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EDITORIAL

I am delighted that this issue of *QUEST* has finally come out! Thanks to the Open Access Movement, anyone connected to the internet could read the articles prior to their official release. When I wrote this editorial, Hong Kong—a place where I live, work, and anchor myself—was just stepping up coronavirus efforts as a second wave of infections struck. The pandemic has taken place amid the anti-extradition protest movement here. This is a world-famous anti-government movement that has rocked Hong Kong for months, and coupled with the public discontent over the government's ineptitude at handling the coronavirus crisis, we are now in a deepening legitimacy crisis. My society has been experiencing one historic event after another. Hong Kong has become increasingly politicized, where people are fighting not just for health, for survival, but also for justice. Intractable conflicts rage over the city, and the situation shows no sign of dying down. Questions looming for me recently are: How are these conflicts to be resolved? Is hospitality still possible amid such hostility? What does hospitality have to do with resistance movements? It just so happens that this issue of *QUEST* is dedicated to the theme of “hospitality.” It was in the atmosphere described above that, as an editor of the journal, I read all the contributions. I am deeply grateful.

Hospitality is about alterity. It is about a permanent tension between sameness (singularity) and difference (plurality), and how these two are theoretically intertwined and mutually implied. While hospitality encourages dialogue, acceptance, empathetic understanding, forgiveness, etc., it also admits the impossibility of being unconditional. Moreover, hospitality is not only a concept, but, more importantly and straightforwardly, a practice.

The modern notion and practice of hospitality has a tradition tracing back to the Greco-Roman world. Indeed, hospitality has strong roots in the history of Christianity, and in the Hebrew culture. In the Hebrew Bible, God is represented primarily as a host. Yet, God is also received as a guest. Israelites are also required to remember their history of sojourn in Egypt and the desert, and how God was hospitable to them in the midst of this. In the New Testament, Jesus is imagined as an ultimate stranger to this world, while at the same time he extends God's welcome to humanity. He also requests his followers practice a radical hospitality to their stranger-neighbors. Judaism regards hospitality to guests as a commandment from God, and through the centuries hospitality has been regarded as a great virtue by the Christian church.

Hospitality is also generally regarded as a moral virtue in many Asian cultures and religions. Although hospitality is variously interpreted as conditional, it is certainly a virtue in Chinese cultures, particularly in Confucianism, Daoism and Chinese Buddhism. Hospitality, in the language of *dāna* (giving), is one of the central teachings of Buddha, as interpreted by Theravada Buddhism, a dominant form of the religion in many Asian countries, such as Sri Lanka, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and also practiced by many groups in China, Nepal, Vietnam, and Bangladesh. It is therefore worth the effort of capturing all the nuances of the spiritualities of Asian hospitality, especially when nowadays many Asian traditions are ideologically deployed for hostility rather than hospitality toward the “other,” and when even hospitality can be deployed as a tool for social control.

In the passing decades, hospitality has received much scholarly attention across different disciplines and in various contexts. Its interpretation is spelt out anew every time a theorist or a practitioner attempts to relate it to a variety of human experiences. For example, we have a deconstructionist approach (Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle) which is classical in the field. We have a political theology of hospitality (Emmanuel Lévinas), linguistic hospitality (Paul

Ricoeur), intellectual hospitality (Eleanor Kaufman), inter-religious hospitality (Catherine Cornille; Marianne Moyaert; Amis Yong), ecological hospitality (Anne F. Elvey), and pastoral hospitality, to name but a few.

While Asian countries are heterogeneous, the perennial practical problems they are facing are not altogether different. The list could be long, but includes at least: social injustice, poverty, gender injustice, social exclusion of sexual minorities, caste-related violence, class antagonism, neocolonialism, Asia-West tension, racism, inter-religious conflict, intra-religious conflict, terrorism, urban vs. rural differences, ecological problems, political oppression, etc. These issues persistently appear in the research studies of Asian scholars. The discussion of these issues is not only of local and regional significance, but is also globally relevant. I suggest that hospitality is highly relevant to these polarizing issues.

Most of the present submissions were papers presented at the Academic Conference cum 15th Anniversary Celebration organized by the Institute for Advanced Study in Asian Cultures and Theologies held in July 2019. Our peer reviewers selected eight papers for this issue. I am sure you are going to learn a lot about hospitality across different cultures and social-political situations from the authors' theological reflections and practices. I hasten to add that I myself learned a great deal from those that were not selected as well.

We do hope you enjoy reading the articles in this issue. Let me repeat: *QUEST* welcomes submissions—research papers and book reviews—that span the full spectrum of religious, cultural, theological, and interdisciplinary studies on the cultures and religions of Asia. We hope to receive your manuscripts in 2020.

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BUILDING HOPE AMIDST DISASTER THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BANTUL PEOPLE DURING THE MAY 2006 EARTHQUAKE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explain the solidarity of people toward the victims of disasters and the relation between solidarity and the virtues of hope and faith. Solidarity in its various forms does not stand alone, but connects to the virtue of hope, which is based on faith. From the experiences of the Bantul people in the province of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, following the May 2006 earthquake, the material and spiritual support of people from all over the world helped the survivors to rise from adversity. The virtues of hope and faith strengthened them to endure suffering and rise again.

Introduction

Disasters are prevalent in Indonesia since they hit almost every year. Examples include the Tsunami in Aceh in 2004, the earthquakes of Pangandaran, Nias, Yogyakarta, and Central Java, the eruptions of the Merapi, Sinabung, Agung, and Kelud mountains, floods, and landslides. In 2018, there was an earthquake in Lombok and Palu, which left thousands of victims in pain, and trillions of rupiah lost. In such a context, reflection on the experience of disasters is relevant.

This study focuses on the May 2006 earthquake in the provinces of Yogyakarta and Central Java, Indonesia. This disaster left many people amazed at the sense of human unity, which was still very strong, in spite of an increasingly individualistic and selfish spirit. Material and financial support to be distributed to the victims came from all over the world, reflecting God's solidarity with his creation (Kristiaji, 2007). Human solidarity can thus be considered the highest virtue among others, including hope and faith.

Various forms of disaster relief are often temporary, since expressions of concern and consolation generally occur only in the days surrounding the incident. The survivors are then left to face the ongoing reality of the disaster, and their maturity determines their response and recovery. Attention and research should thus focus more on the other virtues shown by the survivors.

This paper studies those virtues that are related to the spirit of unity of people affected by disasters. The survivors demonstrate much courage in their helplessness, by accepting reality, and possessing the hope to bounce back from the suffering. This becomes a good source of inspiration for the community, both physically and mentally and it becomes easier for people to face the worst

disaster that might occur. Does such solidarity have an impact on the hope of the victims that they might be able to return to their normal lives?

Javanese society considers *nrima* (surrender) a virtue, for it symbolizes moral maturity, patience, and sincerity (Magnis Suseno, 1984:142). Through surrender, a person retains the power to respond to difficulties rationally, rather than collapse into futile reactions. *Nrima* gives people the strength to endure the most difficult situations. Additionally, *sumeleh* is another Javanese word referring to the ability to re-discover one's self. A person obtains the qualities of *nrima* and *sumeleh* through sheer belief and hope in salvation. This, by extension, reveals hope influences these qualities and vice versa.

In Christianity and Islam, surrendering to God is a matter of faith. This virtue grows alongside belief and the hope of salvation. In Christianity, faith, hope, and charity (love) are theological virtues. However, "the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

This paper studies the experience of the residents of Caben hamlet in the district of Bantul, Yogyakarta province, Indonesia, during and following the May 2006 earthquake, with a focus on hope. The following questions are raised:

1. What virtues and local pearls of wisdom inspired the community of Caben hamlet to survive this significant downturn?
2. How was hope attained by the people of the Caben hamlet community?
3. What are the obstacles encountered by the survivors in their attempts to hope in the midst of suffering?
4. How is hope built and developed in the midst of a disaster?

This research was conducted eleven years after the disaster occurred. The idea was to consciously reflect on past experiences and not forget what had happened in the past. Since enough time had elapsed between the study and the incident, it was hoped that the survivors would be more accurate and less emotional when sharing, and that this research might therefore draw lessons on building hope and enthusiasm for life amidst a calamity. Given that Indonesia is a disaster area, the results of this study could be very beneficial for other communities, in being better prepared to face any disasters that may come in the future.

An Overview of the May 2006 Earthquake

The May 2006 earthquake took place in Yogyakarta and Central Java Provinces of Indonesia, on May 27, 2006, at 05:52 local time (May 26, 2006, 22:54 GMT). The epicentre was in the Indian Ocean about 33 km south of Bantul district in the Yogyakarta Province (Aloysius Gunadi Brata, 2018). With a strength of 5.9 on the Richter scale, the quake affected five districts in Yogyakarta Province and six districts in Central Java Province. Bantul district (where this research takes place), was most heavily affected, and included Klaten, Kulonprogo, Yogyakarta, Gunung Kidul, and Sleman.

The damage and losses were estimated at Rp 29.1 trillion (US\$ 3.1 billion). Households and private companies were the most affected, with thousands of houses destroyed, and thousands of people losing their jobs. Since the areas affected by the disaster were densely populated, around 6200 people are reported to have died, most of them poor.

The mood was somber and became increasingly so when the news of an impending tsunami emerged. Many people who had broken legs in the fall of the buildings were forced to flee to avoid being hit by the tsunami. Traffic in the disaster areas was chaotic. There was even a case of a family that tied one of its members to a tree to prevent him being washed away by the tsunami, since he was sick and they could not carry him along. Fortunately, the tsunami did not arrive. Nevertheless, a tsunami might be seen as a test of the faith and confidence of the survivors, especially as many of them were not afraid of the coming of the tsunami, since they trusted in and were convinced of God's help.

Reconstruction and rehabilitation after such a disaster requires substantial funding. Interestingly, reconstruction in Java has proceeded faster than it did in Aceh and Nias, which were affected by a tsunami a few years earlier (Aloysius Gunadi Brata, 2018). Although several factors led to faster reconstruction in Java, the general assumption is that the community unity of the Javanese was a decisive factor. For this reason, solidarity is the central theme of this reflection, as mentioned above.

Methodology

The study was qualitative and aimed at discovering the perspective of the survivors upon their experience of the May 2006 earthquake. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and forum group discussions. Observation of the survey location was frequently carried out to gather additional information about the social situation of the people in the area, while a literature review was conducted to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the issues.

Caben hamlet in Bantul district was chosen for the survey with some considerations: this hamlet is located about eight kilometers from the center of Bantul district, around the Sacred Heart Catholic Church of Ganjuran. There are a total of 1,177 residents in this hamlet, which has a land area of sixty-four hectares, consisting of thirty-four and thirty hectares of land and paddy respectively, managed by six neighborhood units (*Rukun Tetangga*). Residents in the hamlet are Catholic (507), Protestant (5), Muslim (661), and Hindu (4). At the time of the May 2006 earthquake, there were sixty-three deaths, with fifty-seven reported to have died during the earthquake, and several houses of residents collapsed to the ground. These conditions make this location ideal for this study.

For this research, eighteen respondents were interviewed, and twenty-three participants were involved in forum group discussions. Three of those who participated in the discussion were also interviewees, and therefore, the total number of respondents was twenty-eight.

There were two forum group discussions, with eight Catholics participating in the first, and five Muslims in the second. The grouping of the forum participants based on religion was intended to enable participants to express their opinions without feeling any constraint to do with religion, and also to determine if religion would be a variable in the research.

Of the respondents, seventeen were men and eleven were women. Most of them worked around the Caben village as farmers and breeders. Two worked at the Ganjuran Orphanage, one was a driver, and one worked in the city of Bantul. All respondents bore material losses from the May 2006 earthquake since their houses had collapsed and were flattened to the ground. The two respondents whose houses did not collapse had built them with strong material. They did not calculate precisely how many rupiahs they lost.

Additionally, of the sixty-three who died in Caben hamlet, seventeen were relatives and neighbors of the respondents. This reveals that those selected were deeply affected by the May 2006 earthquake, and their experiences of suffering were shared in the interview and forum group discussions. The table below describes the relationship between the respondents and the victims.

The relation between the respondents and the victims

Children	Mother	Younger brother	Brother	Wife	Grand-Child	Grand-mother	Aunt	Step-father	Niece	Neighbor	Total
4	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	17

The data collected included the expressions and statements of the survivors, obtained through interviews and discussions. These individuals expressed their beliefs and personal attitudes, which manifested their maturity and faith. The data was then analyzed in comparison with theological views and Patrick Shade's theory about the practicality of hope, as described in the following sections.

Theoretical Framework

Hope as a Theological Virtue

Hope is essential for human life and its dynamics. It is what makes humans live, for life only happens once. Humans try their best to achieve and perfect the day after this one, hoping it will come, and that it will be better than the one before.

Thomas Aquinas defines hope as the desire for a good (in Latin, *desiderium boni possibilis ardui*), which is hard, but not impossible to obtain (*Summa Theologiae* IIa-IIae. Q. 17 as cited by Pesckhe Vol. II, 1992: 65). Also, humans can hope for anything: for healthy living, business success, excellence in education, etc. A gambler hopes to win the game, a thief hopes for success in stealing, and a murderer for the target person to be killed. The critical point is, there is a possibility to obtain the desire, although it is hard since there is no guarantee the desire will be fulfilled.

As mentioned by Thomas Aquinas above, hope is a virtue when it is directed towards what is morally excellent and lovable (Pesckhe Vol II, 1994:66), because in essence virtue is a habit that gives humans both the inclination and power to do what is morally right (Pesckhe Vol I, 1994:343). Virtue is a quality that encourages moral good. It is the excellence or superiority someone possesses. Whoever is morally knowledgeable and prudent loves the virtues and strives to do good by them, hence making them a habit.

The virtues are grouped into two, namely: moral and theological. The object of moral virtue is related to human reality, while the object of theological virtue is related to God. The four cardinal moral virtues are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, while the theological virtues are faith, hope, and love or charity, which are referred to in the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13:13).

Christian theology considers hope a supernatural virtue, which means it symbolizes the fullness of God's salvation. Many believe salvation will occur in the last days when humans are united in the blessed communion with God, the ultimate symbol of hope. In more inclusive, universal and cosmic terms, the object of hope is formulated as the consummation of the messianic reign, the completion of creation under God's design, the perfection of all things in Christ as the head of the universe, and integral salvation (Pesckhe Vol II, 1994:71).

Christian hope is not only the expectation of redemption, eternal happiness, or eschatological deliverance at the end of time, separate from the real concerns of the world. Hope also relates to the worldly and temporary sphere. The Kingdom of God came to the world and continues to be manifest in the life of the human nation. In this sense, peace, justice, and the better ordering of the world are also the real hopes of Christians. However, temporary and worldly hopes remain the precursors of the ultimate hope, which is eschatological salvation. In other words, "although the final object of hope is the fullness of God's glory and the universal salvation, all which contributes to the realization of this universal, ultimate goal, here and now in man's earthly existence, is equally and with full right the confidence of hope" (Pesckhe Vol. II, 1994:72).

Several factors cause people to have hope, including belief in God's great power, and willingness to help people. This willingness is evident from the history of salvation in which God always keeps His promises to save people, mainly through His revelation in Jesus Christ. Secondly God channels His mercy through the sacraments and the prayers delivered to Him through the intercession of the Virgin Mary and the saints, and salvation is granted to humans through the Church.

As stated earlier, hope is the driver in human life. Challenges and suffering are overcome through hopefulness. Therefore, it is important to be optimistic about the future since life does not stop at this time. In a sense, hope is a tool to continue building the world, since human beings are called upon by God to participate in His creative work.

Dimensions of Hope

Hope is experienced in all of life, and this implies its manifestations are very diverse. Children, adolescents, adults, and parents have their hopes, just like individuals, families, organizations, nations, countries, and the wider community.

Additionally, hope causes life to be dynamic, the future more open, and encourages the enthusiasm with which to build the world. However, there is also the danger that hope will not be realized, a situation that makes people frustrated. This is understandable, since what we hope for is totally out of our control. Patrick Shade, in his *Habits of Hope* (2001: 5-6), distinguishes between blind and sensible or practical hope. Blind hope does not rest on real conditions; there is no commitment to realize it, while sensible/practical hope rests in reality, therefore, realization is warranted.

Furthermore, Shade proposes a theory for bridging these two poles of hope. Hope needs to rest on reality to be realized, and not be blinded. Additionally, hope need not be strictly limited to the purpose for which it was intended. Therefore, Shade proposes a pragmatic theory that can empower the practicality of hope. He rejects traditional theories of hope, including the theology that bases optimism in the absolute divine power. According to these traditional theories, hope is lost to human beings. Instead, Shade advocates the use of intelligence to form and pursue this subject, to explore perseverance, and realize hope can be productive in facing challenges and enriching life, and that it is therefore not empty and futile.

According to Shade there are three dimensions of hope: particular hope, habits of hope, and hopefulness. These three dimensions are separated only abstractly, and are related. First, particular hopes are those directed at real objects—recovery from illness, succeeding in business, and studies, for example. Particular hopes lie between plans and dreams (Shade, 2001: 19). A plan has clear goals, while hope does not. However, a target is more precise than a dream since it has clear goals. If someone dreams of becoming a contractor, realization is uncertain. By contrast, for someone who is planning to become a contractor, realization is certain since various steps are taken towards achieving it. Hope has clear goals in comparison to dreams. The specialty of particular hope is that it is accompanied by a commitment to realization, though there might be difficult obstacles to overcome. For instance, if one hopes to succeed in business, the target can be achieved if there is a commitment to achieving it. The second dimension is habits of hope, the essential fostering of a commitment to make efforts to achieve unclear expectations. There are three main elements to the habits of hope; namely, persistence, resourcefulness, and courage. Realization of a particular hope requires commitment, which is manifested in these elements. Habits are associated with the other two dimensions, including particular hopes and hopefulness, and the hinges which connect them are equally essential. The third dimension is hopefulness, which involves positive desiring, even in continuous suffering. If the commitment to achieve expectations is continued with persistence, resourcefulness, and courage, hopefulness grows. For this reason, particular hopes come closer to being achieved. Therefore, according to Shade's theory, the dimensions of hope are practical and productive, and they are particular hopes, habits of hope and hopefulness. This study assesses Shade's theory in light of the experience of the Caben hamlet community after the May 2006 earthquake in the provinces of Yogyakarta and Central Java.

Findings

Faith as the Basis of Hope

From interviews and forum group discussions with respondents, twenty-three statements relating to the hopes of the survivors during the disaster were noted. Of these, twenty stated faith was the foundation that enabled survivors to rise from their suffering immediately. The following expressions or statements show the faith dimensions of the survivors. First, God is seen as the origin and purpose of everything:

Whatever God wants happens, and therefore, there was a belief in restoration.

