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Risky Witnessing, History of Wounds, Compassionate Leadership:

Theological Education and Missional Formation for Christian Discipleship

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Good morning,

My experience of teaching mission studies, feminist theology, and trauma and theology at Jakarta Theological Seminary, the oldest Protestant and ecumenical seminary in Indonesia—the country with the world’s largest Muslim population—is the basis for my reflection on the formation of Christian discipleship, which I call *witnessing discipleship*. I focus on the following intertwining dimensions: the sacramental and the political, arts, and healing.

In May 1998, not long before the resignation of the second president of Indonesia after he had ruled the country for 32 years, the nation witnessed political turmoil that was intertwined with an economic crisis and widespread violence. I was in my first year of teaching, when in the early afternoon a young female undergraduate student, Obertina, came to my office. She was asking my opinion regarding whether or not she should join the student street protests. Fearing for her safety, I tried to persuade her not to join the protests. But knowing that I would not be able to convince her I asked why she was insisting on joining. She answered, “Because I want to meet the Jesus that you have taught us in class.”

This story illustrates when the theological becomes the political. Inspired by Mary Elizabeth Moore’s pedagogy, I see teaching as a sacramental act. But it is at the same time a political act—a way of participating in God’s work and imagination for the flourishing of humanity and the whole creation. The story also testifies to the riskiness of this formation as it often involves individual and collective response to injustice and violence in our everyday lives.

Two questions guide my reflection:

1. How do theological and missional formation empower and inspire students toward a vision of witnessing discipleship and transforming community?
2. What kind of teaching and formation are needed to equip students to imagine and to find ways toward that vision?¹

The massive violence, riots, and pogroms in Indonesia in 1995-2005, which involved religious communities, challenged me to re-think of the significance of martyrdom by re- connecting it to the

¹ These questions are inspired by Moore’s questions: “What is the nature of Christian vocation?” and “What kind of teaching is needed to inspire and equip people toward that [Christian] vocation? Ibid., 2.

question of mission in the context of the trauma of the Muslim-Christian communal violence. The trauma perspective complexifies martyrdom especially in dismantling and disconnecting violence from the sacrificial dimension of martyrdom. How to live as witnessing disciples in the aftermath of religious violence? If trauma means “suffering that remains” (Shelly Rambo), or as “the truth that is not available to us” (Cathy Caruth), what are we witnessing to in the aftermath of violence? How do we witness to the remaining of suffering that challenges our “God is good theology” or “everything will be OK theology” that often glosses over suffering?

Witnessing to what “remains unknown” or to “the truth that is inaccessible to our language” (Caruth) challenges the Christian claim of the translatability and the sayability of Christian gospel. This dimension ruptures our understanding of witnessing and, by implication, the formation of discipleship.

Trauma ruptures a theology that defines Christian witnessing as a practice of claiming the truth. It challenges the primacy of word, of verbal communication in the Christian witnessing practice. Trauma reveals a different language of witnessing—the unsayable, the language of silence, the language of wound. This is the language that has been abandoned in the mission and evangelism discourse. The late Kosuke Koyama, an Asian theologian, once said, Christianity is a noisy religion by referring to the Christian proclamation of the word. Our understanding of mission and evangelism has often been shaped by our one-sided emphasis on the sayability, the translatability of the Christian message. Susan J. Brisson, a survivor of a violent attack and assault that almost took her life, asks “How can we speak about the unspeakable without attempting to render it intelligible and sayable?”

Here re-integrating arts—the language of wounds and beauty—into theological education and formation becomes crucial. In 2007, I started to offer dance as an integral part of the missional formation at the seminary through various platforms. Since 2012, theological aesthetics, especially healing arts, have been integrated into various courses. Healing becomes one dimension that is intentionally integrated into the theological education, including in shaping the collective response to the questions of human sexualities that often wound the individual and the communal lives.

The formation also reveals the connection between women mentoring and leadership. Two of our future faculty, Kartika, who is doing her doctoral study at Jakarta seminary and Maraike, who is now taking a German course in Bochum for her doctoral study at Missions Akademie Hamburg University, are the examples. They shared that the experiences of co-teaching and the formation during their study have shaped their understanding and practice of discipleship. Maraike’s master thesis focuses on the narratives of Indonesian and Filipina migrant workers in Malaysia and their influence in shifting the local churches’ understanding of evangelism. Kartika’s research relates mission, trauma studies, and the theology of religions in the context of Indonesian history of trauma.

Witnessing discipleship is a discipleship that has scars as Tig Notaro notes, “I have scars because my body heals.” In her reading that disrupts the common interpretation of the doubting Thomas, Shelly Rambo states that the “wounds cannot be easily seen or accessed. . . the wounds are both concealed and revealed, engaged, and covered over.”² Recapturing the space of the upper room as a new landscape of what she called the “afterlife of trauma” Rambo reminds us of the prevalence of Christian narratives that “erase wounds” rather than attending to wounds. The missional formation at theological institutions should also aim to form a community of witnesses that “attend to wounds rather than erase them.”³

The somatic images that go beyond just seeing the wounds—touching, breathing, sensing—invite other ways of reflecting on the formation of discipleship that takes place after the resurrection. Witnessing leadership as a result of the formation of discipleship is resilient in the face of death by continuing to insist, to breathe the breath of life, and to embody the story of the afterlife of trauma, persisting in loving life amidst the wounds that remain. Here, breathing as a metaphor of mission—inspired by my

² Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 147.

³ *Ibid*, 149.

conversation with my mentor, Dana L. Robert—needs to be considered in our missional formation in our diverse communities.

Thank you.