divided into two parts, West and East Jerusalem, until 1967. In 1967, Israel proclaimed East and West Jerusalem the capital of Israel. This was not accepted by the Palestinian government, the Arab world, or the United Nations. Until today, East Jerusalem has been recognized as an occupied territory.¹⁵

As of 1917, Palestine was under the control of Britain, which supported the creation of a Jewish state in the Holy Land. Sympathy for the Jewish cause grew during the genocide

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- 13 Robert Jewett, Roy David Kotansky, and Eldon Jay Epp, *Romans: A Commentary. Hermeneia: a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 789.
- 14 Gideon Biger, "The Boundaries of Israel—Palestine Past, Present, and Future: A Critical Geographical View," *Israel Studies* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2008), 69.
- 15 Michael Zank, *Jerusalem: A Brief History*. (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 7.

of European Jews during the Holocaust. When the Second World War ended, Britain was suffering and broke. In that time in Palestine things were constant, meaning they didn't suffer as much from the second world war or have a Post-war Effect. Yet Zionists were digging and growing bolder by becoming more organized and determined.¹⁶ As the sun set on the British Empire, it also started to set on Palestine. In 1946, the Palestine issue was brought before the newly created United Nations, and a partition plan was outlined. In 1947, the United Nations set up a group of people to find a resolution for Palestine. They came up with a partition between Arabs and Jews, allowing for the formation of the Jewish state of Israel, which led to *al Naqba* (the Catastrophe, or Disaster).¹⁷ Many discussions have been held with no definite result. This led to the formation of the State of Israel by Jewish leaders in 1948. And it has not been peaceful ever since.

“Days in Jerusalem start with the Muezzin’s call to prayer, followed by the bells of many churches that fill the city and the never-ending procession of devoted Jews that walk the city towards the Western Wall.”¹⁸ Jerusalem is the unifying factor of the three monotheistic religions; it can be as well a place where they all see each other as the enemy, and therefore becomes a place to destroy the each other to claim the holy city each for themselves. In Jerusalem’s history one can observe a chain of wars, conquests, crusades, and counter-crusades. Jerusalem has quite a complex situation, with three different religions where the fights are mainly political but hide behind religious arguments.¹⁹ The fight has always been between Palestinians and Israelis, and is not a religious fight.

THE CASE STUDY²⁰

The questionnaire included eight questions. In the questions, the word *authority* was not used, as I wanted to see what the first impression of the youth towards the Romans text was. Therefore, the first question asked the participants for their first thoughts about the text of Romans 13. Not until the next question was it revealed that the text was written by the apostle Paul, and the respondents were asked if they support it and how it relates to today’s world. The next question was about their opinion on being obedient to authority, and about equality, as well as the role of women in their religion (not society as they all live in the same place). The final question to them was “When talking about authority, did you link it directly to the situation today with the Palestinian/Israeli conflict? What do you think about the text in comparison with the situation today?”

16 Gregory Harms and Todd M. Ferry. *The Palestine-Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 82.

17 Harms and Ferry, *The Palestine-Israel Conflict*, 99.

18 Sofia Seins de Aja, “The Importance of Jerusalem for the Three Monotheistic Religions,” working paper, Centro de Estudios de Oriente Media Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura (CEMOFPC), n.d., 16, accessed 24 August 2020, https://cemofps.org/documents/download/sofia_sainz_de_aja.pdf.

19 Seins de Aja, “*The Importance of Jerusalem*,” 16.

20 The questionnaire was administered online in March/ April 2020. The questionnaires were sent out to 50 participants via email and other social media tools. Sixteen forms were completed and sent back.

It is important for the case study to know that there were 50% Christian and 50% Muslim youth who answered the questions that were sent to them. There weren't a lot of respondents, but the responses were quite interesting. Another interesting fact is the gender balance, this was not intended but was still the case, as personally I am an advocate for gender justice. There were 16 participants in total, due to the COVID pandemic it wasn't possible to get more young people to participate. There were 8 girls and 8 boys. Their ages ranged from 18-30, as I used the youth age classification of both the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation.

In the questionnaire, the text from Romans 13 was offered in connection with the participants' first impressions. The answers were quite overwhelming, and unexpected. All of them identified this text as talking about authority or the state. In their opinion, it is our obligation to obey the state or the governing authority, as it comes from God. There were more options given, like obeying the authority is something rewarding; as we are doing a favor to God, we get this favor returned. Two people were against mixing religion and politics or the state. One of the two elaborated that religion is on top, with God is the highest authority, which makes the earthly authorities God's servants; this makes us have to respect the authorities as well as the religion. Nevertheless, we are the image of God and should act like that. Another young man suggested that this text delegates the authority that God has granted people on earth. Power and authority are acquired in the name of God; therefore, only good can come out of it if God is involved. Thus, all authorities are God's tribute; people who have authority are God's messengers, as they are responsible for applying God's wisdom. Self-conviction is very important, as people should follow an authority as a self-conviction, not out of fear. One sentence that was very much appreciated is when Paul mentions that the authorities should make sure that it is through faith and reason that the people are following the leading powers and not through fear to win their belief.