(Indonesian: Tuhan yang berkehendak semua terjadi, maka saya percaya pasti Tuhan akan memulihkannya.)

The Almighty makes all of these events.

(Indonesian: *semua kejadian ini yang membuat adalah Yang Kuasa.*)

God made everything.

(Indonesian: *semua peristiwa Tuhan yang membuat.*)

Second, God is thought of as a helper. This is illustrated in the following expressions:

They remained hopeful God would help.

(Indonesian: *saya tetap optimis dan memiliki harapan bahwa pasti Tuhan akan menolong.*)

Due to God's help, some were still safe. It was unbelievable

(Indonesian: *Karena pertolongan Yang Kuasa, saya masih selamat. Kalau dipikir tidak masuk akal.*)

Third, God was regarded as the mainstay of everything. Human beings can rely entirely only on God. This can be seen in the following statements:

Life is about following and surrendering to God.

(Indonesian: *Hidup hanyalah sekedar ikut Tuhan dan menjalani hidup ini dengan berpasrah.*)

Human beings belong to God.

(Indonesian: *manusia adalah milik Tuhan.*)

God does anything according to His will.

(Indonesian: *Tuhan bisa berbuat apa saja sesuai kehendak-Nya.*)

God is the owner of this life.

(Indonesian: *Tuhan yang menjadi pemilik kehidupan ini.*)

God wants everyone to live.

(Indonesian: *Tuhan tidak akan mencobai. Tuhan ingin semua orang hidup.*)

Life and death are determined by the Almighty.

(Indonesian: *Hidup dan jodoh ditentukan oleh Yang Kuasa.*)

The above statements of the survivors fall under the teachings of religions about faith. They contain three essential elements, namely (1) faith as total surrender to God, (2) absolute trust, which leads to true loyalty to God, (3) obedience, which is not easy for modern people who strongly emphasize autonomy and freedom (Chang 2015:25-26).

Faith in the sense of total submission is the basis for humanity to have hope. In the letter to the Hebrews, it is stated that only faith can guarantee the blessings which we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities which at present remain unseen (1 Heb. 11:1). According to Thomas Aquinas (cited by Chang 2015:27), the verse emphasizes that faith is the substance and basis of human hope, works of truth, and the proof of the certainty of what is unseen.

This was also the experience of the survivors of the May 2006 earthquake in Caben hamlet. Surrendering to God was the basis of their hope when enduring very heavy suffering. In general, they hoped God would help them and give them the strength to face all kinds of difficulties, wholeheartedly believing that He has ways of fulfilling all their needs. In this context, the main hope of eternal salvation is also manifested in these secondary hopes, which are temporary and worldly. The survivors hoped to receive rice packs, tents, tarpaulins, or financial assistance to rebuild houses. These concrete expectations were based on faith in God, who is the origin and destination, helper, and organizer of life.

Patrick Shade (2001), as mentioned earlier, rejects traditional and theological teachings, which have the supernatural and divine power as the foundation of hope. Instead, Shade proposes to intelligence as the basis for forming and pursuing hope. However, the experience of the survivors in Caben hamlet proves the survivors' particular hopes for food, money, and other support emerged from their absolute submission to God. Their habits of hope in the forms of their persistence, resourcefulness, and courage to face the terrible disaster originated from their strong trust in the Almighty. Also, their optimism to live hopefully is supported by their faith. It should be noted the survivors are all religious, and it is not possible to separate their experiences from their faith. In this context, therefore, Patrick Shade's theory of hope is not suitable for the religious community.

God's Presence in the Love of Others

In interviews and discussions, the survivors confirmed their submission to and hope in God grew strongly when they received overwhelming help. They were humbled by the number of people who generously supported them regardless of religion or group. Assistance in the form of food, goods that could be directly used, money, and labor were manifestations of love and solidarity.

Additionally, this love and solidarity made the survivors aware of God's love and they stated that assistance confirmed their faith and hope. Some said that since the earthquake, they had become aware of the importance of faith and the principle of cooperation. Since then, several have begun to pray and work together diligently. Another said that in similar conditions, they would remain optimistic and have hope God would help them.

It is clear that faith in God is not lived in an abstract void; instead, it continues to grow through human love. That is in line with Paul's assertion that love is the highest virtue. "So these three things are left, namely; faith, hope and love, and the greatest of them is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). Love unites and perfects everything. "And above all: wear love, as a binder that unites and perfects" (Col. 3:14).

Love and solidarity encouraged the survivors to care more for their neighbors. By working together and helping others in the same boat, they generated enthusiasm for a better life. Two chairmen of the neighborhood association in the Caben hamlet stated that they prioritized the safety of others before their own interests. They were willing to take care of the funerals of their dead neighbors and provide food and tents for their residents, even though their own homes and families had not been taken care of. It was only on the last day that the chairmen's houses were cleared with cooperation from the residents.

Love and solidarity foster hope and faith, and the former is based on complete belief in God. Two residents shared experiences in which they suffered a similar fate of losing their beloved children. Mr. Wardi and Mr. Warjiyono lost a daughter and son respectively. However, they believed God would bring about a change to their situation. Their hopes came from their faith. It happened that a few years later, Mr. Wardi was blessed with a son, while Mr. Warjiyono had a daughter, even though his wife was in her forties. Mr. Warjiyono prepared for a cesarean section

for his wife and the most expensive medicines for recovery after the surgery when the time for delivery was nearing. However, thanks to God's mercy, his wife was able to give birth normally, and the drugs were acquired for free.

Also, Mr. Warjiono lost a newly-built 40 million rupiahs mortgaged house. Only two installments had been made on its repayment. The loan had to be repaid in full, even though the house had been destroyed. However, there is optimism about debt financing and owning a home due to the faith placed in God, which is strengthened by unity with others.

Patrick Shade (2001) does not state specifically how hope grows. His theory presupposes that these concrete expectations flourish by means of human *intelligence*. From the experience of the Caben hamlet community, concrete expectations develop out of the love and unity of all. They do not grow without concrete experience. Habits of hope in the forms of persistence, resourcefulness, and courage grow when one experiences love from others. Similarly, hopefulness flourishes when one is shown love and solidarity from others. Therefore, Shade's theory of hope is not applicable in the above context of a religious community.

Dishonesty as a Barrier to Hope

Not much was revealed from the interviews and discussions about the factors that inhibit hope. However, cases of looting and aid not reaching the intended addresses were mentioned, and the dishonesty and greed of a small number of residents was highlighted as a possible barrier to hope. There were a number of people who denied receiving aid even though they had done so. Others took advantage of peoples' predicament to loot and steal, causing survivors to lose hope. Fortunately, such cases were not hugely significant. Love and unity was stronger than those few negative incidents.

Understandably, dishonesty and greed are obstacles to growth of hope, hence, they are the opposite of love and solidarity. By crippling hope, trust in others is lost, and fear about one's needs not being fulfilled (especially while suffering), creeps in. As a result, despair arises, and this is the enemy of hope (Peschke Vol.II, 1994:79).

Building Hope Amidst Disaster

This study discovered that love and solidarity, which grow and flourish in disaster experiences, are not lone-standing virtues. Previous research mostly stops at the point at which their findings show unity among the human race to be a source of amazement. This study explains how love and solidarity foster hope, allowing survivors to quickly rise from adversity when they receive assistance from various parties as a manifestation of God's love.

In the wake of disaster and suffering, any form of assistance and solidarity from others needs to be intensified. When support from people to victims is limited, the latter often struggle to meet their needs. Thus, material assistance needs to be supplemented with mental-spiritual assistance and consolation, that the survivors might always remember God's love. Trauma healing, prayers, and worship are critical and remind the survivors of God's mercy.

As a form of protection for vulnerable people, meetings, and gatherings which foster a spirit of cooperation need to be held frequently. The community also needs to become accustomed to doing spiritual exercises to prevent being caught up in momentary needs. If at some point they are hit by a disaster, they will thus be prepared mentally to continue in the virtues of faith, hope, and love/solidarity.

Conclusion

Solidarity and charity correlate with faith and hope, and are not different from other theological virtues. Shade's theory about the practicality of hope is irrelevant to the experience of the Caben hamlet community. Love, care and support from others bring hope. Therefore, building

hope amidst the experience of disaster can be achieved by increasing the attention, assistance, and unity of others not affected by the disaster. Solidarity fosters and strengthens hope, enabling people to rise from destruction and suffering as soon as possible. By contrast, dishonesty, greed, and taking advantage of the suffering of people who are hit by a calamity needs to be eliminated. Such bad attitudes dispel hope and break the spirits of those affected by disaster.

Solidarity and cooperation need also to be encouraged in society in general. Willingness to help one other and work together in society is a shared virtue that continues to grow hope. In Indonesia, which is very prone to disasters, hope is significant, so that a community will not be easily discouraged if at any time a disaster occurs.

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RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION WITH VIETNAMESE CULTURE: THE CASE OF ALEXANDRE DE RHODES (1591 – 1660) AND LÉOPOLD MICHEL CADIÈRE (1869 – 1955)

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ABSTRACT

Throughout history, tolerance has always been a requirement for human ethics, but it is not always easy to implement when people live together and become integrated with one another. In the process of East-West cultural integration, with its potential for conflict between civilizations, the need for tolerance in coexistence and integration is especially important. This article studies the religious tolerance and cultural integration of Christians in Vietnamese culture through the cases of two Western missionaries, who are also two famous scholars, during two different periods in Vietnamese history: Alexandre de Rhodes (1591-1660) and Léopold Michel Cadière (1869-1955). The scholarly contributions of these two figures are well-researched and acknowledged in Vietnam, but from the perspective of religious tolerance and cultural integration, their missions in Vietnam have not received much attention. This article aims to contribute to the study of Christian evangelization in Vietnamese history and draw some lessons about religious tolerance and cultural integration in the context of current globalization.

Introduction

Culture is “the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group” (UNESCO 1982). In essence, cultures are different and the differences between cultural communities are their invaluable assets, and should thus be preserved and promoted. However, cultural differences also tend to lead to conflicts and can impede cultural integration, because each culture has its own assumptions, its own peculiar values, and each culture also inclines to consider itself better than others (Mach 1993, 7). Accordingly, in order to live and share with one another, people, as well as cultures, need a spirit of tolerance and respect for differences.

Unlike previous regional cultural contacts, the East-West cultural relations in the Middle Ages (according to the history of Eastern culture) took place in around the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, marking a turning point in the history of human culture. The basic cultural differences, especially those of religion and belief, led to critical conflicts and distinctive behaviors between cultures belonging to two typologically different civilizations (Trần 2001, 39).

Prominent in the above mentioned East-West cultural contact is the communication between Western cultures, typically Christian culture, with East Asian cultures, in particular the cultures of



the countries in the region under the profound influence of Confucianism. As is often the case, differences in religions and beliefs often lead to profound cultural conflicts, because such beliefs are “a strong basic for social and cultural identity and are a common yardstick by which people compare themselves with others” (Levinson and Ember 1996, 1088). History has also recorded that “where Christian missionaries were successful, societies often experienced dramatic transformations in notions of family and community.” (Levinson and Ember 1996, 1101). This was unavoidable, especially with the new awareness of religious pluralism and multiculturalism, which was not laid out in the past as it is in our time.

Through the process of evangelization, and the development of Catholicism in the medieval culture of East Asian countries, including Vietnam, it can be demonstrated that the missionaries basically had a spirit of religious tolerance, respect for differences, and suitable methods for conducting inculturation, thereby bridging East-West cultural relations. Of the influence on Vietnamese culture, as Nguyễn Tài Thư notes: “If speaking of the influences of Western ideology and culture in Vietnam, Christianity is certainly the first factor” (Thư 1997, 59). The fact that Catholicism is the second largest religion in Vietnam after Buddhism, also demonstrates this (Dũng 2013).

In this article, and from the perspective of cultural relations, I seek to contribute to an understanding of the conceptions, the attitudes and the approaches employed by the missionaries in becoming inculturated in Vietnam as they faced the challenges of religious differences in particular, and cultural differences in general. I chose to examine two typical cases, namely Alexandre de Rhodes (1591-1660) and Léopold Michel Cadière (1869 - 1955). The former, “the first Frenchman to Vietnam”¹, had striking success in the early stages of the missionary process and contributed to the creation and development of the Vietnamese script in Romanized form. The latter, also a Frenchman, belonged to the last generation of Western missionaries in Vietnam, where he vowed to spend his life, loving and contributing to the country, and where he is highly appreciated for his mission and his scientific research. He wrote over 250 studies on Vietnamese culture, covering many fields, especially the Vietnamese language, and Vietnamese family and religion.

One common point in the missions in Vietnam from the first missionaries to Léopold Michel Cadière is that they took place before the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which advocated the policy of opening Christianity to the world, on the principle that “due regard for the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples and Christian life will be accommodated to the genius and the dispositions of each culture” (Vatican Council II 2006, 292). This reveals that mission in the earlier period was perhaps more difficult than the period after Vatican II, because of a lack of a basic spirit of cultural tolerance and respect for differences.

Christian Inculturation and Vietnamese Culture

Originally located in the ancient Southeast Asian cultural space, Vietnam, like other countries in this area, has rich indigenous Southeast Asian cultural strata with diverse traditions. However, during its development before modern times, unlike other cultures in Southeast Asia that were influenced by India, Vietnam, as G. Coedès defines it, was instead deeply influenced by Chinese culture and “had to adopt or copy her institutions, her customs, her religions, her language, and her writing.” (Coedès 1975, 35).

Up until the middle of the sixteenth century, when the first missionaries arrived, Vietnam had been in contact with and acculturated to Chinese culture for over 1500 years. The first period followed the path of war (a thousand years of colonial rule) and the next was when the Vietnamese

¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Alexandre de Rhodes,” accessed June 10, 2019, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/alexandre-de-rhodes>.

government chose the Chinese model for the country's development (from the tenth century onwards). By the end of the nineteenth century, while gradually integrating into international culture, Vietnamese culture had for about 2000 years been associated with the Northeast Asian cultural orbit, was deeply influenced by Chinese culture, and was often considered part of the Sino-sphere, a cultural sphere with many differences from Western culture, especially in terms of religion.

Vietnam continued to absorb many Chinese cultural elements into its Southeast Asian indigenous culture, including the feudal-political-cultural model with Confucianism as the official ideology for organizing society. In terms of religious beliefs, besides animism—a kind of local polytheism—Vietnam absorbed and reconstructed a localized and harmonized form of religion and religious beliefs that came from China, which included the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism), and especially ancestor worship. Historically, Buddhism has always ranked first among the religions in Vietnam, deeply affecting both intellectuals and common people. There was a period when Buddhism (Mahayana Buddhism) developed to a peak in Vietnam, and included significant contributions from the nobility. Typically, under the Tran Dynasty (1225-1400), King Trần Nhân Tông established the Trúc Lâm Yên Tử Zen sect that has had great influence on Vietnamese Buddhism in particular and Vietnamese culture in general (Xuân 2012, 35). Taoism was not a religion in Vietnam, but nevertheless deeply penetrated indigenous beliefs and has had a great influence on the populace. In general, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism deeply influenced Vietnamese culture, because in reality the “Three Teachings” formed a syncretic belief system that could be found at all levels of Vietnamese society (Dutton, Werner, and Whitmore 2012, 114). Ancestor worship has also held a special position in Vietnamese culture and is considered a religion in Vietnam. According to a recent study entitled *Ancestor Worship in Some Countries of the World and Vietnam* (Thoa 2015, 180), “100% of families in Vietnam have ancestral altars.” It is ancestor worship that has truly been the foundation and expression of Vietnamese cultural identity, especially of the Viet ethnic group—the representative of Vietnamese people. According to Ngô Đức Thịnh:

In Vietnam, experiencing many ups and downs with events of history, while many other popular religions and religious beliefs were subject to the stigma of being condemned “superstitious,” the ancestor worship has and still has occupied a sacred position in the spiritual life of people. Especially, this is the belief recognized by the political institutions (States) from the past until now, even at different levels. (Thịnh 2012, 24)

The continuous process of dealing with external cultural elements in both normal and unusual conditions, especially the process of acculturation of foreign religions, has demonstrated the spirit of tolerance and the ability for integration of the Vietnamese people. Perhaps because of this, cultural synthesis has been considered one of the outstanding features of Vietnamese culture (Trần 2001; Vương 2003). A Jesuit missionary who preached in central Vietnam from 1618 to 1622 noted the following in a book he published in Italy in 1633:

The Cochinchinese [Vietnamese] are more gentle and courteous in conversation than any other nation of Europe . . . They stand much upon their valour . . . They ask us many questions, they invite us to eat with them, usually all kinds of courtesy, civility and familiarity. . . . It seemed to us as if we were among ancient acquaintances . . . There is a fare gate opened for the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ among them.”²

² “Quotations: Medieval and Colonial Vietnam,” Alpha History, accessed June 10, 2019, <https://alphahistory.com/vietnamwar/quotations-medieval-colonial-vietnam>.

However, evangelization in Vietnam was still not easy because of cultural and religious differences, and because of the disapproval of the Vietnamese government, who feared that the new religion would disturb the social order and create difficulties. Besides, there were the issues to do with the attitude of the missionaries, in relation to the state of awareness before the Second Vatican Council. Taking the typical case of the relationship between evangelism and Vietnamese ancestor worship, Peter Phan, a theologian at Georgetown University, notes that Vietnam was heavily influenced by both China and Rome's prohibitions against the cult of ancestors, which profoundly affected the development of Vietnamese Catholicism (Phan 2003, 122-129).

While it is true that in the Ten Commandments of the Bible there is a commandment to "honor your father and your mother," ancestor worship in Vietnamese culture is not only a way of expressing affection for parents; it is also a religious belief about one's duty to dead relatives in the afterlife. In addition, ancestor worship is a kind of religion of family and lineage, and is a way of asserting Vietnamese identity as the Vietnamese proverb puts it: "birds have nests, men have stock."

Therefore, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu (1822-1888), a Vietnamese poet well-known for his nationalist and anti-colonial writings against the French presence in Cochinchina, strongly criticized the demolition of ancestor worship of Christian followers at that time. He called ancestor worship the "home doctrine," and said: "Better being blind than having eyes but not worshipping ancestors" (Chiểu 1982, 248). Before that, in the seventeenth century, as noted by one researcher, even the highly successful evangelist Alexandre de Rhodes and his colleague P. Marquez met with some opposition because of the cult of the ancestor of the Vietnamese and "their teachings clashed with superstitions, polygamy, and at the same time undermined the influence of Buddhism. Throughout the country, the Vietnamese accused missionaries of being witches, breaking temples, and attempting to overthrow the Trinh Lord." (Hùng 2010, 205).

The above mentioned problem reveals that in order to obtain success in evangelization in Vietnam, missionaries, in particular Alexandre de Rhodes and Léopold Michel Cadière, experienced many difficulties and needed to have a spirit of religious tolerance, in order to accept the differences as well as take appropriate measures.

Alexandre de Rhodes and Léopold Michel Cadière's Inculturation

According to a historical record of the Nguyễn Dynasty, the year 1533 marked the beginning of the first Western priests entering Vietnam to carry out missionary work (Quốc Sử Quán Triều Nguyễn 1998, 301). However, the early missionaries were rarely successful due to their unfamiliarity with Vietnamese language and culture. In the seventeenth century, when more Jesuits came to Vietnam and had better conditions for learning the language and about Vietnamese culture, evangelization achieved better results. Prominent in this early period, as mentioned above, was the missionary Alexandre de Rhodes (1591-1660).

During the course of his evangelization in Vietnam (1st phase: 1627-1630; 2nd phase: 1640-1645), Rhodes wrote three important works: a *Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin Dictionary*; an *Eight-Day Catechism*; and a *History of the Kingdom of Tonkin*. The first two works were written in Latin script (what the Vietnamese later called *Quốc ngữ*—the Vietnamese national writing script), both of which were published in Rome in 1651, while the third was written in Italian and published in 1650, translated into French and published in 1651, and in Latin in 1652.

The three works reveal Rhodes' important contribution to the systematization and development of *Quốc ngữ* in Vietnam, as well as his commitment to recording and reflecting Vietnamese culture in a special period of Vietnamese history. Among them, the *Eight-Day Catechism* and the *History of the Kingdom of Tonkin* clearly reflect the conception, elaboration and methods of Rhodes' missionary process in Vietnam. We can trace his attitude to other religions from the perspective of cultural tolerance.

The *History of the Kingdom of Tonkin* is Rhodes' report to the Vatican about the political and social situation of the Kingdom of Tonkin and the mission of evangelization there. In the report, it can be seen that Rhodes clearly holds to the orthodox views of Christianity, especially in the context of the European Catholic crisis during the religious reform movements, where Catholicism was seeking to assert itself by denying anything other than Catholicism.

In *History of the Kingdom of Tonkin*, Rhodes devoted eight chapters out of thirty-one of volume I to criticizing the three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, along with other religious practices. He considered all of them superstitions (Rhodes 1994, 39). Concerning Confucianism, Rhodes recognized the sage, and Confucius' great contribution to moral education, but denied Confucius was a spiritual leader of a religion or a saint, because in his view, if Confucius was holy, he would have mentioned the Great God. He also criticized people in the Kingdom of Tonkin as cowardly for revering Confucius as a God (Rhodes 1994, 39). He considered Buddhism a heresy that spread an untrue myth, and felt that the people believed in Buddhism blindly. He wrote:

In Cochinchina, there are numerous temples and pagodas where numerous idols are worshiped and praised. No matter how small or large a village, no matter how filthy or poor conditions, every village has a temple or a pagoda to which people closely attach themselves. Twice a month, at the beginning of the month (lunar calendar), and at the full moon people come to the temple filled with thick smoke and incense, pray and offer their sacrifice. No matter how poor a person is, all bring something and place it at the feet of the statue covered with dust. They kneel and prostrate four times, their faces drop closely to the ground. Then they chant and pray. (Rhodes 1994, 42)

The sect Rhodes criticized most is Taoism, because "it is too popular and much related to the devil" (Rhodes 1994, 43). Rhodes also devoted many chapters to criticizing the "superstitions" related to the deceased, including the special filial piety of children for parents who had died, and who spent too much on worship (Rhodes 1994, 51). Along with that were "superstitions" in the customs of marriage, birth, and year-in and year-out rituals, etc.

The views of Rhodes in the *History of the Kingdom of Tonkin* are also easily found in his famous *Eight-Day Catechism*, showing that he did not really have or promote the spirit of religious tolerance and respect for differences in beliefs. However, this is understandable if one puts that perspective into its historical context, both from a Catholic perspective and from the perspective of the then progress of the meeting between Eastern and Western civilizations. So where did the results Rhodes gained in his evangelizing work—as recognized by many people—come from?

In the second part of his *History of the Kingdom of Tonkin*, which reports on the process of spreading the faith in Tonkin, Rhodes clearly states his advantages and difficulties. Here, as in the *Eight-Day Catechism*, it can be seen that Rhodes' success mainly came from an awareness of mission and from his method of preaching. At the same time, he also partially demonstrated a spirit of respect for cultural differences and respect for indigenous culture, except for matters related to belief and faith.

First of all, Rhodes was aware of the need to master a local language in order to understand a culture and as a means of evangelization. He spent a lot of time learning the Vietnamese language and after that contributed greatly to the development of the *Quốc ngữ* script by compiling his *Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin Dictionary*, which was based on the contributions of some of his predecessors. He wrote the *Eight-Day Catechism* in the Vietnamese script, not only for his own use, but also as a guide for other missionaries. Secondly, Rhodes chose a neutral and moderate method. He said that many missionaries preached the Gospel by advocating the destruction of wrongs and the heresy of the people before promulgating Christian principles, in order "to destroy and pluck, to build and plant." He chose instead a way of teaching that did not focus on the errors

of other denominations, and took appropriate steps so that listeners could understand and accept reasonably:

Not to oppose the wrongs of the religious sects in the Kingdom of Tonkin but laying some of the principles that naturally understood, such as the creation of the universe, the end, and the absolute principle of everything . . . I was more successful, as I remarked, if I gave them some natural filial piety and natural affection for the Creator and their supreme essence. (Rhodes 1994, 94)

Because of his awareness of the type of mission mentioned above, Rhodes barely criticized Vietnamese ancestor worship and was not too harsh on other sects during the course of his mission, though in his report to the Vatican (*History of the Kingdom of Tonkin*), he presented a clear critique of other religions and beliefs he thought were superstitions. In addition, he paid close attention to indigenous customs, keeping his hair long, dressing and behaving like a Vietnamese, etc. One of the remarkable things about Rhodes is that he knew how to transform Catholic rituals using Vietnamese customs. For example, he changed the baptismal ritual to put salt in the hands instead of in the mouth of the baptized, and he did not use his saliva to anoint the baptized person and did not anoint the breasts of women, only their foreheads (Kết 2001, 67). Rhodes also found words that accorded with the Vietnamese people's feelings and understandings with which to preach about Christianity, God, angels, hell, original sin, baptism, preachers, etc. Vietnamese people had a tradition of considering fidelity and piety important, so Rhodes also put this content into preaching. For example in his *Eight-Day Catechism*, instead of using the Latin word "Deus" to denote "God," he used the term *Trời* (Heaven), which is very familiar to Vietnamese people when analyzing, interpreting and talking about the God who created the heaven and earth (Rhodes 1993, 13). From that work he introduced further terms, such as *Đức Chúa Trời* (the Lord of Heaven), *Thiên Chúa* (God), terms that are still widely used in Vietnam, both inside and outside Catholicism.

During his mission in Vietnam, Rhodes converted 6,700 Vietnamese people to Catholicism (Thuần 1996, 46). That was not a small number and as the researcher Nguyễn Văn Kiệm notes: "Alexandre de Rhodes, by the way of cleverness and fluency in Vietnamese, had great success in building a solid foundation for Vietnamese Catholic Association" (Kiệm 2007, 63).

For his part, Léopold Michel Cadière, carrying out missionary work in Vietnam 250 years after Alexandre de Rhodes, had many advantages, especially from the end of the nineteenth century, with the Peace Agreement (June 6, 1884) of the Nguyễn Dynasty which accepted French rule of the whole of Vietnam, creating many helpful conditions for the activities of Catholics in Vietnam.

From Alexandre de Rhodes to Léopold Michel Cadière, and up to now, there have been great examples of Christian cultural inculturation, but according to Bishop Paul Nguyễn Thái Hợp:

In the context of post Council of Trent (1545–1563), the adaptation problem had been neglected or not properly enforced . . . In order to carry out the inculturation in Asia, talented missionaries were needed, both proficient in Christianity and quite at home in Eastern culture as well as in its rites and customs. In fact, it is difficult to find those who fully qualify. How many missionaries met those conditions during the 350 years of preaching the Gospel in Vietnam? It must be honestly acknowledged that Cadière's experience of promulgating the Gospel in the cultural field is a unique and quite rare case in Vietnam. (Hợp 2011)

Indeed, Léopold Michel Cadière was probably not only a unique and quite rare phenomenon in Vietnam, but also in the world. Coming to Vietnam to serve as a missionary when twenty-three years old (1892), Cadière followed Jesus' incarnational spirit and vowed to become Vietnamese. He lived in Vietnam sixty-three years making many contributions; he rarely visited France; and he wished to stay and die in Vietnam. He was finally satisfied and passed away in 1955 in Huế, Vietnam.

Like Rhodes, Cadière attached great importance to understanding the native language for his mission. However, with Cadière it was more than that. He learned the Vietnamese language because he loved the Vietnamese people and wanted to understand more about them. He wanted to study Vietnamese culture as a Vietnamese. At the age of seventy-three (1942), Cadière wrote:

I learned their language from the first day I arrived, I still continued to study and found that Vietnamese language is very subtle in terms of structure and we should not underestimate the richness like some people think. . . . Because I have studied and understood Vietnamese people, I really love them. (Huệ 2000, 22-23).

However, unlike Rhodes, Cadière was outstanding both as a missionary and as a scholar. He was good at the Vietnamese language, researching Vietnamese culture in almost all fields, especially the Vietnamese language, Vietnamese religious consciousness, and the relationship between families and the beliefs of Vietnamese. As Đỗ Trinh Huệ wrote in his foreword to one of Cadière's works, Cadière studied Vietnamese culture "with a sense of understanding and with a spirit of engagement" (Cadière 2010, 6).

With over 250 research works on Vietnamese culture, Cadière surprised many researchers with his work, especially with his research method. Many scholars wondered how, in the context of leaving France early (in the late nineteenth century) and in the then academic context in Vietnam, he could master the views and research methods of modern anthropology, such as an interdisciplinary approach, participant observation, etc.

Louis Malleret, the former Director of the Ancient Far East School, noted in the preface to Léopold Michel Cadière's work *Vietnamese Religious Beliefs and Practices* reprinted in 1958, three years after Léopold Michel Cadière died: "No need to reiterate that all our knowledge of Vietnamese culture is thanks to this excellent missionary, who had devoted his life with so much diligence" (Cadière 2010, 18).

Perhaps Cadière's great contribution to scientific research made him less likely to be spoken of as a missionary. It is also possible that the context where Cadière conducted his mission did not have as many problems as in previous periods. However, it can be seen that a special feature of Cadière is that he rarely separated the mission of preaching the Gospel from the study of indigenous culture, though once, in the paper *Outline of the Missionary and Research*, he revealed difficulties in completing both exemplary mission work and serious research: "To be honest, it is only a very little time for research to live like that. How can I be free to study while I have to run back and forth like a shuttle, while there are still many people who want to meet? It's hard to maintain the mind in peace" (Hợp, 2011).

In fact, in sixty-three years living in Vietnam, Cadière was both a professor and a pastor, teaching in many places and appointed pastor in many parishes, including in places in a province in central Vietnam that were considered remote. In the work *Practical Instructions for Missionaries* presented at Louvain University in 1910, when he had a chance to return to visit his country of France, he asserted: "Any missionary who is concerned about religious research is always a missionary." (Cadière 2010, 251).

In the above-mentioned paper, Cadière imparted his experience and awareness of evangelism in Vietnam. For him, as for Alexandre de Rhodes before, "if you want to evangelize, you need to know the local language very well" (Cadière 2010, 221). At the same time, he said, missionaries and religious researchers "need to be respectful [of] the various manifestations of the religious consciousness they study" (Cadière 2010, 222). He affirmed: "It is necessary to respect the beliefs of others, as far as I understand, indispensable in the missionary, not only to study the religion of those around him, but also to convert them." (Cadière 2010, 223). He continued:

A missionary is almost the one who has the confidence of the indigenous people; a missionary is never a stranger in the places they go through. They personally enjoy that belief because of their function, their lives, their help . . . A missionary speaks the language of the indigenous people, lives the life of the people and takes care of the people, almost like a native. (Cadière 2010, 235)

Reading the research works of Cadière, in particular the works on religion, we rarely see him studying for the purpose of finding a suitable missionary method to convert non-Catholic people. In contrast, highlighted in his outstanding research on Vietnamese religion is the spirit of respect and affection. We do not see him criticize or ridicule forms of animism, magic or childish practices; on the contrary, he always tries to understand their meanings and considers them special cultural forms. In his work *Religion of the Viet People*, Cadière describes Vietnamese religion as a “thick forest with many kinds of colorful flowers” that is very hard to fully research (Cadière 2010, 20).

Unlike Rhodes’ perceptions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in Vietnam, Cadière studied the Three Teachings from a scientific perspective, with care, and pointed out that this was one of the “religious mosaics” of the Vietnamese people, and more deeply, that those religions were all manifested mainly through ancestor worship (Cadière 2010, 45).

In the spirit of respecting differences, and through an objective scientific view, Cadière studied deeply and made a particularly important contribution to the study of Vietnamese culture as well as contributing to the development of Catholicism in Vietnam. From the perspective of religious tolerance and methods of integration, it can be said that, it was a long path from Alexandre de Rhodes to Léopold Michel Cadière, with developments in methods of evangelization, especially in the awareness of religious tolerance and the respect for differences. It was a path that led to great strides being made in East-West cultural integration in Vietnam.

Conclusion

The spread of Christian culture into Eastern cultures, especially into cultures influenced by Confucian ideology, is one of the typical manifestations of contact and communication between cultures and civilizations. In medieval times, it was not meetings under normal conditions that led to acculturation, but those meetings made from the initiative of one side, which came out of a sense of promulgating a culture, especially the evangelization of non-religious communities. Cultural conflicts, or other potential conflicts, would be unavoidable if there were no suitable methods of inculturation, because cultures are different, especially in their most sensitive layer: religious feelings.

Not coincidentally, *inculturation* is a special Christian term referring to “the adaptation of Christian liturgy to a non-Christian cultural background”³. In inculturation, the spirit of cultural tolerance and respect for differences is a prerequisite. The process of promulgating Christianity in Vietnam, represented by two individuals, Alexandre de Rhodes and Léopold Michel Cadière, reveals the importance of cultural tolerance. The success of Christian missionaries in Vietnamese history, as well as in the world, reveals their great contribution to East-West cultural relations and to the richness of many cultures.

Catholic inculturation leads us to think more about cultural integration. In cultural contact and interference, cultural tolerance, especially religious tolerance, not only comes from cultural promulgators but also from the receiving side. In the current globalized context, cultural tolerance plays a vital role. The relationship between inculturation and integration needs to be considered as two-way interaction leading to stronger intercourse and cultural harmony. It is also a great opportunity for religious dialogue and cultural integration in the global context of religion, and for

³ *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 3rd ed., s.v. “inculturation.”

cooperation between civilizations today as McLean (2000) once stated in one of his works on Islamic and Christian cultures on a global horizon.

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TRANS/FORMING CHURCH IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION: NARRATIVES OF HOSPITABLE ECCLESIOLOGY BY PHILIPPINE AND TONGAN TRANSGENDER WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Transgender Christians in the Asia Pacific region often experience conditional acceptance or even blatant rejection from their churches and faith communities. Confronting such inhospitality, this article proposes a hospitable ecclesiology, or an attitude of doing and becoming church that welcomes all human beings by recognizing, listening to, understanding and including their lived complexity. Thus, “trans/forming church” gestures towards an active affirmation and deployment of the lived experiences and insights of transgender people in ecclesiological construction. In theologizing the testimonies of Philippine and Tongan trans women, I propose that the project of trans/forming church in order to foster a hospitable ecclesiology for gender-diverse people can draw on their emphases on unconditional inclusion, relying on God and the Scriptures for ethical trajectories, and participatory community ministry.

Only ... “LOVE” will conquer everything!!

– Agabe Tu’inukuafe¹

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

– Hebrews 13:2 (RSV)

At the outset of this article, I turn briefly to Hebrews 13:2, which appears above as the second epigraph, as a scriptural articulation of my acknowledgment that many gender-nonconforming Christians experience unrequited love from their faith communities. Some discover that ecclesiastical acceptance is laden with conditions, condescension or trivialization, while others meet with an outright lack of hospitality. Individuals who do not conform to cisnormative and heteropatriarchal systems of self-presentation are often neglected as strangers, even though, as Thomas Hanks avers, “hospitality to strangers [is] the most important expression of Christian love” (2006, 713). These individuals are relegated to the periphery of a perceived legitimate fold, or consigned to its hinterlands. Church-sanctioned estrangement risks missing the opportunity to

¹ Communication with author, 13th March 2016. Then, Tu’inukuafe was the project officer and treasurer of the Tonga Leitis Association, and graciously participated in my research project through a qualitative survey.

entertain angels—and is the failure to discern the messages and workings of the divine out of misguided notions that God refuses to operate from outside the borders of the respectable and familiar.

For this reason, this article envisages a hospitable ecclesiology, a theologically-informed demeanor in doing and becoming church that includes a welcoming stance towards all human beings because it listens closely and wholeheartedly to their experiences. The main title of this article takes a leaf out of Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood's anthology *Trans/Formations*. In the introduction, Isherwood (2009, 3) speaks of gender-nonconforming people "who defy physical boundaries and so question social sexual roles by their actions." The intent of the volume, she explains, is to spark consideration of greater theological inclusion through the radical thinking of transgender Christians, which reflects the fluidity and transgressive nature of Christianity itself.

Inspired by her words, I use "trans/form" to refer to the recognition, affirmation, inclusion and deployment of the lived experiences and insights of transgender people of God and Christianity. I draw on the lived experiences of two Christian transgender women—one from the Philippines and the other from Tonga—as theological starting points and resources. These two individuals were two out of nineteen participants in a qualitative research project that I undertook in 2016 in collaboration with the international coalition APCOM on Christianity, sexual diversity and access to health services.² The project comprised qualitative email surveys, and in-depth interviews in person or through Skype video calls. Surveys and interviews were divided into "grassroots" and "elite" categories. The showcasing of Kahleesi and Mataele's voices here reflects specific rather than overarching transgender experiences of Christianity in the Asia Pacific. Moreover, their mostly benign experiences of church contribute to the largely church-positive narratives that are present in this article.

I conducted a thirty-minute face-to-face interview with "Kahleesi," a Philippine Christian trans woman and member of an inclusive and affirming church, during my fieldwork in the Philippines. I also spoke with Joey Joleen Mataele, the co-founder of the Tonga Leitis Association and the Pacific Sexual Diversity Network (PSDN) via Skype video for forty-five minutes. At the time of our interview, Mataele was the executive director of the Association, established in 1992 "with a focus on improving the rights and celebrating the contribution of Leitis in Tonga" (Tonga Leitis Association 2017).