When talking about the authorities, many mentioned that subjecting oneself to the authorities means subjecting oneself to God; this means that when you resist the authority, you resist God. The authority is God's power on earth and should be respected and honored accordingly. Most of them mentioned that the text talks about following the laws, although some complained, saying that religion and politics don't mix. Due to the political situation in Palestine and Israel, and the struggle of the Palestinians under the conflict, many associated the powers of the authority with the Israeli authority. Living in Jerusalem or the West Bank doesn't automatically mean being under the control of the Israeli government. The government does however control water and electricity everywhere, as well as who enters and leaves their home. Therefore, some participants connected the text directly to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Thus, saying that Paul is not giving any legitimate reasons to follow authority, as well as saying how to obey an authority in their own land by a government not representing them. Some gave other short answers, saying that God is love, power, and peace, so respecting the law means respecting God. One young person said we are born as subjects and we remain so. However, according to one of the youths, this text can be read differently depending on the political stance.

This last sentence connects to the next question, which asked how they personally support Romans 13. I will start by quoting one of the youth, who stated that “the situation my family and I (as Palestinians) have been living in doesn’t allow me to completely support this perspective. We are obliged to follow the authorities of people trying to conquer our land and have been damaging everything for years, so that gives us no reason to obey them.” This sums up and explains many thoughts of the youth today. Almost the majority of the respondents disagreed with Paul on the arguments pushing towards the political situation. The main takeaways of the youth from Paul’s text are being obedient to the authority and loving and respecting one another. Everyone agrees that we should love one another and respect each other, but when it comes to the authorities it becomes quite critical, in the sense that they cannot see the authorities in a loving and respectful way because of the way they are treated by the authorities they are living under. The youth of today have faced and experienced a lot of things in their lives; this influences the way they look at things.

However, an answer from one of the youth gave me some hope about looking at the biblical text and applying it to today’s world. He said that if we would actually listen to Paul’s text and do what it says, it would lead us to a peaceful world and would change the whole history of human rule on earth. It was also mentioned, though, that the authority can be in control and be obeyed but with justifiable reasons for asking the society to do so. One of the Muslim youth mentioned that it is not possible for God to pass on or give authority to the ones on earth; it is only God who can judge us.

The next question connected the text with today’s reality, asking if it is still applicable. There were many different answers, one of the youths stated that “rules are meant to be broken, and no one can or should tell anyone how to live.” For many young adults, freedom is important. Living in Occupation, and not being able to move from city to city without a permit, makes them feel trapped. It is not simple to plan what to do throughout the day. There is always something in the way, whether it is checkpoints, or not having a permit. Therefore, freedom is important for the youth, as they don’t get to experience it fully.

Only three of the youth said this text applies today. The rest explained that it depends on the person and situation. Others mentioned that religion and politics should be separated, and they don’t support the text. Moreover, the situation in Palestine and Israel is quite complicated, and not only the youth but the whole society will disobey an authority that humiliates or disrespects them: it is also about mutual respect and love in a society. Hence, some responded that it was never the case the way Paul describes it; that there was never harmony with the authorities as it was always reliant on fear. People were scared of the authority and had no choice but to obey it. If fear is avoided, the authorities would be respected, which would lead to even a higher respect towards God.

The topic of being subject to authority received different answers and was more religiously distinct. The Muslim youth were more convinced that any authority should

correspond with the religious rules for serving God. For some, being subject to the authority is something that harmonizes; presumably, it is about love, safety, and that important life necessities are met. Others connect obedience to authority with the duties of a civilian, like paying taxes and giving living orders. Though being subject to authority was defined in different ways, it is often seen as listening to the power in control without questioning it, being part of a religion and operating within its rules. "Respect," "honor," and "discipline" were three more words used to describe obedience to the authorities. One of the youths from Jerusalem answered, "I believe being obedient to authority starts by being respectful to fellow citizens and seeking the common greater good." Another answer was "being obedient to authority in my perspective means to be totally convinced of what this authority has to offer. If people receive their safety, love and important life necessities from this authority, then obedience will never again be a problem."

Equality is a big issue in our society, as mentioned before. It was important to see where the youth stand today, as it is an important aspect of the Romans text as well. The respondents almost unanimously agreed that everyone is equal despite their religion, yet with slight differences. From God's perspective, everyone is equal despite their religion. Nevertheless, equality in heaven and earth were differentiated. In terms of authority and politics today, it was difficult to see that there is equality due to the different ways people in our country are treated. When talking religiously, there was no doubt that we are all equal in Gods eyes. Still, most of their answers referring to equality on earth expressed that earthly and heavenly perceptions are the same. One person disagreed by saying that human beings are all living, striving for equality between each other, emphasizing on earth. There was also a Muslim view that that there are particular people more holy than others, and consequently not equal. Having said that, one young person said that judgement occurs differently as "each will be dealing with their own ruler." On the other hand, someone else implied that we all worship the same God, but from different perspectives. One person suggested that equality between people is not very possible as some have more privileges than others. Hierarchy and authorities thus don't matter as we are all equal in God's eyes, and this is all just to keep order between each other and make life easier.