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimates a total of 122,800 and 400 transgender people in the Republic of the Philippines and the Kingdom of Tonga respectively (2019a, 2019b). "Transgender" is itself a contemporary term, the origin of which is often credited to Virginia Prince (Ekins and King 2006). It denotes "an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth" (GLAAD 2011). This term is in contrast to "cisgender" or being "on the same side" and has come to be understood as an antonym to trans (Heinz 2016, 8).

In the Philippines, the most common appellation for people who were assigned male at birth (AMAB), but live as women is *baklā*. Martin F. Manalansan IV explains that *baklā* is not an autochthonous version of gay, but an enduring Philippine identity that straddles "the in-between, or *alanganin* [and which] conflates the categories of effeminacy, transvestism . . . homosexuality [and] cross-dressing" (2003, 25; see also Campos 2012; Garcia 2008). In Tonga, AMAB persons who live as women are known as *fakaleitī* or its abbreviated form *leitī*, which translates approximately as "like a lady." The *leitīs* are "a quasi-institutionalized, conditionally accepted gender identity that, while tolerated in most social circumstances, is not completely condoned and

² APCOM strives to shift attitudes and sensitize society to the needs of gender-variant and sexually diverse communities, including bridging the gap between faith and the diversity of gender, sexuality and sex. While respecting the freedom of religion and expression, APCOM believes that they can never justify the denial of basic rights among these communities. See <http://www.apcom.org/>.

remains on the margins of mainstream gender sensibilities” (Good 2014, 223; see also Besnier 2004). *Baklā* and *leiṭi* are thus local subject positions that continue to inhabit the betwixt-and-between of gender and sexual categories in the Philippines and Tonga, while simultaneously negotiating the transnational subject position of “transgender.”

Both Kahleesi and Mataele self-identified as “transgender” and “trans woman,” although the latter also referred to herself as a *leiṭi*. While it is beyond the remit of this article to undertake a detailed study of the interlocking politics of global, native and glocal identities, I do want to mention that they may have utilized “transgender” for a recognizable (trans)gender category and connected with “transgender movements and issues internationally, potentially building networks of solidarity across countries and continents that are vital to all forms of political activism” (Chatterjee 2018, 313).

Sharon A. Bong (2018, 41) observes that the transgender person often “indexes primordial and alternative worldviews that are premised on ‘sacred gender’ and ‘gender pluralism.’” This observation is often traceable in spiritualities and cosmologies that name gender-diverse people as intermediaries between the material and the spiritual (Garcia 2008; Graham 1987; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997; Ho 2009). In contemporary times, much has been written about gender-diverse people from religious, spiritual and theological perspectives (Cheng 2013; Childs 2009; Cornwall 2012; Goh 2012; Hero 2012; Hipsher 2009; Kugle 2010).

Despite historical, geographical, ethnic, socio-cultural and linguistic differences, both the Philippines and Tonga are Christian-majority countries. In the Philippines, Roman Catholicism is embraced by 80.9 percent of the population (Index Mundi 2018a) while 64.9 percent of Tongans are Protestant Christians (Index Mundi 2018b). While there are no precise laws which penalise gender-variant or sexually diverse people in the Philippines, sodomy and cross-dressing are criminalized in Tonga. In both countries, conservative socio-cultural norms and Christian principles police and dictate gender and sexual identities and expressions (Conde 2018; Conan 2018), and propel non-cisnormative and non-heteronormative communities towards various forms of vulnerability, discrimination and suspicion, not least being held accountable for the spread of HIV. There are, however, several small churches in the Philippines that unconditionally admit transgender and queer Christians to their ranks (for instance, Open Table MCC 2019; Metropolitan Community Church of Marikina 2019).

This article retains only Kahleesi’s anonymity. Mataele’s narratives in this article make her easily identifiable. Any attempt at anonymity would be counterintuitive and may trivialize the epistemological potency of her position as an important HIV and human rights activist in Tonga (consult Kaiser 2009). My article is a detailed analysis and interpretation of both individuals’ narratives, and my theorizing abides by Kathy Charmaz’s (1995) assertion that knowledge and meaning are always co-constructed between the researcher and research participant. I do not speak *for* transgender people, but *with* them as a respectful trans ally who continues to learn (see Goh 2019b, 6). My own position as a mostly Christian Malaysian gay cisgender man, academic, and ordained minister, is embedded into this article.

I see my interviewees not as individuals with a total sense of “possession, appropriation, self-foundation and power” (Iveković 2010, 53) but as *fluid, evolving and communing subjects* who shape and are shaped by multifarious political, socio-institutional, class, economic, ethnic and faith systems. Such subjects simultaneously evince autonomy, agency, constraint and subjugation. Nevertheless, I admit that as urban-dwelling and educated personages who are respected in their churches and social communities, both my research participants embody a significant measure of privilege, self-empowerment and influence.

Hermeneutical Tapestry

Edmund Chia's thoughts on a new way of being church in the context of interreligious dialogue are very helpful for this present discussion (1999, 3). A maturing church, he submits, is one that encounters challenge and change, and "begins to see things in a new light and perceives life and the universe from a broader perspective." Still, a deep investment in age-old familiarities that causes the church to become fearful and doubtful of future possibilities thrusts it into a form of liminal precariousness in relation to its purpose and meaning. Chia predicts that "prophets will come by way of persons who dare to address this 'in-between' period with creativity, daringness and foresight" (1999, 4). Such bold prophets, I argue, include transgender Christians who can teach churches to be more hospitable in their theologies and pastoral ministries. As Marcella Althaus-Reid (2000, 4) proposes, "the everyday lives of people always provide us with a starting point for a process of doing a contextual theology without exclusions."

Returning momentarily to what I discussed earlier in this article, it would seem that Christian spaces play a key role in the hardships faced by gender-variant and sexually diverse individuals in the Philippines and Tonga. Holly Devor (2002, 9) says of transgender people that "to be unthinkable, to be unspeakable, to be un-namable is to be socially invisible" – to which I would add "ecclesialogically invisible" or considered inconsequential in the theologizing of church.

Based on her studies of the socio-cultural interactions of young Asian American and Pacific Islander women, Jennifer Yee (2009, 54) insists that "sites of interaction" may serve not only as sites of oppression, but also as "sites of resistance" and "sites of liberation." Borrowing her idea, I hold that while churches can act as locations that spearhead persecution and even diminishment, they can also become stepping-stones that lead to non-compliance, emancipation and empowerment. When sites of denouncement and exclusion are reconstituted as sites of affirmation and inclusion, such places also become nurseries for hospitable ecclesiology.

Hospitable ecclesiology forces churches to ask the question: "How can we become 'more church' in accordance with the mind of Christ by incorporating the embodied experiences of those whom we have long dismissed and excluded?" Hospitable ecclesiology is deeply cognizant that "a church of decent people keeps its doors barred against those who might upset the status quo or insist that the church do the gospel" (Bohache 2013, 275). Hospitable ecclesiology humbly accepts that churches do not and need not possess all the answers, and thus continues to explore, discover, understand and struggle, while clinging resolutely to unconditional love—as exemplified by Christ—as its main premise and goal. Hospitable ecclesiology is thus an attitude of theologizing in which churches radically affirm and incorporate the insights and experiences of gender-diverse people in their theological and pastoral formulations.

Weaving Hospitable Ecclesiology: Entitlement, Not Privilege

Both Kahleesi and Mataele perceive themselves as trans women, not in spite of being Christian, or Christian despite being trans women, but as people who are *both* Christian *and* transgender. Kahleesi locates this amalgamated identity in God and ecclesiastical spaces:

Interviewer: What does it mean for you to be a Christian transwoman?

Kahleesi: I think the most important thing there is, that you believe in God. That you have Christ as part of your life, and, you go to church . . . pray . . . someone [with a] more powerful being is there. Church is important because I feel the solemnity, communication with God. I mean you can pray anywhere, for me it's a different kind of feeling over there. You're

closer. When I go to church, I listen to the word of God, I mean, make me feel like nearer. It's his house anyway.³

In response to my enquiry about the meaning of being both Christian and transgender, Kahleesi first foregrounds her belief in God and the integral involvement of Christ in her life. Her main strategy for upholding this belief and sustaining the divine presence in her lived reality is prayer. Although she believes that one “can pray anywhere,” she experiences a specific connectivity with God when she “go[es] to church,” a space which evokes “a different kind of feeling” and facilitates “communication with God.” I suggest that since it is at church that she feels “closer” and “nearer” to God, the “solemnity” of which she speaks is in actuality *a purposeful disposition of clarity and focus* that she finds absent elsewhere. Church therefore catalyzes her “own spiritual connection to God [as] part of the link that is necessary to spiritual growth, maturity and health” (Hipsher 2009, 101). Her personal spirituality is not detached from church, but is inextricably bound to it.

Kahleesi's inclination to “listen to the word of God” at church may be a reference to the proclamation of scriptural excerpts during services, but may also indicate a heightened sensitivity to the personal relationship that she fosters with God and Christ as a Philippine Christian trans woman. “[God's] house” for Kahleesi is really God's home, a space of familiarity and intimacy with the divine in which she knows that “God as the Creative Designer . . . desires human community without demanding the relinquishment of human diversity” (Goh 2019c, 438). In this space where this bond is continually renewed, God's home transforms into Kahleesi's home.

Mataele's notion of being both Christian and transgender, however, acutely recognizes the transnegative rhetoric that assails Tongan Christian trans women:

We were all brought up by Christian families. But we don't let the Christianity stories that come from men that are printed against us, we don't let that overcloud our knowledge of how to accept ourselves for who we are. . . . I mean, God loves everyone. I keep praying and ask God, why was I made like this? I never get an answer!

Mataele's dual reference to being “brought up by Christian families” and “Christianity stories . . . from men”—with “men” being a metonym for “human beings”—may be indicative of the disapprobation that she and other trans women have experienced in their intimate social circles, as well as in the circulation of anti-transgender literature. In the face of such antagonism, Mataele resorts to prayer in order to find a definitive answer to her gender-variant embodiment. As her orison offers no resolution, she falls back on the magnitude of divine love. Possibly she recognizes deeply that “God exists in the places where the human heart strives for integrity and seeks God” (Tanis 2003, 181).

Perhaps her experience has been similar to that of Joanne Leung (2015, 26), when the Hong Kong Christian transgender activist interrogated the divine with a similar question and received this inner conviction: “God said that if this was my desire then I had to bear all responsibilities [and] that wherever I go and whatever decision I make, God will be with me!” My interpretation is that in Mataele's life, “stories . . . from men” or the transnegative metanarratives that assail her are superseded by God's stories or the workings of God in her life.

I admit to feeling a little disconcerted by Mataele's effusive conviction that “God loves everyone.” Hugo Córdova Quero's avowal that “theology has historically invested huge amounts of energy into fitting the *decent* patterns of societies (supported by the so-called *orthodoxy*) and condemning those that are considered *indecent* (related to those classified as *heterodox*)” (2006, 81; original emphases) must not be taken lightly. “God loves everyone” is almost always

³ Interviews were conducted completely in English, although the research participants spoke the language with varying degrees of proficiency.

accompanied by an assumption that “everyone” loved by God adheres to decent binary, cisnormative, heteropatriarchal and dyadic forms of gender, sexuality and biology. This assumption undermines the notion that the unconditional love of God is extended to each person *in* their gender and sexual particularities, not *in spite of* them.

Another interpretation of “God loves everyone” may lie in the fact that more than a few *leitīs*, including Mataele herself, could have been subjected to narratives that proclaim their exclusion from God’s love due to their gender diversity, possibly from “Christian families” and in transnegative literature. It is possible that such oppositional attitudes are linked to the exclusive ecclesiastical systems that she intends to nullify with this quip.

Speaking personally and perhaps even for her community as a leader and representative, she proclaims her steadfastness in resisting any effort that can “overcloud [trans women’s] knowledge of how to accept [them]selves for who [they] are.” I suggest that “overcloud” refers to an attenuation of inner intelligibility, coherence and confidence with regard to the wholeheartedness of God’s love for trans women. Thereafter, I see Mataele replacing “overcloud[ness]” with an *unclouded theological vision*, or a deep clarity and self-assurance that comes from resolutely adhering to God’s unqualified love. Ignorance about why she is a *leitī* is replaced by an unwavering belief in unconditional divine love that brings her ongoing lucidity and inner peace.

Both Kahleesi and Mataele’s testimonies attest to a mentality that holds intersecting Christian and transgender identities as a rightful entitlement for church membership rather than a privilege to be earned. I thus suggest that they participate in, and contribute to trans/forming church from three crucial but not exhaustive perspectives: (i) insistence on unconditional inclusion; (ii) dependence on God and the Scriptures for ethical trajectories; and (iii) concrete realisation of participatory community ministry.

Unconditional Inclusion

Kahleesi’s vision of Christianity as instantiated by church is one that foregrounds a cherishing of diversity and a preference for unconditional inclusion. The stand that she takes in this regard may echo a deep-seated desire for Philippine churches to uphold and perform “Christian teachings”—perhaps in reference to both ecclesiastical doctrines and the “raw” principles of Christ—in ways that are more radical than at present:

Churches should be more inclusive. Christianity is for everyone who likes to embrace it. There’s but one race, it’s the human race, and this diversity within this race that makes it even more beautiful to be a part of this Christian community. If you are able to give love, to bring forth peace to your brethren, and if you are able to accept people for who they are, then that is what matters most. These are the Christian teachings that I value the most and that made my experiences in the church community all the more beautiful.

Kahleesi’s distinction between “Christian teachings” and “experiences in the church community,” her underscoring of the need for churches to “be more inclusive,” and her emphatic belief in the attainability of Christian identity and teachings for all who wish to avail themselves of these is striking. She seems to imply that Philippine churches are falling short of their divinely commissioned mandate to be unconditionally accepting and non-judgemental.

I propose that Kahleesi is presenting herself as an embodiment of diversity within the “one ... human race,” and deserving of Christian inclusion. She celebrates her gender diversity by naming it a “beautiful” feature of the “Christian community” or church. She recasts her Christian-transgender identity from an anomalous characteristic to a valuable attribute. That the adjective “beautiful” is used for both human diversity and experiences of church suggests an important nexus.

When human diversity is celebrated instead of condemned or suppressed in church, the doings of church become more meaningful.

Her call for churches to convey love, peace and acceptance to human beings “for who they are” likely points towards the inability of some (if not the majority of) churches to embrace transgender people with unqualified acceptance. According to Patrick S. Cheng (2011, 106), “to the extent that the church is one body that is made up of people of many sexualities, genders, and races, we can understand the church as a place that dissolves the traditional boundaries that divide us from one another.” Kahleesi’s exhortation echoes Cheng’s statement.

Kahleesi’s call for churches to recognise that “diversity” exists in “one race” underpins the reality that “Christian *unity* does not require *uniformity*” (Lowe 2017, 35; emphases added). Kahleesi’s “experiences [of] church community” have been “beautiful” because they ignite within her an appreciation for human diversity that reveals how people “are made in the image of one dazzlingly diverse Spirit” (Mollenkott 2009, 50).

Mataele’s thoughts are very similar to Kahleesi’s, as the following narrative reveals:

I think that the church leaders should actually teach themselves to love everyone, no matter who they are. I think our church leaders should be more open-minded, and they should accept us for who we are. In order for us to move forward, they need to speak our language. And to be us, to know exactly, put themselves in our shoes. If they were transgender, what would they do? I’m sure they won’t want us to hate them. Love is a two-way street. They need to give us space to talk, and to be decision makers.

Mataele’s recommendations that church leaders develop the ability “to love,” “be more open-minded” and accepting of human beings, regardless of “who they are,” implies that Tongan churches have not fully exercised unconditional inclusion. She holds the inability of churches to empathize with gender-diverse people as responsible for this ecclesiastical shortcoming. Churches, she avers, have not learned “to put themselves in [transgender people’s] shoes” in order to truly understand the tribulations of transgender communities. Mataele’s poignant question addressed to the same churches, “if they were transgender, what would they do?” is followed by her instant response that churches would not want to be despised merely on the basis of gender-diversity. This response may allude to Mataele’s own experiences of ecclesiastical contempt and rejection for being a trans woman.

Her numerous comments lay bare her exasperation with an ecclesiastical dissonance that occludes opportunities for transgender people and churches “to move forward” towards more productive synergies. Furthermore, by declaring that “love is a two-way street,” she appears to state that love, open-mindedness and acceptance cannot flow unilaterally from Christian trans women to churches. Instead, Christian trans women are entitled to the same treatment from churches. This forms “an alternative vision to a hegemonic belief system [that can overturn] the common standards of worthiness and acceptability” (Astorga 2016, 259). As Justin Tanis (2003, 181) points out, “too many religious institutions support the status quo and preach that the holy is found in the socially acceptable,” thus dismissing the truth that God is also found beyond the decent and respectable.

In this regard, Mataele’s contention that churches “need to speak [transgender people’s] language” and “give [transgender people] space to talk” hints at the fact that churches are ignorant of and/or disinterested in the issues, needs and concerns of transgender people. Churches are thus complicit in the silencing of their voices. Tanis’ (2003, 89) comment that in the United States “the relative rarity of encounters that religious groups have with transgendered [sic] people and the factors that make it difficult for congregations to engage these questions” may also ring true in Tonga.

The lack of expertise in transgender issues among churches almost implies an inevitable exclusion of transgender people from the church, or a belittlement of their experiences and contributions to ecclesiastical life. The amelioration of such an awkward situation, Mataele quips,

lies in a willingness of churches to allow transgender people “to be decision makers” or active and equal participants in church leadership. Despite her frustrations, she acknowledges that there are efforts to foster good relations between churches and the transgender community, namely the Tonga Leitis Association:

Interviewer: Let’s talk a little bit about the Roman Catholic institution or any Christian institution in Tonga. Have there been any official pronouncements on [men who have sex with men] and transgender people?

Mataele: There hasn’t been any real official discussion from any church. But with the Catholics, we work closely with our [church leader]. As a matter of fact, he’s the only church leader who was there for the opening of our office, in our drop-in centre. He’s the only one who’s been ever, approach us for anything, spiritual or accept any of our invitations for any of our events. Even the HIV advocacy and the World Aids Day. He’s the only who’s ever given full support of the work. Apart from him, there’s been support from the other churches, because they know we’re the drivers for the work of prevention of HIV. . . . There’s only one particular church here . . . preaching against us.

Mataele’s claim of an absence of “any real discussion from any church” describes the inability or unwillingness of faith communities to engage in thorny issues of gender and sexuality. Her brief mention of a church that is “preaching against [trans women]” demonstrates how “transpeople are sensitive to the injustices and oppressions that arise when some people are considered more sacred, more perfect and more entitled than other people” (Mollenkott 2009, 50). Nevertheless, Mataele highlights a relationship that exists between a “Catholic [church leader]” and “other churches” and the Association, due to the latter’s efforts in “HIV advocacy and the World Aids Day.”