When talking about authority in our land, the youth mostly deny a contemporary connection with the Romans text. The majority were convinced that this text is not related to the current situation; they mentioned that the situation in Palestine/Israel is not comparable to any other situation. They stated that there is no authority to start with in order to compare to such a situation. Furthermore, they asked how to obey an authority that disrespects and humiliates people? According to one of the youth in Ramallah "Yes, the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is an important representation of the subject of authority that we are discussing. The uniqueness of this case however is that there is a misuse of religion that is involved in the plot of the story. As the Israeli side seem to use the wrong concept of authority, opposite to what Paul the Apostle demonstrates in his text. The wrong concept of authority used is presented by violence and actions of fraud on the land to be colonized, where those actions aim to win the fear of people and their

obedience to that authority.” It is said that Israel is demonstrating that it has the wrong concept of authority: if it did follow Paul’s text, there should be love and respect towards the people; instead there is violence and fraud. In the end, God created the world but did not distribute the land to specific people, so we are all equal. Still, some connected it to the Islamic and Jewish rule in the era of Muhammad, saying that this text applies politically as well as non-politically. A few said that this text had nothing to do with the current situation, only stating that love and respect is the main focus of this part of the letter. I end with the words of the young woman who said: “I think we are equal and as humans we both have the right to live in dignity and freedom.”

CONCLUSION

To sum up, there have been different types of attitudes toward the topic of authority. It is a difficult topic to address, and it is a difficult situation in our region. The youth here grow up seeing people being mistreated and political powers being unable to do anything to support their people. However, the text of Paul shows that there should be equality between the people no matter their religion or political identity. Sadly, this is something that is not seen in our country. The youth today want to see a peaceful country, and this can only be achieved by the right treatment of the people in Palestine and Israel. They say the young people are the future, but they are also the present. They are fighting every day to make this world a better place for the next generation. However, we still hope and pray that one day we all can find a way to live together, not just besides each other.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WE ARE ONE, BUT ARE WE WHOLE? YOUTH'S CALL FOR WHOLENESS IN LIFE AND IN THE MINISTRY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

CHRISTIAN PRIDGEN

Within the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) denomination, congregations host Sunday school, which is an opportunity for Christian education before service on Sunday morning. To conclude each meeting, a hymn is sung with a charming tune and captivating words that are sure to stick with congregants for the rest of the week, and hopefully, their lives. The words are simple but powerful, as this hymn declares what life in Christian community should look like:

We are one in the Spirit; we are one in the Lord;
We are one in the Spirit; we are one in the Lord;
And we pray that all unity will one day be restored.

Chorus:

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.¹

Songwriter Peter Scholtes wrote this hymn while serving as a youth choir director in Chicago during the 1960s US civil rights movement. 30-year-old Scholtes was in search of songs appropriate for the ecumenical and interracial experiences of the youth. He searched and searched but found nothing. Out of this lack, he wrote, "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love." The spirit of unity can be heard overpowering ecumenical and racial bias throughout this song. This hymn has proven to be timeless, not only as the AME Zion tradition gathers every Sunday to sing it in unison, but through our youth having a strong desire for the Christian church to be known by its love, being one in the Spirit and the Lord, walking with each other, working with each other, and praising together.

1 Peter Scholtes, "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love" (F.E.L. Publications, 1966).

While many young Christians acknowledge the duality of existing as spiritual beings placed within the human experience, we also long for the church community to reflect the kingdom of God. This is difficult because the duality within this experience we call life creates illusions of dichotomy within oneself, one's community, and one's church. Along with this comes a deep longing for wholeness and for practices that help heal the disconnect felt between oneself, community, or church. People, young and old, each have their own personal preferences and expectations of a fulfilling religious or non-religious community. Despite these preferences, all humans have an inherent need for the unconditional love found within genuine community. The various aspects that make up a community are essential to the spiritual and emotional growth of individuals. With young people's engagement in the ecumenical movement moving forward, the church will prioritize wholeness, as the way we think about Christian ministry may transform to align with a biblically-based ethic of love and authentic community that lives in the power of the resurrection.

ILLUSIONS OF DICHOTOMY: FLESH VS. SPIRIT

The duality of having soul and flesh within the Christian experience creates dissonance within oneself and one's community. This dissonance can lead to an illusion of dichotomy between the soul and flesh, as here the flesh and soul have opposing concerns of life. The experience of being Black, not only in America but all over the world, offers an example of living within this tension of duality. Through duality, to be Black in this world is in some ways analogous to being a Christian in this world. The two experiences are not interchangeable, but they do have a wealth of common ground. Their commonality is found within unknowingly existing in a state of "double consciousness."

This concept, articulated by W. E. B. Dubois, provides an explanation of what happens to the consciousness of an individual when they have not been offered love and acceptance from themselves or the outside world. The term alludes to the experience of Black people consistently being in search of identity within a White experience that does not accept the authenticity of Blackness. Dubois writes:

the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this "American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled

strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.²

Applying this heavily Black-influenced concept to the Christian experience suggests a need for the church to show itself as a space where all can be whole as we are baptized into the Christian identity. Over the years, people of African descent – not only in America but all over the world – have been given to understand that their true self is not of value. For Christians, the African American concept of “double consciousness” is much more internal and can be self-inflicted. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have all been made new, whole. The life and resurrection of Jesus Christ as human, spirit, and God makes the dichotomy of soul and flesh within the human experience an illusion. If we truly believe in the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we must believe that we are whole. While we are both spirit and flesh, we are whole, one. We must work toward seeing ourselves as one, and not being at war with ourselves or our community to be more spiritual than religious when the two are one. We must love the whole of ourselves, and we must love the whole of our neighbors, as commanded. This makes us the church, not Black, not White, more than spirit, more than human, and radically welcoming to all, as a beloved entity, a living expression of the love of God.

While the Black experience is used as an example, racism is not the issue here. Many people from various backgrounds have experienced living in a state of double consciousness because of the duality that exists within their lives. For example, being a woman, could mean being a mother and wife while trying to maintain one’s sense of self. Another example could be expectations of the workspace and home life, which can apply to any person. Nonetheless, the focus here is not our differences but our need to be given love in the form of a space we can go and be whole. A place where we as Christians take pride in accepting what God has said about us and not what the world has told us we are or should be.

To further clarify the use of dichotomy in this context, let us look closely at the relationship between religion and spirituality. The etymology of religion begins with the Latin word “*religio*,” which means reverence, honor, and/or respect for the sacred.³ The meaning of spirituality has remained the same through modernity in translation. It is commonly defined as “concerning the spirit.” To honor or show reverence toward any spirit is to act religiously. The dichotomy we witness is influenced by the institutionalization of the church, which makes us believe that religious activities are those we engage in with the Church. By this understanding, we use our bodies to be religious and our spirits to be spiritual. It seems that the standard for being religious is to participate in

2 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Signet Classics, 2012), 9.

3 *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “religion,” (n.d), <https://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/161944>. Paraphrased from “translating post-classical Latin *catholica religio*; the figurative use in sense 4b is apparently not paralleled in French until later (c1810), monastery (c1130 in Anglo-Norman), religious house (1139 in Anglo-Norman), action or conduct indicating belief in, obedience to, and reverence for a god, gods, or similar superhuman power, piety, devotion (c1145),”

religion as an institution, go to church, volunteer, and serve. When we view religion as spirituality, it will change the way we live our Christian lives. “Spirit” can refer to the Holy Spirit, the spirit that lives within you, or within another person. Therefore, to be religious through respecting the spirit is to simultaneously be spiritual through being concerned with the spirit.

WHOLENESS IN MINISTRY

Now that we have dismantled the illusions prohibiting us from re-envisioning ourselves, ministry, and religious life, we can now come to a new understanding of how to participate in ministry. Before we move forward in reimagining ministry and religious life, we must first heal from the pain acquired while operating under the illusions mentioned above. We now know that we need to mend the relationship between our flesh and spirit, so that we may operate within wholeness.

Healing this internal and communal disconnect mandates employment of the love ethic. Howard Thurman, in a portion of *The Hester Lectures* entitled “The Dilemmas of the Religious Professional,” suggested that Christians are not expected to practise the love ethic when relating to the world because the love ethic is not practised within the church.⁴ Dismantling the illusions of dichotomy will allow individuals and communities to become open to honoring themselves and all others as children of God through extending love to all. In sharing his thoughts and the concerns of the religious professional, Thurman emphasizes a need for religious professionals to first have a prayer life independent of the concerns they have with their congregations; and secondly, to be a professional lover.⁵ His comments about prayer lead him to share the importance of practising silence, not only for the pastor but for every individual. Silence is imperative for one’s spiritual growth. As Thurman puts it, “God speaks loudest in silence.”⁶ Silence is important in repairing internal and communal disconnects because it provides space for contemplation, intercession, and revelation. One hundred years ago, Thurman highlighted a problem that resulted in the decline of the church and continues to exist in the church today by saying: “What has happened to us? We have been unable to meet the hunger of the heart which is manifest in this dimension of the behavior of our youth. Conventional Christianity provides small room for this aspect of the religious life, and this aspect of the hunger of the heart.”⁷

Thurman emphasizes the importance of the church providing space for wholeness practices of silence, along with the importance of each individual fostering their own

4 Howard Thurman, “The Dilemmas of the Religious Professional,” *Early lectures*, nos. 1–3 (San Francisco: Howard Thurman Educational Trust, 1977), Audio Recording.