On the one hand, it appears as though the amenability of the church towards trans women is purely for utilitarian purposes. In this sense, the worth and acceptability of *leitīs* is contingent on their contribution as “drivers for the work of [HIV] prevention.” There is a possibility that the Association is perceived as a buffer between less respectable HIV issues and more respectable ecclesiastical hierarchies that feel obliged, but are hesitant or lack the know-how, to engage in HIV-related outreach.

Crudely put, churches offer “spiritual” support and graciously accept “invitations [to] events” in exchange for the *leitīs*’ involvement in such controversial grassroots efforts. *Leitīs* are “outsiders-within their faith communities” (Kwok 1992, 105) accorded the status of *temporary insiders* due to their functionality. Consequently, while both parties seem at peace with this arrangement, more transgressive and potentially volatile issues of gender and sexuality appear to be deliberately overlooked or simplistically ignored.

On the other hand, issues of sexual health that hold concern for both churches and transgender HIV advocates may be the ideal shared space, allowing two parties that are seemingly doomed to perpetual enmity to forge a relationship based on commonality rather than difference. The Association and the church may be leveraging this relationship to maintain friendly ties with each other. The situation may be such that both parties have elected to focus on commonality rather than difference.

I have suggested variously in other works that a pivotal dialogue point for churches and transgender and queer communities could well lie in shared humanitarian projects (for instance, Goh 2019a; Goh, Meneses, and Messer 2019). As such, the relationship between the church and the Association may be one that is forged with mixed intentions on both sides. That which commands the most important consideration, I submit, is the possibility for such tentative relationships to act as trans/formative stepping-stones to radical inclusion in the future.

Ethical Trajectories

The concomitant living out of gender and faith for Kahleesi and Mataele is, as discussed, an unsteady enterprise that requires clarity and guidance. Their views suggest that they draw on their relationship with God and engagement with the Scriptures for this purpose. The following narrative occurred immediately after Kahleesi intimated her connection with the divine that was amplified in church:

I think he looks at me as a transwoman like anybody else, I mean, what have you been doing? Gauging on me at the good things, the bad things that you've done, based on his teachings, the teachings in the Bible, frail in nature, capable of doing good and bad, like any other human being . . . In all of my prayers . . . I consider him as the guiding, ultimate being, because every time I pray, I have to ask him to . . . always bring me to the right path, to always bring me home. . . . It give you a peace direction . . . will help guide you to become a better person.

Kahleesi imagines God engaging with her in a sort of biblically-framed interrogation of the “good things” and “bad things” that she has experienced in her life. This suggests she perceives the divine as a sort of Moral Arbiter in her life. While this statement may be one that circumvents gender nonconformity, I am drawn to her mention of “frail[ty] in nature” and the capacity for making both life-giving and death-dealing decisions “like any other human being.” Therefore, while gender identity may be a major identity marker for Kahleesi, she seems convinced that identity alone is insufficient in “human–divine interrelationality,” or that which “reflects and images God’s own desire for the continuous un/becomings and un/doings of gendered and sexually identifiable subjectivities . . . towards greater human thrivings and realisations” (Goh 2018, 87). Instead, *it is what she does with her gender-diverse identity* that determines the quality of her relationship with God.

This astuteness prompts her to pray for guidance concerning “the right path” from the “ultimate being.” Furthermore, I propose that her understanding of her relationship with God is extremely significant, because God is the One to whom Kahleesi is ultimately accountable in her ethical deliberations. By conversing with and listening to God, she receives definitive ethical trajectories. At this juncture, I am reminded of D. Simon Lourdasamy’s stance “that every communion [with God in prayer] carries with it a prologue, a conversation and a dialogue with a personal God Who listens to us, and at the same time speaks to us and gives us His [sic] gift, all within an atmosphere of friendship” (1978, 4–5).

Therefore, prayer acts as interior signposting that brings Kahleesi “home”— perhaps an allusion to her earlier reference to “God’s house.” It is here that she feels an unparalleled connection with God as a Philippine Christian trans woman and which then bears fruit in “peace,” “direction,” and “becom[ing] a better person.” Kahleesi’s experience corroborates Tanis’ belief that “of all the spiritual resources available to trans people, the most powerful are the times when God speaks directly to us of the freedom to be ourselves and to follow the path that God sets before us” (2003, 129).

Mataele finds the Bible shepherds her and Tongan Christian trans women through what she considers the superficialities of life:

As a matter of fact, the Tonga Leitis Association has their own little programme, we call it the bible sharing, every Friday evening. . . . It hasn’t been easy. But at the same time, the reason why we do it is to actually uplift the spiritual life of each of our members, to balance their lives. Not just stay in the materialistic side. And to remind them that they are who they are today because of the Man above, you know. In a way, we’re trying to make sure that it’s not just about parties, it’s not all about drinking, there’s something ahead of them that’s better.

I find it noteworthy that Mataele refers to the Association's weekly "Bible sharing" evenings as a "little programme." This could be little more than an effort to express modesty or affection through use of the diminutive, but it could also signal a sense of disenfranchisement. "Little programme" is possibly a cry for rightful legitimacy in reading and sharing the Scriptures as trans women, given that gender-variant people are often touted as ineligible to participate in such devotions. Moreover, as the *leitīs* are neither scripturally nor theologically trained in any formal manner, their Bible sharing can easily collapse in deference to hierarchical dominance. Yong's (2009, 50) experience of church as fostering "self-alienation, submission, the blind 'trust and obey' faith among its women members" is, I believe, also true of its trans women members in this context, and I return to this matter in the following section.

I understand Mataele's remark that "it hasn't been easy" as representing ambivalent feelings that straddle possible struggles with thoughts of unworthiness in creating a trans-based Bible-sharing programme and sustaining the interest of trans women who are more partial to entertainment. That such efforts are meant to "uplift the spiritual life" of *leitīs* in order to create some "balance" could be understood as the consistent wielding of biblical teachings for the purpose of revitalising a sense of Christian morality, given the Association's members can be prone to overindulgence in "parties" and "drinking." Akin to Kahleesi's Moral Arbiter, who guides her towards a more life-giving existence, Mataele's "Man above"—despite rehearsing an androcentric reference to the divine—becomes the stark reminder of "something ahead ... that's better," or of more meaningful human experiences beyond the pale of pure amusement. The praxis of trans/forming church must be accompanied by serious consideration of the nuanced ways in which transgender people relate to God and the bible.

Participatory Community Ministry

Within their respective faith communities, Kahleesi and Mataele take up the task of "participatory community ministry" by immersing themselves in ecclesiastical programmes to share their faith and offer presence, companionship and solidarity to others. As evident from the following narrative, Kahleesi is enthusiastic about her involvement in church:

Interviewer: What are some of the most meaningful experiences for you as a transwoman in a church?

Kahleesi: I think the opportunity to get involved with the activities, or the programmes, that we had in our church ... like going out with the youths, and other programmes promoting our Christian faith, you know with the young people. So we go to different places, different municipalities and provinces, and we have Bible studies, camping. I also had the opportunity to be one of the leaders in our locality back then.

For Kahleesi, participatory community ministry involves church-based events such as "going out with the [youth]," engaging in evangelization efforts "to different places ... municipalities and provinces," "Bible studies [and] camping." Her eagerness to participate in such youth-oriented ecclesiastical activities may be driven by an unconditional acceptance of her twofold identity as transgender and Christian that she experiences from her fellow church members. A supportive ecclesiastical environment and multiple opportunities to take part in church activities without fear of rejection or discrimination fortifies both her transgender identity and her faith.

Kahleesi is not merely tolerated or simply even accepted as a Christian trans woman—she is acclaimed as a full member of her church through unconditional participation and a leadership role. Not unlike the spiritual strategies of Queer Asian Pacific Americans (QAPAs) which Cheng (2006, 238) observed, Kahleesi "redefine[s] spirituality by reclaiming the idea of 'sacred space' to include any place where [she]

experience[s] Ultimate Reality with others in community.” During the course of our conversation, she constantly repeated both her keenness to accompany the youth of her church and her pleasure in being “involved” as “part of the church’s community”:

More importantly, I got involved, I was there, and I felt I am part of the church’s community. So it doesn’t matter if you are a trans woman or not, or whatever your gender orientation is, for as long as you can become a role model to your fellow Christians and be able to touch their lives and be able to bring forth positive changes to their lives, then that’s what matters to me.

The crux of Kahleesi’s involvement is her ability to “become a role model,” who helps to bring about “positive changes” in the lives of the church’s younger members, buttressing her inclusion within her Christian community. Her remark that her transgender identity is irrelevant in this regard is significant. It seemingly glosses over the particularities of transgender identity that are crucial to pastoral, spiritual and theological conceptualizations. Tanis (2003, 164) posits that “the concreteness of the specific body creates a unique experience and manifestation of God, and the experience of a transgendered body is necessarily different from one that is not transgendered.” The transgender body can lend a critical hermeneutical lens to challenge universal and essentialist “one-size-fits-all” Christian metanarratives that are often unconsciously transnegative and queernegative.

It is very likely that Kahleesi is attempting to subsume her transgender identity under an overarching Christian identity. Such a “gender-neutral” perspective can be problematic, as Christian pastoral, spiritual and theological discourses are conditioned and limited by a shifting rhetoric in favour of or against gender variance. Kahleesi’s opinion implies that Christian participation provides an exemption from an otherwise biblically and ecclesiastically disagreeable gender identity (see Winter 2006, para. 22), rather than the idea that both Christian and gender categories can operate synergistically within a transgender embodiment.

Mataele shares strikingly similar gender-neutral ideas of church:

We’ve had ministers and pastors coming to our bible study, we invite one priest this week, one from another church the next week, to come and share, and also to see where the bible says, or where we can share something in the bible that links to the work that we do, and for whatever gender we are. . . . And for us to actually share and teach to our younger ones, to be comfortable on who they are.

It is possible that the presence of “ministers and pastors” at the Tonga Leitis Association’s weekly Bible-focused gatherings acts as both a crowd-puller and an authoritative voice on the biblical insights and imperatives for the Association’s work. It is unlikely that these church leaders encourage the Association’s members to queer or “to complicate, to disrupt, to disturb all kinds of orthodoxies, including . . . those that take [the] current sex/gender regime as natural and God-given and those that posit ‘the Bible’ as a flat, transparent window into the divine mind” (Armour 2011, 2). What is more likely is that the *leiitis* are exposed to more pastoral forms of biblical understanding that restore the power of interpretation to the hands of ecclesiastical hierarchies. The forging of “links” between scriptural interpretation and the Association’s “work” indicates an intentional centering of Christianity in the latter’s activities, which can then be interpreted as a divine mandate.

Mataele’s words, “whatever gender we are,” resonate with Kahleesi’s views. She also appears to supplant her transgender identity with a perceived supernumerary category of Christian inclusion. In other words, as long as the Association’s members remain faithful to the intertwining of faith and HIV outreach, the issue of transgender identity diminishes. I find her statement somewhat troubling as it detaches the importance of gender from the deliberately faith-inflected work of the Association. If a chosen gender identity is indeed integral to the embodiment of Tongan

trans women, this core category must figure extensively and unapologetically, and certainly not incidentally in their “Bible study” and consequent “work.”

Nevertheless, I put forward another interpretation of both these individuals’ narratives, and one which appropriates an additive rather than subtractive angle. The “does not matter” and “whatever” dispositions are actually adamant self-assertions that being trans women should not in any way invalidate their Christian identity and church participation. Declarations that a person cannot be transgender, Christian and active in ecclesiastical ministry at the same time are hardly surprising, as “too many have been told that God condemns and rejects them [and] have walked away from either their religious practice or their dream of living as a fulfilled transgendered person” (Tanis 2003, 185). Yet, as Mataele explains in the following narrative, Tongan *leiīs* have also taken on specific church ministerial and leadership positions:

Some of them have even become pastors. Some of them have gone to the missionaries and dedicate their lives to helping, to work on, to serve the poor and all that. I’m only talking about the ones that are Catholics that I know of. Some of them have become leaders as a transgender of the youth at the rural areas. And they dress like me every day, like a woman!

Mataele’s reference to Roman Catholic trans women whom “[she] know[s] of” and who have “become pastors [and] missionaries” needs to be unpacked. The Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education (2005) officially forbids men “who practise homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called ‘gay culture’” from entering the priesthood, a policy which Andrew K. T. Yip (2008) sees as the Vatican’s pathologizing of sexually diverse people. Although the descriptions of such illicit subjects are at best nebulous, a proscription exists. There is, however, no official prohibition or concession in the Roman Catholic hierarchy for gender-nonconforming persons to take up presbyterial ministry (Blondiau 2019). Nevertheless, trans women who “dress ... like a woman” are often seen as feminine-acting “homosexuals” and who may thus be disqualified from the priesthood on the grounds of sinful recalcitrance.

Those to whom Mataele refers may be lay trans women who “dedicate their lives to [serving] the poor” and who “become leaders ... of the youth.” The “missionaries” she mentions may indicate those who become members of lay apostolate organizations rather than sacred orders—not unlike Kahleesi’s evangelizing efforts as previously discussed. In speaking with more than a hint of pride and dignity that *leiīs* are provided with opportunities to be at the forefront of Christian ministry and leadership, Mataele demonstrates that participatory community ministry becomes a trans/formative gateway to integral ecclesiastical membership for those who would ordinarily be relegated to the margins of church life. The committed *leiīs* embody the reality that “God’s mission may have to be conceived as much wider in scope compared to a possible understanding of Christian mission” (Aleaz 2010, 199), particularly as Christian mission is often seen as the sole province of the cisnormative and heteropatriarchal.

Concluding Threads: Tied and Otherwise

Kahleesi and Mataele offer insightful imaginings of a hospitable ecclesiology that bears the hallmarks of unconditional inclusion, ethical resources and participatory community ministry. That these trans/formations draw on the complex lived realities of Christian trans women reflects the contingencies, multiplicities and resistances that have marked Christianity since its inception and contributed to its survival. As Kwok Pui-lan (2005, 161) observes, “the relation between gospel and culture has never been simply wholesale borrowing or outright rejection, but full of negotiation and contestation, as well as accommodation.”

The inclusion of trans women’s narratives as theological conversation starters and resources mirrors the testimonies of early Christians who were also thought of as counter-normative,

subversive and irrelevant by the societies of their time. Such an inclusion resonates with Pearl Wong's (2015, 23) exhortation to Christians to "avoid homogenizing experiences and contexts when doing theology [and] practice humility by accepting experiences that are different from [one's] own."

Both churches and transgender Christians must overcome the urge to bypass uncomfortable and complicated discussions that need to take place at the intersection of gender, sexuality, theology and pastoral ministry. Such a course of action, which replaces real issues with simplistic overtures, such as "God loves everyone," imprudently circumvents and disguises what lies at the heart of relations between churches and gender-diverse people. For the latter, as is the case for most human beings, gender is integral to a meaningful embodied life, rather than merely a superficial auxiliary characteristic. Collaborative practices between churches and transgender communities, such as community outreach and evangelization efforts are important, but they need to be recognized as starting points that must lead to more profound conversations.

The process of trans/forming church is a long and arduous one, but I believe that it is necessary for the pursuit of theological and gender justice. However, this process will remain dormant as long as churches continue to assign an *a priori* status of sinful anomaly for gender-diverse people, as well as other communities that are perceived as disoriented from the legitimate path. Continual opposition to gender-nonconforming and sexually variant communities on the grounds of preserving tradition, authenticity and purity, can only serve to portray churches as antagonistic and thus tangential to real life.

Those with transnegative attitudes forget how the nascent church grew in relevance because it provided a home to the counter-cultural, just as it was itself counter-cultural. As aptly expressed by Christina Astorga (2016, 259), "resistance is rooted in our faith tradition." I wish to reiterate the imperative for an ongoing *aggiornamento* in ecclesiology, which will repeatedly throw the doors and windows of churches wide open to the gust of the Spirit. Borrowing from the words of Kenan B. Osborne (2007, 106), I implore churches to "rehear the gospel message but with new ears, new eyes, and new minds"—indeed, with new hearts. It is only then that churches can (re)imagine and (re)realize unprecedented vision, equitable dialogue, radical inclusion, mature development and unfiltered love for the world.

Dedication

To the memory of Kenan B. Osborne OFM (1930-2019), who taught me to be wilful and disruptive in theology; to go towards what was truest to me in life; and to always appreciate Asian cultures and theologies alongside Aristotle, Chauvet, Ricoeur and Aquinas; and to my IASACT 2015 peers whom I hold in great esteem.

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SPIRITUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN A MARGINALIZED COMMUNITY: A STUDY OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV IN KATHMANDU AND POKHARA

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ABSTRACT

Spirituality and development are intrinsically related. People living with HIV (PLHIV), who make up a marginalized community, are discriminated against by family and society. There is a dearth of studies on how people living with HIV use their faith to go ahead in improving their quality of life, especially in the context of Nepal. This study attempts to examine the lived experiences of PLHIV in relation to their spirituality and development. It follows a qualitative research methodology, based on in-depth interviews with PLHIV in two cities of Nepal: Kathmandu and Pokhara. PLHIV give credit to God for improving their quality of life, by helping them find a job and/or re-imagining their social status through networking. This paper concludes that spirituality and better quality of life proceed side-by-side in marginalized communities, especially for PLHIV, both in Nepal and in other Asian countries with similar socio-cultural contexts.

Background

From time immemorial, people have used their consciousness to seek the infinite, or have realized the cosmic entity as a result of their religious and spiritual efforts. Human beings use their physical bodies to attain spiritual power and a sense of spirituality. Spirituality is generally thought to be a path of longing for God, irrespective of people's different religious affiliations (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania 2006). It is believed that longing for God is a way of improving our health of both body and mind, and also of attaining spiritual wellbeing. Therefore, those people who make use of their consciousness, and follow religious and spiritual paths find themselves having healthier and better lives (Sarkar 1998), even though they might follow various ways, such as visiting temples, churches, or mosques, and a variety of practices, such as worshipping, meditating, practicing yoga, and so forth. Pursuing a religious path as described above is not only a way of attaining spiritual health, it is also a way of making the human body and mind much healthier, thus making day-to-day human actions more effective (Labbs 1995).

Nepal is the birthplace of many saints, famous for religious teaching both inside and outside of the country. For example, the birthplace of Maharishi Ved Vyas, known as a scholar of the Hindu religion, is considered to be in Vyas Municipality in Nepal. He was the writer of eighteen *Purans*, or Hindu religious books (Van der Geer, Dermitzakis, and de Vos 2008). Likewise, Gautam Buddha was born in Lumbini in Nepal, before becoming famous for originating Buddhist philosophy (Khetan 1996). These Hindu and Buddhist philosophies became extremely famous, not only in Nepal, but all over the world. Other religions, such as Islam and Christianity, have also been

followed in Nepal for a long period of time (Central Bureau of Statistics 2012; Dahal 2014). Thus, people use religious and spiritual practices in one way or other in accordance with their own beliefs and traditions.