5 Thurman, “Dilemmas.”

6 Thurman, “Dilemmas.”

7 Thurman.

personal relationship with God. This is the healing factor, the ointment for our festering wounds. God, if given our silence, will heal our internal and communal disconnects. But we must first submit to God through silence. We must quiet our personal desires for ourselves and even for the church, in order to receive direction from God. These personal, private encounters with God should transform how we see and do ministry. More of the work of the church will then be done with the consciousness of God and not the consciousness of the people.

Time spent with God should inform our communal life, not vice versa. Many of us allow our communal experiences to inform the relationship we have with God. Due to this we become disoriented as we focus on the individuals instead of the ministry—that is, on the God of God surrounding us. We may decide not to participate in certain ministry programs because we do not care for the people who are involved. Or we choose not to allow certain people to participate or have leadership roles because we want to remain in positions of power. Here our personal desires can come against authentic ministry, the work of God. This is why being a professional lover is important to all phases of ministry. How can one serve if their heart is centered on self? What if we viewed our entire lives as ministry informed by prayer? What would it take for us as individuals and as the church at large to be fluid in ministry? How can the church as an institution practice wholeness ministry?

BIBLICAL ETHIC OF LOVE

To provide a definition of love, Thurman points to the experience of the woman who was caught in the act of adultery (John 8:1–11). For Thurman, love is “to have a sense of being totally dealt with. Of being touched at a point in yourself that is beyond all of your faults and all of your virtues.”⁸ Love is the act of honoring one’s wholeness, honoring the flesh and spirit without condition. Jesus did not deny that the woman had fallen short of the glory of God, but instead of reprimanding or shaming her as her counterparts did, he showed her community, he showed her love. He showed her community by letting her know that she was not alone, that we have all fallen and none are to condemn. He showed her love by protecting her from the condemnation that she was receiving from her community. Thurman also paraphrases the experience of love as “a sense of being met where he is, and being dealt with there as if he were where he should be.”⁹ This is a concept that the church will improve with young people’s engagement. The church must meet people where they are and not expect people to come to the church for community or when they are in need. The church will be the community and the community will be the church – there will be no disconnect.

8 Thurman.

9 Thurman.

With the engagement of young people in the ecumenical movement, a type of transparency will be expected that gives way to agape love, a love that artist Lauryn Hill describes as difficult, but a confidence builder.¹⁰ The transparency expected will require individuals to “do their own work” in order to be an asset to the work being done by the collective. Here, ministry can be seen as healing. The act of being intentional about creating space and time for God to speak is ministry. Submitting to the voice of God heard in silence and using the voice of God to become more self-aware is ministry. Being transparent with one’s community about personal and spiritual areas that are in need of growth, so that one’s community can hold them accountable, is ministry. Here returns the question: How can the church as an institution learn to honor the wholeness of its members in ministry?

For many years we have witnessed a ministry that benefits the institution of religion, but not the body of Christ or the kingdom of God inclusive of all of God’s children. I hope that you push yourself to think about how you can transform your own life into ministry and how you can support your church community to practice silence and wholeness. As you journey toward options that may result in solutions, here are a few more questions to think about. How can I honor my own wholeness, both flesh and spirit, at all times? What can I do to become more aware of God’s voice in my life? How can I provide space and opportunity for those who have not been honored within the church? In what ways can I help the church honor my wholeness and the wholeness of others?

My humble suggestion is that we start with love. Expressions of this love will elevate the ecumenical church as a trusted storehouse for communities, creating what the government and no other secular organizations are capable of creating. Resources such as homes, medical care, mental health care, rehabilitation opportunities, and much more, not solely financed by the church, but sustained by the theology of the church, the love ethic. I suggest that with the engagement of young people in the ecumenical movement, we will begin to see the institution pour into its people, who will then go on to pour into people who are not a part of the institution. This will show itself as ordination processes for professionals “outside of the church” to provide service to the community at large. For example, a veterinarian may receive training on how to operate as a religious professional or professional lover as they provide care to animals and their owners. They may be ordained to do so within an animal hospital operated by the church or an outside organization that supports Christian beliefs. The same can apply to many professions, including, but not limited to doctors, teachers, psychologists, athletic coaches, receptionists, dentists, and accountants.

10 Zeba Blay. “This Video of Lauryn Hill Dropping Wisdom at Only 25 Is a Must-See.” HuffPost Black Voices, 26 May 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/this-video-of-lauryn-hill-dropping-wisdom-at-only-25-is-a-must-see_n_59284297e4b053f2d2ac15ca.

CONCLUSION

Ordaining professions outside of religious leadership will be monumental for the church and its members, as opportunities are provided to expand the church through career development. Members will be able to access the resources that other members possess because the church has made it known that its members are valuable resources. It will be difficult and transformative to develop ordination processes that will enlighten members on how to be, as Howard Thurman puts it, “professional lovers” in their respective fields. This will cause us to think deeply about the connection between being a professional lover and participating in wholeness ministry.

Moving forward, with young people’s engagement in the ecumenical movement, the church will prioritize wholeness as the way we think about Christian ministry evolves. Christian ministry may be transformed to align with a biblically-based ethic of love and authentic community that lives in the power of the resurrection. We will explore the last commandment given just before the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: to love our neighbor as God loves us. All will be encouraged to develop their own personal, intimate relationship with God, and not to depend solely on the church or its leaders to be the voice of God. In the future, with young people’s engagement in the ecumenical movement, we will experience wholeness in spiritual, professional, and personal life that we have never experienced before. We will be whole, and our lives will be ministry.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

EMPOWERING THE ANCESTORS OF OUR FUTURE

OLIVIA BARO

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

–Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)

The UN General Assembly defines youth as individuals aged 15 to 25.¹ For many in the Pacific, youth and the work they do in the community is tied to social ideas of adulthood and independence. As such, youth groups, both in civil society and faith-based youth groups have expanded the range to include individuals between the ages 18 to 35.

According to the Pacific Youth Development Framework, “more than half of the region’s population of 10 million, across 22 countries and territories, is under the age of 25.”² This segment of the population is growing fast, placing huge and increasing demographic pressures on basic resources and core services.³ Young people are faced with many challenges in a rapidly changing world. These challenges are associated with economic, social, technological, cultural and environmental factors. The Framework goes on to state that, “Despite the substantial size of the youth population in the region and the significance of issues such as youth employment and young people’s sexual and reproductive health, there remains a lack of targeted investment required to meet the needs of all young people in the Pacific.”⁴ However, these challenges also provide an opportunity.

The young people of the Pacific today are the ancestors of our future; therefore, it is vital to equip, empower, and influence the current generation of young people to be able to

1 United Nations, “Definition of Youth”, (Geneva: United Nations, 2001), Page 1-2, <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

2 Secretariat of the Pacific Community, “The Pacific Youth Development Framework: A Coordinated Approach to Youth-Centred Development in the Pacific”, (Suva: Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2015), page 5, <https://www.spc.int/resource-centre/publications/pacific-youth-development-framework>.

3 Ibid., page 5.

4 Ibid., page 5.

stand against injustice, stand against violence, stand for climate justice, stand to fight for freedom, and stand for what is for them and about them.

The ecumenical movement in the Pacific requires more engagement from young people from different faiths and diverse walks of life, but to do this, two issues need to be addressed:

1. Young people cannot effectively participate in the ecumenical movement if the issues they face are not being addressed.
2. Church leaders must continue to pave the way for young people to interact in the body of Christ.

Every young person has the ability to bring about change in their lives and families, as well as to make a positive impact at national, regional, and international levels. Young people in the Pacific make up a large proportion of the population, but are often ignored in decision making, and not consulted on decisions that will affect them and their future: in other words, young people are seen but not heard.

According to the *Pacific Youth Development Framework*, in many communities in the Pacific, “youth unemployment rate stands at an alarming 23% and young people are over five times less likely to secure jobs than older workers. National youth unemployment rates range from 63.7% in Tuvalu, 58.5% in the Marshall Islands and 8.9% in Vanuatu.”⁵ Young people face issues such as unemployment, drug addiction, mental health disorders, suicide, and teenage pregnancy, among others. Addressing these issues is important so that harmful impacts are minimized on Pacific youth.

The current pandemic has brought more fear, loss, and despair to what has already been a continual struggle in the Pacific. More young people in urban communities are now unemployed, with many having to return to their villages as they can no longer afford living costs. Government and NGOs have also reported an increase in violence within homes and communities, where young people are either exposed to or become perpetrators of domestic violence, rape, and assault. In the midst of these issues is the ongoing struggle against the impacts of climate change throughout the Pacific, where increasingly violent storms are destroying homes and forcing the relocation of families and communities. Young people are expected to deal with the loss of their homes, schools, and livelihoods, while having little to no support in dealing with the mental trauma associated with these experiences. Instead, they have no choice but to pick up the remnants and support their families and communities in the aftermath of a storm or relocation to a new home.

5 *Pacific Youth Development Framework*, page 24.