Nepal is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and a religiously diverse country. Despite the present-day existence of tolerance toward one another's religions, prior to 2007 the country was officially a Hindu kingdom. The overwhelming majority of people in the country are Hindu. According to the 2011 census, 81.3 percent of the Nepalese people were Hindu, followed by Buddhists at 9 percent, Muslims at 4.4 percent, Kiratist (an indigenous ethnic religion) at 3 percent, and Christians at 1.4 percent (Dahal 2014). In 2007, the interim Government of Nepal declared the country a secular nation. Both Hindus and Buddhists usually accept each other's practices and many people follow a combination of both religions. Likewise, other religious people celebrate and practice in their own ways.

The basic premise of this paper is that spirituality is not only a way of gaining a sense of well-being in relationship to God (a vertical relationship), but is also a means of obtaining a sense of life purpose and life satisfaction (a horizontal relationship). Indeed, happiness is derived from getting what one desires. Generally, people have two major goals in life: one is to obtain health of physical body and mind, along with basic human needs, such as food, shelter, and clothes, and the other is to obtain a sense of well-being in relation to God. Out of this background, an attempt is made here to examine the lived experiences of PLHIV, a marginalized group of people in Nepal, in relation to their religious practices and their quality of life, and in terms of their spirituality and development, using a qualitative research approach.

It might first be helpful to link this article with my earlier essay on identity that deals with spirituality and identity reconstruction, so that readers may form a clear understanding of spirituality and identity reconstruction in tandem with spirituality and development. The earlier article focuses on spiritual practices and lived experiences in terms of a fluidity of identity that moves from spoiled identity to identity reconstruction. In that paper there is an attempt to address how PLHIV feel and how HIV negative people treat those with HIV, given identity is not a single phenomenon. By contrast, this paper deals with spiritual practices and their lived impact on quality of life, focusing on the overall development of an individual living with HIV, irrespective of questions of identity.

Terminology

The term spirituality is associated with the colonization of religion by psychology and is perceived as synonymous with religion (Doherty 2003; Ferm 1963). In any event, in this study, the term is used as a symbolic word for all religions, while well-being is defined as a state of balance between the dimensions of the physical, social, spiritual, ecological, and psychological (Adam et al. 2000). Taken together, spiritual well-being is viewed as a sense of peace and contentment stemming from an individual's relationship with the spiritual aspects of life. Likewise, development is positive change in people's lives, leading to better quality of life. Most participants in this research give the credit for this to God. A marginalized group of people refers herein to those people who have been living with HIV and have been stigmatized and discriminated against in family and society. (HIV is considered a culturally sensitive issue in Nepal.)

Conceptual Framework

If we look at spirituality, health and development in a global context, we find they are intrinsically related. Along with global modernization and urbanization, spiritual, religious and cultural values are gradually declining, especially among young adults. Many people are too immersed in the modern materialistic world, while spiritual, and religious and cultural values are

retreating into the shadows. Spiritual and religious teachings are needed now more than ever. Expanding these teachings in Nepal and even in the global context, with courage, strength, compassion and grace, is extremely important during these times. By connecting to our inner strength and elevating our consciousness as living beings, it is possible to support people in need with courage, love and compassion (Sarkar 1998). In order to build these qualities in human beings, this study seeks to dig out spiritual and religious practices along with their impact on physical health and spiritual wellbeing. Given humans are indeed superior to any creaturely beings in existence, their role and responsibility should be greater than that of other creatures in this world: i.e., to make themselves happy and to make others happy by supporting them in need. Sarkar states his view on how people can become happy through a manifestation of consciousness in this way:

Human beings are the highest evolved beings. They possess clearly reflected consciousness and this makes them superior to animals. No other being has such a clear reflection of consciousness. Human beings can distinguish between good and bad with the help of their consciousness, and when in trouble they can find a way out, with its help. No one likes to live in misery and suffering, far less human beings, whose consciousness can find means of relief. Life without sorrow and suffering is a life of happiness and bliss, and that is what people desire. Everyone is in quest of happiness; in fact it is people's nature to seek happiness. (Sarkar 1998, 1)

The main root of religious thinking originates from the fear of death; the desire for life after death; and reasoning and logic regarding good or bad deeds (Sarkar 1998). The longing for life or fear of death are the cornerstone of religion, which is why most of the primitive religions worship very basic things like fire, sun and moon. This is because for early people, who were living in caves, for example, fire offered an important protection against wild animals, especially in the night. It is thus obvious why fire has a sacred position in most ancient civilizations. Likewise, other primitive peoples regarded different natural forces, such as the sun, the moon, and the stars, as important deities or gods, whom they thought protected them, and so they worshiped them. These types of practices or nature worship religions were prevalent in most ancient civilizations. Every individual's spiritual well-being develops in accordance with the principle of synergism, which means the domains of spiritual well-being both build on one another and build one another up (Fisher 1999). In this synergism, the central role belongs to the transcendent (Ellison 1983). Spiritual well-being is also externally integrated with physical well-being and psychological well-being.

Irrespective of any particular religion, spirituality is considered to have a positive role in every walk of life, as it teaches us humanity and the necessary qualities of human life. From time immemorial, people have considered God a supernatural power who is invisible, but who controls human life based on the work done in past and present lives. The good deeds we do in our lives are considered virtue, and the bad are considered sin, and for the particular individual these open up either heaven or hell. It is also believed that people gain supernatural power given by God through their bodies. Meditation and yoga are ways of achieving higher consciousness, transcendence from the physical body, and life on a spiritual realm.

This study follows Goffman's theory in relation to the stigmatization and discrimination attached to HIV, as this theory relates to various strategies for greatly reducing such negative reactions. This process of reducing stigmatization and discrimination helps in achieving positive changes in the lives of PLHIV after being diagnosed. Likewise, this study also follows the World Health Organization (WHO)'s conceptual framework with regard to Quality of Life (QOL), including Peterson and Roy's three major pathways for obtaining better health. According to WHO, QOL is defined as a person's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns (World Health Organization, Division of Mental Health and Prevention of Substance Abuse 1997).

Likewise, Peterson and Roy (1985) state that there is a connection between religiosity and spirituality and better health. They suggest three major pathways for how religion and spirituality play a role in people's lives as follows: 1) religiosity and spirituality offer hope, comfort, and optimism, 2) they provide meaning and purpose to individuals concerning their existence, and 3) religious participation can provide social support through interpersonal relationships that offer encouragement and sympathy.

Data and Methods

This paper follows a qualitative research methodology as it seeks to understand and describe how people feel, think and behave within a particular socio-cultural context (Bryman 2012). The study of HIV and AIDS in Nepal is considered a sensitive area. I have chosen a path of data collection through organizations working in the field in order to maintain confidentiality of both participants and organizations. I use pseudonyms for thirty-three interviewees, and a numerical order—one, two, three and so on—for eight organizations from which data were collected. From an understanding of qualitative research, this study utilized a semi-structured questionnaire with a framework of various themes to be explored, drawing on the lived experiences of research participants after being HIV diagnosed. Ethical approval was gained from Massey University, New Zealand, as study institution, and also from the Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) in the home country, where field work and data collection took place. I, as a researcher, was fully involved with the interviews, face-to-face with interviewees, collecting data using open-ended questions and understanding their lived experiences of spiritual practices and their attainment. After completion of data collection, the field data were translated from Nepali into English. This study used a thematic analysis to examine the responses provided by participants in the research field. In this study, themes and sub-themes were thus generated to analyze field data about Nepalese socio-cultural perspectives in relation to spiritual practices and their attainment.

This study used a thematic analysis, examining the responses provided by participants in the research field. In this study, I read the translated Nepali-English raw data several times and coded English texts using different themes while analyzing the data. Thereafter, the different themes were classified into main themes and sub-themes of spirituality and development as per the objectives of this study. After identifying the main themes and sub-themes, I analyzed the field data based on Nepalese socio-cultural perspectives, in relation to the participants' spiritual practices and their lived experiences, especially for attaining quality of life. This study has been based on an inductive analysis of participants' lived experiences in accordance with a qualitative research approach (Shank 2006).

Results

Nepal has multi-religious and multicultural societies, where, according to the 2011 census of the country, 123 native languages and 125 castes/tribes are in existence (Central Bureau of Statistics 2012). From a humanistic and social work perspective, people seem to be proactive, irrespective of their religious beliefs, in saving other people's lives when something bad happens. In this matter, Nima, one of the participants, told of his lived experiences of being fully supported after having an accident while heading elsewhere in Pokhara by motorcycle. He shared his experiences of being saved in this way:

At that time, all the people in Pokhara had given up hope of my survival. I was told about my HIV in hospital, [in] Kathmandu. None of the hospitals in Pokhara would take me in, so I was taken to Kathmandu. I was too gravely injured. I had a broken neck and an injured spine. At hospital, the doctors said that I could be saved by being

given oxygen for twenty-four hours and that I should be rushed immediately to Kathmandu. At that moment, my guru (who is a Rotary club member) and my well-wishers from Pokhara raised money and took me to Kathmandu. In the three weeks of my hospital stay there, 900,000 Nepali rupees were spent on my treatment. After that, I was discharged. There I was informed that I was HIV positive. . . . After three weeks, I was shifted to [a] hospital in Pokhara. During my stay, through the doctors, I came in contact with this institution (venue of interview). In [this] hospital, I was told that I was HIV positive and they suggested that it would be good for me to contact an institution that dealt with the issue of HIV. (Nima, Male)

Religious people often consider other people (or other religious people) suffering a disease or an infection or an injury with a positive attitude and a humanistic approach. HIV knowledge is very important when dealing with people living with HIV. Nima further shared his experiences of how people with knowledge of HIV treated him well:

He [a religious teacher] was from Malaysia. A short while back, we gave yoga training to more than 500 people in Gharepatan, Pokhara. At that time, my gurus also came from abroad. They know I am an HIV positive. They don't look at me from a negative point of view. They never said that it [HIV] was a big, dreadful disease. They and their doctors say that by eating from the same plate, by sleeping together, by walking together and sharing clothes, this disease is not transmitted. (Nima, Male)

Many people in Nepal understand that there are causes and consequences for everything we do in life. It is also believed that the present life's daily occurrences are also the outcome of the karma from our previous life: what we did, good or bad. Furthermore, people attempt to do good works to attain salvation. They pray to God to make their present life better and they even pray for their future. In this matter, Gita shared her experiences of spirituality and wellbeing in the present and for the future and recounted how she consoled herself in this way:

I think [Good or Bad Karma], depends upon our previous life, what we have done—good or bad works. This life is also related to our past life. Maybe I did bad karma in the previous life and got such a disease (HIV). It may depend upon time of birth. . . . I believe in GOD. I pray to GOD and my life is getting better than before. In the beginning, people used to say that people with HIV die soon as there is not any medicine to cure it. But these days, there are medicines to give pain relief and a longer life. (Gita, Female)

Gita added one more experience that shows how God sees everything what we do in our life. We do not need to wait a long time for the outcome of our work. We do good work in our life and we have a good outcome immediately in our present life. She shared her personal experiences in this way:

I feel much better than before. My daughters are also convincing my family members (about HIV) at home. I looked after my daughters well when they were small. That's why they treat me well now. GOD shows everything we do in our life immediately. Imagine how I survived, caring for my small son and daughters after my husband's death. (Gita, Female)

Spirituality teaches people that it is necessary to overcome discrimination based on class and caste. To make all people equal, we need to treat them equally, so that everyone can have an opportunity to uplift themselves, and search for possibilities based on their capability. Nima added the following in this regard:

The rich have indeed subjugated the poor. If the rich worked for the benefit of the poor, the distance between them could be covered; even the poor would nurture some hope. Our foreign gurus have made schools in the Ghandruk region [one of the hilly regions of Nepal] for the children of the poor, and have done a really good deed. But the poverty hasn't been alleviated, caste-based discrimination still exists. At first, this type of discrimination was rampant. Even when we were young, such things existed. They said that *damai/kaami/sarki* (the so-called untouchable caste) couldn't enter another's doorstep and they weren't allowed to. I didn't like it, because I believe that everyone is equal. I used to fight with my father and mother about it. We could play together with kaami/damai but we could not eat with them; we could not bring them to our homes. . . . When I used to return home after playing with the children of kaami/damai, after going to their homes, my mother used to sprinkle me with gold-water (water touched by gold). They used to say that by doing so, we would be purified again. If we ever mingled with them by mistake, the belief remained that one needs to be purified by sprinkling gold-water. (Nima, Male)

Discussion

When it comes to issues of people living with HIV, gender, caste, and class have become intertwined. Consequently, such people face multiple problems in their lives. However, most of them have felt their health status improving following HIV treatment at the allopathic (western modern medicine) hospital in Nepal. When their health status improves, they are able to become literate through informal education programs launched by the government and non-governmental organizations, even after being HIV diagnosed and having to leave their homes due to stigmatization and discrimination. This has made it easier to find jobs in organizations working in the field of HIV, and in other places through their networks of people, either people living with HIV or those who are HIV negative. Ultimately, the processes of obtaining HIV treatment, informal education, and jobs, have simultaneously made people with HIV independent socially and economically, much like HIV negative people are. As PLHIV find their health status improving and as they become independent socially and economically, they find their stigmatization and discrimination to be considerably reduced. Some PLHIV have been reunited with their family members after reconstructing their identities, socially and economically, after migrating to urban areas due to the HIV stigmatization and discrimination (Aryal 2015). Most PLHIV give credit to God for their economic independence, for reducing the stigmatization and discrimination, despite the fact that they are HIV positive.

People in Nepal are taught to call upon God's name, as per their own religion, by the older citizens in their family and society. Hindus, Buddhists, Moslems, Christians and others—use different names, such as Ram, Krishna, Shiva, Buddha, or Allah. They often believe that calling on these names as per their own religious traditions provide them with positive vibrations that give them strength in their bodies and comfort in their daily activities. Furthermore, they also believe that calling on God's name is a way of reaching heaven after death. Most PLHIV in this study share this experience: "It comes from within. If I am in a trouble, I remember God and say, 'Oh, my God!'" (or Mira, Jwala, Sushma, Mamata, Nabin, Buddha, Basant, Rajesh, Nima, Min, Durga, Gita, Sarita, Laxmi, etc.). Indeed, these people consider God to be the ultimate friend in their lives upon whom they depend.

Spirituality is considered to have helped some participants in joining organizations that are working in the field of HIV and AIDS. Becoming economically independent was found to be a significant way of reducing stigma and discrimination. The participants prayed to God and attributed their success in finding a job to the grace of God. There are different kinds of people in society: some have positive attitudes while others have negative ones. Those people who have positive attitudes seem to be dedicated to the upliftment of marginalized groups of people like PLHIV. They support marginalized communities, providing services, money, and logistical

support, such as food, shelter, clothes, and so forth. It is also believed that helping a marginalized community with such services makes God happy. When God becomes happy with people's contribution a path to reach heaven opens up. Such people believe that they can obtain salvation after death takes place. This notion is deeply rooted in Nepal. Some people living with HIV shared their experiences of how they consoled themselves and their friends by functioning as social workers at an organization that in the field of HIV and AIDS. Anu, one of the female participants, shared her experiences through in this way:

At first I would think that I could not do anything, but later after I had training as an HIV positive person I became more familiar with persons in organizations working in the field of HIV. I had the chance to counsel my HIV-infected friends, thus giving them positive feelings by telling them that HIV is not as big an issue as people think. . . . Similarly I had the chance to share with many friends who have similar problems as mine. I had the chance to find many HIV infected friends; it is not just me who has this problem. I counseled them that HIV is not a very dangerous issue. We can fight HIV by taking good care of our health and with timely medication. In this way I developed positive feelings about myself and about my friends living with HIV simultaneously. (Anu, Female)

Exploring the lives of PLHIV at individual, family, and societal levels, reveals they have been able to develop their careers in multiple ways after acquiring HIV knowledge and treatment at an allopathic hospital, gaining an informal education, and obtaining jobs. With a multi-party democracy and republic, Nepal's government has focused on the upliftment of marginalized communities because of society's unjust treatment of those of untouchable caste, the poor, PLHIV, and people with leprosy. These groups of people find spirituality is one of the major determinants in improving their lives in comparison to the past. One of the female participants shared her experiences of the time she came to know that she had contracted HIV:

I think I was not born before being HIV positive, I was born only after being HIV positive. I had not seen any other alternatives, except weeping, after being beaten seriously by my husband. (Pratima, Female)

Later on, she had the chance to interact with organizations working in the field of HIV and AIDS. She then changed her philosophy in this way:

Now my philosophy of life has changed. An interest in doing social welfare has developed within me. . . . I now think that HIV is not the end of life for me, but a start. I was just concerned about my life before, but now I think about others. I have reached a very high level in life now.

Knowledge of a particular subject, such as HIV, is most important in changing someone's life. In linking religion (or religions) with development, every religion illustrates that true knowledge connects not only to individuals and families, but also to national life and the world. This knowledge generates a collective vibration among people at all levels—individual, family, societal, national and international levels. Indeed, spiritual and religious teachers, irrespective of whether they are Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Moslem, etc. have taught that religious and spiritual knowledge make the family, society, nation and the world livable places. In this context, it is relevant to cite a statement quoted in a religious book, which considers knowledge a basic element in changing people's lives:

When true knowledge is achieved, then the will becomes sincere; when the will is sincere, then the heart is set right. . . . when the heart is set right, then the personal life is

cultivated; when the personal life is cultivated, then the family life is regulated; when the family life is regulated, then the national life is orderly; and when the national life is orderly, then there is peace in this world (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania 2006, 181).

Conclusion

This paper concludes that spirituality a powerful a tool for bringing positive changes in the lives of PLHIV, one of the marginalized groups of people in Nepal. Indeed, spirituality and development are intrinsically interdependent. Spirituality helps with development activities, and through these people in marginalized communities in Nepal and other countries with similar socio-cultural contexts attain quality of life.

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AN ASIAN PNEUMATOLOGY OF THE FABC AND THE RE-IMAGINING OF SPIRITUALITY IN ASIA

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ABSTRACT

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has reimagined spirituality in Asia by removing the perception of the church in Asia as "foreign" through interreligious dialogue and inculturation. It has done this by pursuing a threefold dialogue, consisting of dialogue with the local cultures, peoples, and religions. The interreligious component of the Triple Dialogue is based on the premise that the Holy Spirit or the Divine Spirit is operative in non-Christian religions (BIRA IV/2, art. 8.5, in Rosales and Arevalo 1997, 253). Indeed, the FABC document, *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today* (SWAT) issued by the Office of Theological Concerns, begins not with the teaching of the episcopal magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church, but with how the Spirit has functioned in the lives of Asian people within their historical and religio-cultural contexts. In this paper, I examine some of the ways in which the bishops at the FABC have reimagined spirituality in Asia.