In the Pacific, mental health is a new concept which requires a lot of awareness and understanding about the ways in which it can affect the lives of young people⁶ as alluded to by Subica et al. Pacific misconception and suspicion around mental illness,⁷ contributes towards young people choosing to remain silent and suffer isolation. This, in turn, limits their ability to ask for help because they are either too embarrassed to speak up or because there are more pressing issues to deal with, such as assisting their families or finding ways to survive on their own. The reality of the situation is that when the mental health of young people is ignored, they become socially and economically disadvantaged, they are discriminated against, and they become devalued by their communities, which in return exacerbates the anxiety and depression they experience.

Because mental illness is stigmatized in the Pacific, there is still not much of a support system in place where young people can go for assistance.⁸ The church has the opportunity to create a difference by providing youth programs and youth camps, which could offer the space and opportunity to guide young people and allow them to explore their problems and struggles. The church has played a pivotal role in shaping and guiding young people throughout their formative years: for example, the Pacific Conference of Churches is working on the formation of the Regional Ecumenical Youth Council, which is a path forward for Pacific young people to express themselves through faith, culture, and art. Due to restrictions because of age or because of the lack of public services and resources in the Pacific, there is little to no room for young people to express themselves, which often results in feelings of isolation and depression. Nowadays, suicide is seen as a way out for young people in the Pacific islands who have drifted away from the familiarity of family and community. Their loss of identity or rejection by others becomes the catalyst for a sense of hopelessness.

Exacerbating and perhaps contributing to this sense of hopelessness and the strain of mental health are the social and environmental issues that are often at the forefront of youth advocacy. The most recent example of this is the strain that the global pandemic has had on youth and their psychological well-being. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), on Mental Health Day 2020, “The impacts of COVID-19 on mental health are being seen across the Pacific. In Guam, it is estimated that between June to August, there was one suicide every six days. In Vanuatu, the Ministry of Health has received many requests from communities and church leaders to support training on mental health and psychosocial support as general anxiety in the community around COVID-19 rises.”⁹

6 Dr Michelle Funk, “Growing Mental Health Services in the Pacific”, (Suva: *Pacific Health*, 2009), page 8-11, https://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/pimhnet/NZAid_PIMHnetArticle_3June2009.pdf.

7 Andrew Subica, et al., “Mental Illness Stigma among Pacific Islanders,” *Psychiatry Research* 273 (March 2019), page 578–85, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2019.01.077>.

8 *ibid.* page 578.

9 World Health Organization (WHO), “Mental Health in the Pacific,” (10 October 2020), paras. 5–7, <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/about/how-we-work/pacific-support/news/detail/10-10-2020-mental-health-in-the-pacific>

Gender and sexuality, and the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community, is another subject that draws a lot of attention as it is still a taboo or, at least, not widely accepted in the Pacific community. There are nine Pacific countries that still criminalize homosexuality. And LGBTIQ+ individuals in many of these countries are regularly subjected to homophobia, discrimination, and persecution.¹⁰ The cry is that these groups should first and foremost be seen as humans, and as people with a preferred sexual orientation. Does the concept of “love the sinner hate the sin” still stand, or does the Christian community either ignore or condemn these young people who are part of their church, part of their families and community? In the book of Romans (15:7), we are reminded to accept one another, just as we have been accepted, in order to praise God.

In addition to these, young people are continuously fighting for climate justice. According to the WCC, “The World Council of Churches is standing behind a call for action on climate justice issued by global youth religious organizations. Care for creation and justice are at the centre of the World Council of Church work on climate change.”¹¹ The WHO regional advisor to the Pacific has reported that up to 10,000 people will be affected or could be dying each year as a result of factors associated with global warming, such as severe weather and mosquito-borne disease. Moreover, the number of deaths due to natural disasters – droughts, floods and storms – has increased by 30–40%. Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Samoa, American Samoa, Tonga, and recently Solomon Islands, have seen devastating cyclones, tsunamis, and floods in recent years.¹² These small island states with large oceans contributed less to global emissions, but they are in the forefront not only of witnessing but of facing adverse weather conditions, changes in weather season and patterns, ocean pollution, ocean extraction, relocation, and irreversible environmental damages.¹³ Even though our village communities have proven resilient in the face of pandemics and adverse weather conditions, they are often neglected and forgotten.

Looking internally, even the homes that youth grow up in are in danger. Supposedly sanctuaries and safe places are no longer safe for some young people when it comes to violence inflicted by their peers and by adults. This includes girls and boys being raped or sexually assaulted. Young people are physically abused through corporal punishment that goes beyond discipline. A perfect example is when COVID hit, everyone was advised to stay home during lockdown because it was safe. Women and children, however, experienced a lot of violence and sexual abuse during this period. “Violence and abuse against children have increased in Fiji in the past year,” according to the United

10 Paula Gerber, “Why the Pacific Islands Are No Gay Paradise,” (Monash University, 14 May 2014), <https://www.monash.edu/news/opinions/why-the-pacific-islands-are-no-gay-paradise>.