Overview: Colonial and Postcolonial Contexts

Although Christianity emerged in West Asia, and, for the first four centuries of its existence, was more present in Asia and Africa than elsewhere, it is nevertheless regarded as a Western religion by most people. The Malabar Church of India is older than the Roman Catholic Church, and Nestorian Christians were present in China in the seventh century, yet Christianity is seen as a foreign religion by many Asians today (Phan 2011, 2-3). These perceptions are probably due to the fact that after its birth in Palestine, Christianity moved steadily northward to Antioch, and then westward to Rome, before it spread southward and eastward to the rest of the world. By the time it came back to Asia, the continent of its birth, it was indeed seen as a foreign religion, whose missionary activities followed the expansion of colonialism in Asia: by the Portuguese in Gao (1510) and Malaka (1511), the Spanish in Cebu (1565) and Manila (1571), the Dutch in Indonesia (17 CE), the British in Lower Burma (1825) and Malaysia (1867), the French in Vietnam (1861) and the Americans in the Philippines (1898).

Western missionaries established churches in Asia by transplanting styles of liturgical worship and institutional structures of leadership from Europe. There was no attempt to contextualize or indigenize Christianity to the local setting, or to develop indigenous churches with local identities. Missionary schools introduced Euro-centric forms of knowledge production, with an emphasis on a particular European language, history, and vocation that effectively dislodged local transmission of indigenous knowledge to the next generation. Furthermore, missionary schools provided the means for those who could afford the education to secure their children's futures as bureaucrats or civil servants. The underlying assumption of this approach to

evangelization and education was that one had to become a European or a Westerner in order to become a Christian and an educated person. It turned out Asian Christians, whose Christian faith was practiced as a foreign religion in their own native setting, and educators with minimal knowledge of their own native history, but sufficient command of a foreign language, history, and skillset, would be awarded the opportunity for social mobility in a colonized society.

After the Second World War, advocates of independence movements in former Asian colonies campaigned for national self-determination and self-government rather than a return to European colonial rule. These movements were often accompanied by a rising tide of nationalism and decolonization. The former saw Christianity as a foreign religion and the latter included a process of de-Christianization that resulted in the confiscation of missionary schools and the expulsion of Christian missionaries from many countries in Asia (Chia 2018, 138). A tangible symbol of the new national identity was often associated with a religion that had been suppressed during the colonial era, but that most Asians could identify with as their own. For example, the essential feature of the Burmese efforts to maintain national unity during the postcolonial period was summed up in a popular saying of the time: “To be Burmese is to be a Buddhist.” A similar saying could be found in Kampuchea: “To be a Khmer is to be a Buddhist” (Bechert 1984). The conflation of nationalism with Buddhism reflects the important role that religion played in the vision of national self-determination and the articulated political consciousness of these newly independent nations in postcolonial Asia.

Theology of Religions

Even though Buddhism is of Indian origin and indigenous to neither Myanmar (Burma) nor Kampuchea (Cambodia), it has been adapted to these respective cultural contexts, to include accommodation of pre-Buddhist practices of spirit worship that were previously common in Southeast Asia. Christianity was transplanted onto the Asian continent, however and was thus never truly at home with Asian cultures and thea. European missionaries and their respective Catholic and Protestant religious institutions presented Christianity as the “true faith,” isolated and aloof from the other Asian religions, many of which pre-date Christianity itself. The theology of colonial Christianity reflected the exclusive model of theologies of religions, in which no salvation is possible outside of the one true savior, religion or church. Dialogue with other religions was not deemed necessary, since it was assumed that there is neither revelation nor salvation in non-Christian religions. The goal of the exclusive model is to replace other religions with Christianity (Knitter 2002, 26-29). An ecclesio-centric approach was adopted, in that initiation into the Christian Church was considered necessary for salvation. It is not surprising, therefore, that a church with such a theological framework would prevent Christianity taking root in Asian soil, in part because it saw itself as superior to Asian cultures and to the various religious identities that already existed in Asia.

While in the hardcore exclusivist model, or what Paul Knitter calls the “total replacement model,” dialogue with non-Christian religions is seen as a betrayal of God’s revelation in Christ, in the more inclusive approach subscribed to by the Second Vatican Council, dialogue with adherents of other religions is considered essential to the Christian life, because God’s presence can be found in these religions as well. There is not only revelation in non-Christian religions, but also the possibility of salvation. These religions can be considered “ways of salvation,” even though the salvation of all humans ultimately comes from Christ. In other words, salvation outside of Christianity is possible, even though it is always ultimately dependent on one true savior and one true church. This is a Christocentric approach in that the salvation of all people—Christians and non-Christians, believers and non-believers—ultimately comes from Christ. Knitter calls this the “fulfillment model,” since the salvation of all people is ultimately fulfilled by Jesus Christ (Knitter 70-79). As Pope John Paul II (1990, sec. 6) aptly put it in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, “Christ

is thus the fulfillment of the yearning of all the world's religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion".

The fulfillment model is a major improvement on the total replacement model in that it does not limit God's grace from working beyond Christianity, and it acknowledges the idea that those who do not yet know Jesus can still experience the saving love of God, even if they do not understand the fullness of what they have experienced in terms of the big picture of salvation. We see this idea with regard to salvation of non-Christians as individuals in the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium*, which makes clear that "[t]hose who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation" (LG 16, in Abbott 1966, 35).¹ There are, however, weaknesses associated with this model. First, it engages other religions from a Christian perspective. In other words, it applies Christian categories like "God," "Jesus Christ," and "salvation" to understanding religions whose conceptions of divinity and salvation may be different, even completely different. Second, it often appears imperialistic, in that it comes to conclusions about religious others without encountering the believers of those religions (Light 2014, 79).

The third model in theologies of religions is the pluralistic model, which posits that all religions are equal and have different paths leading to salvation. This model promotes dialogue because it acknowledges that there are many true religions, none of which can claim superiority over the others. It is a theocentric model in that it recognizes that many true religions can have different ends, but that salvation ultimately comes from the same God of these religions. Relativism is the major weakness of this model. The approach taken by the late Indian Protestant theologian, Stanley Samartha, illustrates this point. He argued that Jesus is recognized as one savior among many others in the religiously pluralistic context of India (Samartha 1991, 125). In so doing, he relativized the soteriological uniqueness of Christ without offering an alternative model of interreligious dialogue that does not foreground Jesus in an exclusive manner, yet remains faithful to the basic Christian affirmations about Jesus.

Samartha, however, provided two images that are quite helpful in capturing the colonialist and indigenous approaches to Christianity in Asia: He used the image of the landing of a helicopter to describe the evangelization approach taken by missionaries during the period of European colonization of Asia. While descending upon Asian soil, the helicopter blows away everything on the ground in order to pave the way for the transplantation of a European church. Theologically, the image of a helicopter landing on Asian soil resembles Knitter's total replacement model, which also sought to replace all religions with Christianity.

In contrast, the image of a bullock-cart, a two-wheeled vehicle pulled by oxen, describes an indigenous Church that is in touch with the peoples and cultures of Asia. Just as its wheels touch every inch of Asian soil, as the bullock-cart is pulled along the road, the bullock-cart church "must be in continuous contact and friction with the people and religions of Asia if it wants to move forward" (Chia 2004). This image describes the kind of indigenous church advocated by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). It is a church in which the Christian Gospel has been incarnated in the lives of people in Asia in order that "faith is inculturated and culture is evangelized (Eilers 2002, 27).

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

¹ For a detailed explanation of each of the conditions listed in LG 16, as well as the ecclesio-centric grounding of *mission ad gentes*, see Tan (2004, 678-9).

The FABC is “a voluntary association of episcopal conferences in South, Southeast, East and Central Asia, established with approval of the Holy See. Its purpose is to foster among its members solidarity and co-responsibility for the welfare of the Church and society in Asia, and to promote and defend whatever is for the greater good” (Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences 2019). Established in 1972, with approval of the Holy See, as a federation of nineteen Asian bishops’ conferences and eight associate members of South, Southeast, East, and Central Asia, the FABC, since its inception, has had considerable impact upon the reimagining of spirituality in Asia. Here spirituality refers to an encounter with the Ultimate through beliefs and practices, and the shaping of one’s life based on that encounter. The focus is on the person, because an interreligious dialogue is not a dialogue between two religions, but between believers from their respective religions.

To carry out its pastoral mission of becoming a church of Asia by removing the perception of the church in Asia as “foreign,” the FABC has pursued a threefold dialogue: the dialogue with local cultures (inculturation),² the dialogue with peoples, especially the poor (human development), and the dialogue with other religions (interreligious dialogue).³ These dialogues are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are interrelated. They are concrete ways of proclaiming the Gospel in Asia. I now briefly examine each of these kinds of dialogue.

Asia is the home of some of the oldest civilizations known to humankind. It is also the continent that gave birth to all the major religions of the world, including Christianity. As such, there are elements of truth and goodness in Asian cultures that the Catholic Church considers the “seeds of the Word”⁴ of God. Furthermore, Aloysius Pieris, a leading Asian theologian, reminds us that culture and religion cannot be separated in much of the Majority World, because “culture is the variegated expression of religion” (Pieris 1992, 97). In other words, if there are elements of truth and goodness in Asian cultures, these same elements are present in Asian religions. The goal of the dialogue with Asian cultures is to integrate the “seeds of the Word” found in Asian cultures and religions with the Christian faith in order to form a truly local Asian Christian church, in which Asian ways of thinking, praying, and living become part and parcel of what it means to be Asian Christians.

Having grown up in Burma (Myanmar), a country in which there has been a constant state of civil war between the national government and its ethnic minorities since gaining independence from the British in 1948, Cardinal Charles Maung Bo has focused on issues of peace building in Asia since he took over the helm of the FABC as its President on January 1, 2019. To achieve peace

² In the early documents of the FABC, “inculturation” was used interchangeably with words like “indigenization,” “acculturation,” and “adaptation.” Over the years since the Manila conference of 1979, which devoted a workshop to inculturation as an Asian missionary task, there have been definite characteristics associated with the process of inculturation (Kroegeer 2008). Three salient characteristics are:

1. “Inculturation is not a mere adaptation of a ready-made Christianity to a given situation, but rather a creative embodiment of the Word in the local church” (Rosales and Arevalo 1997, 138).
2. “Inculturation is a dialogical encounter process understood in its deepest meaning that comes from the salvific movement of the Triune God, because evangelization itself is above all a dialogue between the Gospel message and the given reality” (Rosales and Arevalo 1997, 138-9).
3. “Dialogue is a primary means and way for inculturation.” (Rosales and Arevalo 1997, 142)

According to Edmund Chia, Senior Lecturer at the Australian Catholic University, inculturation “simply means enabling Christianity to fit into the context and resonate more with Asian sensibilities” (Chia 2018, 139). It goes beyond the short-term measures of indigenizing Christianity, such as translating the Gospel to the vernacular or “adapting it to an indigenous world-view with the concomitant local concepts, images, and culturally specific symbols ... [that] do not address the critical issues of the Church’s identity” (Chia 2004). It involves the total transformation of the life of an Asian Christian community in such a way that the Gospel of Christ has been incarnated in the lives of people in that community. For the FABC, the Triple Dialogue is the fundamental operative approach to inculturation in Asia.

³ At the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy in Naples, Pope Francis on June 6, 2019 urged theologians to temper history and tradition with dialogue across religious and cultural boundaries (Seneze 2019).

⁴ This phrase is from St. Justin Martyr’s “Spermatikos Logos”.

in a continent where people have faced the horrors of ethnic conflicts, religious intolerance, and violence, Bo rearticulates the triple dialogue of FABC as a dialogue with government, with the poor, and interreligious dialogue (Sainsbury 2019). Dialogue with government is to ensure that the dignity of every person is protected and that the “seeds of the Word” are preserved in Asian cultures and religions. As such, it is the political component of a much larger dialogue with Asian cultures.

In his opening address at the third meeting of the Asian Theological Conference, Samuel Rayan, a Jesuit from India, captured the vastness of the Asian continent with its diversity of peoples and cultures, as well as the plight of the suffering millions, the majority of Asia’s population (ATC III):

Let us be silent for a moment
 Silent before the awesome reality of Asia ...
 Before Asian’s vastness, variety, and complexity ...
 Asia’s peoples, languages, and cultures ...
 Asia’s poor, their cries, tears, and wounds ...
 the death of her babies by the millions and
 the humiliation of women ... and men ... and their struggles. (Rayan 1992, 11)

While Rayan delivered this address in 1992, and while some Asian countries, China in particular, have experienced tremendous economic growth over the past twenty-seven years, Asia as a whole is still extremely poor. The majority of people are under-nourished, uneducated, marginalized, and poor. With the exception of the Philippines and East Timor, where the majority of the population are Christians, the rest of Asia where, by conservative estimates, over ninety-five percent of Asians live, is almost entirely non-Christian. This makes dialogue with the poor and dialogue with non-Christian religions essential aspects of the church’s pastoral mission of evangelization.

The last component of the Triple Dialogue—i.e., dialogue with other religions or interreligious dialogue—is regarded by the Asian bishops as an essential component of how Asian Christians live their faith amidst their neighbors of other religions (BIRA IV/2, art. 8.5., in Rosales and Arevalo 1997, 253). We have seen the significance of interreligious dialogue above in my discussion of dialogues with both culture and the poor. Dialogue with culture entails dialogue with religions because cultures and religions are interlaced in the Asian context. Thus it has been said that all East Asians, to some degree, whether they are aware of it or not, exhibit in their lives elements of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, just as all South Asians display some ethos rooted in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Deeply entrenched in Asian cultures are the practices of filial piety, engagement in ancestor veneration, and other aspects of popular religious traditions. To abandon these for the sake of Christianity or secularization is tantamount to getting rid of one’s Asianness. Consequently, multiple religious belonging is the rule in Asia rather than an exception. In *Being Religious Interreligiously*, Phan (2008, 62-63) observes that in Asia, “religions are considered not as mutually exclusive religious organizations but as having specialized functions responding, according to a division of labor, as it were, to the different needs and circumstances in the course of a person’s life”. A couple of examples will illustrate this. It is not uncommon for a Japanese to be a Shinto at birth, a Confucianist during the prime of his/her life, and a Buddhist in the twilight of his/her life. An East Asian Christian can be a Confucianist at work and be attentive to the Daoist side of life outside of work by sipping tea (*cha*), doing Tai Chi, or even composing a few lines of poetry. In other words, intrareligious negotiation is an inherent part of their lived experience to the degree that it has become naturalized. Moreover, dialogue with the poor entails dialogue with other religions, since most of the poor in Asia are non-Christians. Hence, interreligious dialogue is a *sine qua non* for Asian Christians in particular. Indeed, the Asian church’s pastoral magisterium has proclaimed that “unless one engages in interreligious dialogue one cannot be regarded as a true Christian” (Chia 2004).

Asian Pneumatology

As pastoral gatherings or conferences, the aim of the FABC is not to formulate a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the theology of the Holy Spirit; rather, the intention is to offer a rough contour of the ways in which the Spirit has operated in the life and pastoral mission of the Asian church, situated in a multicultural and religiously pluralistic context. This is what “Asian Pneumatology” refers to in this article, rather than an in-depth treatment of the theology of the Holy Spirit.⁵

In *The Joy of Religious Pluralism*, Peter Phan (2017, 57), Ignacio Ellacuria Chair of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University, explicates the double meaning of the “Divine Spirit” as God as “spirit” (with the lower-case “s”) and the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Blessed Trinity. They are two ways of understanding the same Spirit. The Divine Spirit is God in action: i.e., how the Spirit has operated in the lives of people since the beginning of time through their various histories, cultures, and religions. The Holy Spirit is an abstract and ahistorical formulation of the identity of the Spirit that came from the Christological controversies of the first seven ecumenical councils. While SWAT recognizes that there are deep differences between some Christian beliefs and those of other religions, it also acknowledges “resonances” of the Divine Spirit can be detected in history and in non-Christian religions (Phan 2017, 59-60). Using St. Irenaeus’s metaphor of Jesus and the Holy Spirit as two “hands” that carry out the one plan of salvation of the Father, Phan emphasizes “the fact that there is only one economy of salvation does not entail that the two ‘hands’—Son and Holy Spirit—act in the same way, at the same time, in the same place, with the same people, and in total dependence on each other” (Phan 2017, 56). We find this sort of relationship among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the Athanasian Creed as well: “And the Catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. Neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost” (Sullivan 1907). The implication is that the God Catholics worship is no supreme monad existing in eternal solitude. Catholics worship an inherently relational Trinitarian God, comprising three distinct Persons, yet united in the one divine plan of salvation. We see this in the manner in which the Holy Spirit carries out the “economy” or plan of salvation, which can neither be contained nor limited, for “[t]he Spirit blows where it wills”⁶ (Jn 3:8). The FABC acknowledges “the work of the Holy Spirit both in the Church and beyond its visible boundaries, since the Spirit acts in freedom and His action cannot be reduced to persons, traditions, institutions or problems of relationships” (Rosales and Arevalo 1997, 249).

While the Holy Spirit, is for many Catholics the silent member of the Blessed Trinity, the Divine Spirit as God-“spirit” is God in action: God at work in the universe, in the church, and in Asian multicultural, pluri-religious, and socio-political realities. The actions of the Divine Spirit are revealed when we see people of different backgrounds—be it religious affiliation, nationality, race, ethnicity, or some other factor—come together in peace and reconciliation. A few examples will illustrate this. A week after the worst terrorist attack in the modern history of New Zealand, which left fifty people dead, many women across the country wore headscarves or hijabs in a show of support for the Muslim community. One New Zealander, Bell Sibly, told ABC News in Christchurch the primary reason she was wearing a headscarf was that “if anyone else turns up waving a gun, I want to stand between him and anybody he might be pointing it at” (Durando 2019). During the same week, people from all faith traditions held hands to form a symbolic ring of peace around mosques in Middletown, Toronto, and elsewhere around the world to show their solidarity with the victims of the Christchurch attacks. When we see people standing in solidarity with victims

⁵ For an in-depth discussion of Asian Pneumatology, see Peter Phan (2017, 67-74).