11 Asia Development Bank, “Pacific Risks, Vulnerabilities and Key Impacts of Climate Change and Natural Disasters”, (Manila: *Pacific Regional Strategic Program for Climate Resilience*, 2012), <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/E-Pacific-Risks-Vulnerabilities-Climate-Change.pdf>.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

Nations Pacific *Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Fiji*.¹⁴ The report, which was released in July last year, found that “over 1300 cases of abuse were reported in 2019, the highest number since 2016.”¹⁵

Of equal salience are the struggles of our Pacific brothers and sisters in West Papua, who today are facing silent genocide causing lifelong trauma to young people who witness the abuse, violence, and murder of their families. The Pacific Conference of Churches through the General Assembly 2018 outcome reaffirms the commitment to the struggle for self-determination for our brothers and sisters in Tannah Papua and expresses support for their inclusion in the UN list for decolonization.¹⁶ The Pacific Conference of Churches also reaffirms their support for sovereignty and self-determination for Kanaky (New Caledonia), which is deserved.¹⁷ The Pacific Conference of Churches reaffirms unceasing support over the Maohi Protestant Church on the issue of environment, social, and economic degradation in the territory of Maohi Nui as a result of nuclear testing. Young people from the communities of West Papua, Maohi Nui, and Kanaky arise and free themselves into the society, but the majority of them remain as victims of important social problems while being marginalized, misunderstood or singled out and poorly supported. The struggles of these young people are multifactorial. There is an immediate need for social media engagement and awareness, joint prayer between different denominations, and the creation of arts, dance, and music where Pacific youth may raise their voices and protest the ongoing West Papua genocide, human rights abuses, and continue their fight for freedom and self-determination.

Therefore, due to the urgency and sensitivity of this issue, church leaders will need additional training to address the problem.

This is where the ecumenical movement can play an important role by providing opportunities for church leaders to help their young church members. Churches in the Pacific can create safe spaces for young people, with trained pastoral or lay leaders who can guide and shepherd young people during a time in their lives where they are facing many changes and new experiences. This change in approach For example, consider the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand through a boy with five barley loaves and two fish. In essence, young people, with their limited resources, are themselves an offering to Jesus. Jesus has the power to multiply their gifts and make them meaningful to society. In the Bible, Jesus offers a solution to young people today, to draw them near to Him with their gifts and cause them to be multiplied.

14 United Nations Pacific, *Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Fiji*, July 2020, page 48, <https://pacific.un.org/en/90425-socio-economic-impact-assessment-covid-19-fiji>.

15 UN Pacific, *Socio-Economic Impact*, page 48.

16 Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), Our Key Programmes: “The Pacific Cannot Be Free until We Are All Free,” accessed 12 June 2021, <https://www.pacificconferenceofchurches.org/about-us/our-key-programmes/>.

17 PCC, Our Key Programmes: “Climate Change Is Real,” <https://www.pacificconferenceofchurches.org/about-us/our-key-programmes/>.

The transformational potential of young people in the ecumenical movement can be seen when the right combination of opportunity, personality, and environment stimulates leadership awareness and behaviors in young people. Youth see the world differently and they attribute a different value and importance to it. Research indicates that the more chances one has to experience leadership roles, the more likely one will develop strong leadership characteristics.¹⁸ Early adulthood is characterized by numerous opportunities to develop new skills through new experiences. This is a transitional time for young people to encounter new experiences and settings, which are often their first opportunities to realize their own talents and true potential.

CONCLUSION

The vision of the Pacific young people in the ecumenical movement moving forward is to be able to envision a creative expression of the ecumenical movement. This involves exploration of new activities that are inclusive of all young people. It means having the ability to create activities that cultivate one's inner ability and potential, whether through dance, music, arts, or other forms, in order to address and empower youth struggles and create change and impact the community.

There is a growing need for churches to provide safe spaces so that young people can bring their experiences, questions, and challenges without being judged. Although this requires additional effort and resources, the act of investing into these young lives will surely come into fruition in their later years. As the Pacific's future ancestors, they must be empowered.

Our churches and Christian community can play a vital role in addressing sensitive and urgent issues such as violence against women and children. There is a need to host Bible studies re-evaluating teachings about women and men and addressing gender-based violence.

Underlying all this, our positive influence on the present generation today will bring about a desirable change in the future. We are challenged to create a platform and environment where the younger generation can create a culture and value system based on the principle of sustainability, stewardship, interconnectedness, and resilience. This is the culture and values that has held the Pacific people through the generations, and must be rekindled in the lives of the younger generation today. Everyone has an important role to play. If we all work together toward the common good, there is nothing that can stop us from creating a world that is free, safe, and just for our future ancestors.

18 Teresa Lacerda, "Understanding Leadership Effectiveness in Organizational Settings: An Integrative Approach", (Lisbon: University of Lisboa, 2015), page 34-37. Retrieved from: (Research Gate) <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Teresa-Lacerda-2/publication/279931559>.

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