⁶ In many biblical translations, this passage is rendered as, “The wind blows where it wills”. The word “wind” here is the Hebrew word *ruach*, which can also be translated as “Spirit”.

of religious intolerance and violence, we cannot help but recognize a sign of the work of the Divine Spirit. Dramatic examples of the workings of the Divine Spirit include the dismantling of the Berlin wall, the breakdown of the Apartheid system in South Africa, and the dissolution of the former Soviet Union. From a Christian perspective, as well as that of the FABC, when people come together in reconciliation and forgiveness, one can be sure it is the work of the Divine Spirit. Implicit in this assertion is the conviction that the Divine Spirit is actively present in all religious traditions (BIRA IV/12, art. 7, in Rosales and Arevalo 1997, 326). This does not necessarily mean that the Divine Spirit is the *final cause*, to use Rahner's terminology, but it can imply that the presence of the Divine Spirit in non-Christian religions can open the door regarding these religions as "ways of salvation."⁷ This is the approach taken by the FABC in articulating the starting point of its understanding of the Divine or Holy Spirit.

As noted above, SWAT begins its treatment of the Spirit, not with the teaching of the episcopal magisterium, but with a description of how the Spirit is active in Asian cultures and religions. Phan points out the significance of this approach, when he writes, "implicit to this methodology is the theological conviction that Divine Spirit is actively present in non-Christian religions in and through the Holy Spirit and that to this extent these religions may be regarded as 'ways of salvation'" (Phan 2017, 59). Such a theological conviction does not come from a vacuum. As Jonathan Y. Tan, professor at Case Western Reserve University, observes, the FABC's articulation of the Holy Spirit was built upon two important insights promulgated by the Second Vatican Council (Tan 2014, 101-2). They are:

Ad Gentes (Decree on Missionary Activities) that "the Holy Spirit was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified," (AG 4, in Abbott 1966, 587)

and

Gaudium et Spes (Church in the Modern World) that "since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery." (GS 22, in Abbott 1966, 221-2)

Tan (2014, 102) notes that, based on these two theological insights from Vatican II, the Asian bishops have declared that "God's Spirit is at work in all religious traditions" (BIRA IV/12, art. 7, in Rosales and Arevalo 1997, 326) because "God's saving grace is not limited to members of the Church, but is offered to every person" (Rosales and Arevalo 1997, BIRA II/12, art. 12, in Rosales and Arevalo 1997, 115). These are some of the theological and pneumatological bases upon which the FABC has reimagined spirituality in Asia.

Reimagining of Spirituality in Asia

SWAT reimagines spirituality in Asia by reflecting on how the Divine Spirit has been at work in various religio-cultural traditions, as experienced by believers of these traditions within their own *sitz im leben*. While the FABC recognizes the deep differences between some Christian beliefs and those of other religions, it affirms that "there are deep resonances between them" as well. SWAT highlights these deep resonances between the Divine Spirit or the Holy Spirit and the various religious and secular realities in Asia by focusing on ways the Divine Spirit is actively present in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Asian primal religions, Islam, the church,

⁷ This is different from Rahner's idea of "anonymous Christians," which reflects the position that the saving love of God is present in all people and that those who do not yet know Jesus can still experience the saving love of God even if they are not aware of it. For further discussion, see Phan (2017, 59) and Karl Rahner (1966).

the biblical tradition, and the socio-political realities of Asia. What follows is a brief summary of SWAT's take on the Spirit at work in some of these Asian religious traditions; what Christians can learn from Asian religions; what Christians can offer from their own tradition; and how different approaches to evangelization in Asia have been sources of tension between the Vatican and the Asian bishops.

Of the many concepts of Hinduism, SWAT highlights concepts such as *antarayami* or *antarayamin* ("the inner controller" or "indweller"), *ananda* (bliss or joy), *sakti* ("power" or "energy") as having deep resonance with the Christian concept of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, OTC makes clear that the Divine Spirit or the Holy Spirit is also present in concepts less congenial with the Spirit and in the Indian tradition itself (Eilers 2002, 241-2). From Buddhism, SWAT examined *anatta* or *anatman* (no-self), *karuna* (compassion), the Four Noble Truths, and other Buddhist concepts, and aptly points out that the resonance of the Spirit can be detected, not necessarily in Buddhist concepts themselves, a few of which are non-theistic, but in the living out of those concepts. It offers the practice of the Four Noble Truths as an example of an encounter between Buddhism and Christianity.

One of the weaknesses of SWAT's analysis of Hinduism and, in particular, Buddhism, is that it focuses too much on abstract concepts and hardly at all on the popular practices of lived religion. Had they examined the lives of lay Asian Buddhists, they would have realized that many—even those among the very few who know what *anatta* means—regard it as an abstract concept that has no relevance to their lives, because most lay Theravada Asian Buddhists believe in a concept of a "butterfly soul," a pre-Buddhist belief that has been incorporated into Southeast Asian Buddhism.⁸ In other words, the Office of Theological Concern that issued SWAT, missed the opportunity of discovering that lived Buddhism has more elements in common with Catholicism than the concepts articulated by the Buddha himself.⁹

SWAT did notice the similarities that exist between the collection of the teachings and thoughts of Confucius in the Analects (*Lunyu*) and those of Jesus in the Christian Gospels, as well as between the personalities of the disciples of Confucius and those of Jesus. There was even a Judas figure amongst Confucius' disciples. Jan Qiu, a financial administrator for a rich minister, was later repudiated by Confucius for his lack of compassion toward the poor. Given the tremendous influence Confucius' teachings have had in Chinese culture and in the countries neighboring China, SWAT states that "it is unthinkable that such a human spirit did not have the Spirit working in him" (Eilers 2002, 248-50).

While the Dao is encoded within human culture in Confucianism, it is embedded within the natural tendency of things in Daoism. SWAT summarizes the complementary nature of Confucianism and Daoism:

In many ways, [Confucianism and Daoism] reflect the workings of the Holy Spirit in the Cosmos and particularly in humanity and its history. The Daoist virtues of docility, trust, humility, non-violence, detachment, equanimous love; and the Confucianist virtues of responsibility, honesty, loyalty and fidelity are but manifestations of the fruits of the one Spirit of God working in all sorts of different ways in different people in the world. (Eilers 2002, 257)

SWAT concludes that because Confucianism and Daoism are deeply influenced by traditional Chinese approaches to family and institutions, nature and harmony, the Holy Spirit is also unquestionably working in and through them.

⁸ For more information on butterfly soul or *leikpya*, see Spiro (1982, 84-86).

⁹ For further discussion on lived Buddhism, see Cheah (2011).

SWAT reimagines Asian spiritualities by acknowledging the workings of the Holy Spirit in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism, as well as in areas not discussed in this article; namely, in Asian primal religions, Islam, the church, the biblical tradition, and the socio-political realities of Asia. Since the Catholic Church declares that the Holy Spirit is present in these religions, then Catholics and other Christians should be able to learn something from these religious traditions that will help make them better Christians. What can Christians glean from Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Daoism that might help them better understand their own religious faith?

What Christians Can Learn from Asian Religions

In its sacred text, the *Rig Veda*, Hinduism tells us that “Truth is one, but the wise speak of it in many ways.” It is a saying that approximates the prismatic recapitulation of the nature of diversity in traditional Indian culture, where each facet reflects truth in a different light. It is like the classic story of the blind men and the elephant. The first blind man puts his hand on the elephant’s side and thinks he is touching a wall. The second takes hold of the elephant’s trunk and thinks he is grabbing a snake. The third blind man puts out his hand and touches the elephant’s tusk, which is smooth and sharp and thinks for sure that he is touching a spear. The fourth blind man holds on to one of the elephant’s legs and thinks he is holding on to the base of a tree. The fifth reaches out and touches the elephant’s ear and thinks he is touching a huge fan. The sixth blind man holds the tail of the elephant and thinks he is holding on to a rope. The moral of the story is that each of us has a partial perspective or vision of the reality of truth. None of us has access to the whole truth. In other words, Hinduism reminds Christians that no one has an exclusive corner in the market on truth. Most Christians hold this to be true as well.¹⁰ All Christians, however, need to be reminded that there is no singular perspective on truth and that we do not have the whole thing “bagged” or figured out. Christians need to have an attitude of openness that they might discern the movement of the Spirit beyond their own tradition.

The teachings of Theravada Buddhism state that the Buddha is inaccessible after parinirvana, a release from the cycle of rebirth for someone who has attained nirvana in his or her last rebirth. The Buddha is only a model or a guide in our journey towards the attainment of nirvana. We cannot pray to him or ask for his assistance. However, in popular Buddhism, the actual practice of Asian Buddhists in their everyday life, the Buddha is an object of worship and devotion, especially in times of adversity. In other words, no matter what textual Buddhism says about the Buddha, in the actual living out of their Buddhist faith, Asian Buddhists regard the Buddha as providing the fulfillment of the basic human need to experience the sacred in prayer. It is in prayer that lay Buddhist devotees encounter the Divine Spirit mediated through the Buddha, bodhisattvas, and/or other supernatural agents. Indeed, lay Buddhist devotees pray every day in front of their domestic altars. If praying is essential in this so-called “atheistic religion,” how much more it ought to be in a theistic religion. Such a natural human need or desire to experience the sacred through the practice of prayer and meditation is but a sign of the working of the Divine Spirit.

Rooted in the wisdom tradition, Confucianism values the art of learning and a strong work ethic. It teaches that the maintenance of social relations among people, and, in particular, within one’s family unit is of utmost important. It emphasizes the communal aspects of our relationships. One is never the source of one’s own meaning. A person is a part of a family and larger social institutions. Confucianism teaches that we can become better people by living out our roles in life within these institutions—be it as son or daughter, father or mother, teacher or student, and other roles we assume in life. Confucianism reminds Catholics in particular that they are a part of the larger communion of saints, of which Mary is the head. While there are weaknesses in

¹⁰ Those who maintain that they have the fullness of truth and are opposed to interreligious dialogue include many Fundamentalists, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals. See Knitter (2002).

Confucianism, as in any religious or philosophical system, the deeply humanistic approach to relationship and life that comes from Confucianism is but a sign of the Divine Spirit working through it.

Daoism is not about fulfilling our role in life, however. A person is more than the roles that he or she assumes. One has to find one's own "niche" so to speak – one's "real identity," which resides deep within oneself and what one is called to do in life. This involves seeking inner-harmony through the process of *wu-wei* (not-doing) and being responsive to the natural flow of things in one's life in relation to the world. The process of discovering the Dao encoded within the ways of life itself involves getting in touch with the promptings of the Divine Spirit deep within.

As Christians learn from Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and other religions, and affirm the Divine Spirit working in and through these great religious traditions, they also have much to teach from their own tradition. For example, Catholics can talk about the importance of the Eucharist in their tradition and relate it to the meal-sharing aspect of Asian hospitality. Alternatively, they can share their sacramental and incarnational worldview and the mediational and communion principles that are uniquely put together in Catholicism. Whatever Catholics or other Christians contribute to this dialogue, they cannot avoid the fundamental Christian belief about the uniqueness of Jesus as the universal savior. This is one of the most significant aspects of Christian thought, yet it has continued to be an obstacle to authentic interreligious dialogue if presented in non-negotiable terms. Because Christology is not the focus of this paper, my comments are limited to the Vatican's proclamation of the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ and the evangelization approach taken by the Asian bishops. A special assembly of the 1998 Synod of Bishops for Asia convoked by Pope John Paul II in 1994 is a good place to start.

Dialogue as a Means of Evangelization

It is customary that about two years prior to a synod, the Vatican sends the bishops a document called a *Lineamenta*, which contains an overview of the synod's theme and topics for deliberation, as well as an invitation to the bishops to respond to the theme and the issues to be considered at the synod itself (Tan 2014, 83). The theme for the 1998 Asian Synod was "Jesus Christ the Savior, and his mission of love and service in Asia." The synodical theme and the content of the *Lineamenta* emphasized proclamation over interreligious dialogue. It wanted Asian bishops to focus on the primacy of the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the universal savior and the work of the church in continuing the evangelizing mission of Jesus Christ (General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops for the Special Assembly for Asia 1996, chapters 4 and 5) rather than interreligious dialogue engaged in by the Asian churches.

Many of the FABC bishops expressed serious concerns that the *Lineamenta* failed to understand the FABC approach to evangelization in the religiously pluralistic context of Asia. The Philippine bishops called for "toning down the emphasis placed on Jesus Christ as Savior in the *Lineamenta*, saying it does not help interfaith dialogue—even though most of the Philippine population is at least nominally Catholic" (Fox 2002, 161). Echoing their Philippine confreres, the Indonesian bishops added: "In pluri-religious societies, it is often difficult to directly and explicitly proclaim the central role of Jesus Christ in the economy of salvation. This proclamation must be adapted to concrete life conditions and to the disposition of the hearers" (Fox 162). The Japanese bishops found the *Lineamenta*'s emphasis on Jesus as universal savior too defensive. They noted: "Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, but in Asia, before stressing that Jesus Christ is the truth, we must search much more deeply into how he is the way and the life. If we stress too much that 'Jesus Christ is the one and only Savior,' we can have no dialogue, common living or solidarity with other religions" (Fox 160-1). To be sure, the Asian bishops are not fundamentally denying the uniqueness of Jesus as the universal savior. What they oppose is the method of evangelization advocated by Rome: that the primary task of the Asian bishops is to proclaim the universality of

salvation in Jesus Christ.¹¹ They maintain that this basic strategy of evangelization, which recognizes the universality of a particular religion to the exclusion of others, did not work in Asia in the past and will not work in the present. The Asian bishops insist that they know Asian cultures, religions, and people better than their white counterparts at the Vatican, and that dialogue with other religions is the best means of effective proclamation.

Conclusion

Since the establishment of the FABC nearly half a century ago, in their deliberations and documents the Asian Bishops have imagined spirituality in Asia differently from the colonial church that previously claimed an exclusive possession of the fullness of truth and salvation. They have moved towards an increasingly inculturated church that emphasizes dialogue as the most appropriate mode of evangelization for Asia. Dialogue is the process by which the church makes contact with Asian peoples, cultures, and religious traditions. The recognition of the abiding presence of the Divine Spirit in peoples, cultures, and religions stems from the Second Vatican Council, whose goal was to bring the church “up to date” with the modern world or *aggiornamento* as Pope Saint John XXIII called it. As the Catholic Church opened its windows to let in the fresh air, so to speak, the Asian Catholic Church was gradually coming of age. No longer satisfied with the Vatican’s micro-management of the affairs of Asian churches and, in particular, its insistence of a singular approach to evangelization on the Asian continent, the FABC bishops took charge of the pastoral life and mission of the Asian Catholic Church and made interreligious dialogue an essential component of a new way of being church in Asia. The FABC has reimagined spirituality in Asia by recognizing itself as an *ecclesia discens* (a learning church) and not just an *ecclesia docens* (a teaching church). Learning about and engaging with non-Christian religions is essential and it can help Christians to better understand their own faith. This entails being able to relate the religiosity of another religion to one’s own, and, for the benefit of one’s religion and spirituality, to incorporate and bring to life the Spirit-influenced areas of the other into one’s religion. The lived experiences of Asian bishops have enabled them to recognize “the same Spirit, who has been active in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus and in the Church, who was active amongst all peoples before the Incarnation and is active amongst the nations, religions and peoples of Asia today” (BIRA IV/3, art. 6, in Rosales and Arevalo 1997, 259).

The Asian bishops have grappled with how to present Jesus as the universal savior in a continent where the Divine Spirit is operative in cultures, peoples, and ancient religions. As we have seen, the claim of the pre-conciliar church of the exclusive possession of the fullness of truth and salvation is neither theologically acceptable, nor is it held by the Catholic Church today. Indeed, in the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), when discussing non-Christian religions, the council declares that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. It has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from its own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women” (*Nostra Aetate* 2). What this means is that interreligious dialogue as a mode of evangelization is crucial, if not essential, in a part of the world where Christians comprise a tiny minority in the sea of non-Christians. While Catholics have much to teach from their tradition, spirituality is reimagined not by proclaiming the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ as the non-

¹¹ The proclamation of the universality of salvation of Jesus Christ was reiterated in *Dominus Iesus*, a declaration by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) on the “Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church” (August 6, 2000), signed by its then Prefect, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI. The document was declared to be in reaction to the alleged “relativistic” theories advanced by theologies of religious pluralism, exemplified by the works of Jacques Dupuis in particular. However, it was also directed against interreligious developments in India and, indirectly, to the approach taken by the FABC. While there were some supporters of *Dominus Iesus*, the document itself was controversial and was not well received either inside or outside the church.

negotiable truth, but by engaging in an authentic interreligious dialogue of being open to learning from “a ray of truth” found in the other religion. Only then can the church becomes a truly listening and learning church (*ecclesia discerner*)—which is absolutely essential for interreligious dialogue.

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PUKREILA AND AKSÜ: RE-IMAGINING NAGA PEOPLE'S HOSPITALITY AND PEACEMAKING

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Naga traditions of hospitality and peacemaking, focusing especially on two traditions: *Pukreila* and *Aksü*, in light of the contemporary north-east Indian context of booming tourism, issues of migrants, immigrants and refugees, and ethnic and communal conflict. While *Pukreila* signifies peacemaking through the initiative of a girl or woman marrying a man from another village, *Aksü* is a distinctive example of peacemaking and reconciliation effected through collective efforts. In their most broad use, both *Pukreila* and *Aksü* signify the breaking down of mistrust, hatred, and hostility, while affirming acceptance, forgiveness, peace and harmony between or among peoples. This paper is an attempt at reimagining the Naga people's traditions of hospitality and peacemaking in light of the conference theme, "Reimagining Asian Hospitality," and especially in light of the Naga people's history of struggle for freedom and reconciliation. The paper will further explore the life and teachings of Jesus on hospitality and peacemaking, and draw out their significance for reimagining hospitality and peacemaking today.

Peacemaking and Reconciliation in Naga Traditions

The Nagas are hospitable and peace-loving people. They have a rich tradition of hospitality and peacemaking. The village was and still is the constant for the Naga people; it was always the center of the community, around which all communal life revolved. In a socio-political sense, the village served as the kingdom and state of the Naga people, in that each village was independent and democratic. Being independent from each other meant it was critically important for each village to learn to maintain peaceful and friendly relationships with neighboring villages. At the same time, any infringement on, or interference in, the affairs or interests of another village would result in conflicts and possibly even war. The conflicts or rivalries generally took place on one or a combination of three distinct levels: inter-clan, inter-village, and inter-tribe. The Naga people were known for their bravery and for the art of war-making. At the same time, the Naga people were also known for their abilities in peacemaking and reconciliation, as well as their hospitality, welcoming spirit, and generosity.

A number of rich and profound traditions of peacemaking and reconciliation have been practiced and transmitted from generation to generation by each of the Naga tribes. Different tribes have different names for such forms of reconciliation. The Sumi tribe calls it *Alu Pekili*, which means reconciliation; the Chakhesang people know it as *Küchene*, meaning the feast of peacemaking. To this day, despite the strong influence of modern legal and judicial systems, most Naga tribes prefer to settle their conflicts and disputes according to customary laws and traditions.



The February 2, 2006 headline of the *Morung Express*, an online newspaper issued daily from Dimapur, Nagaland, read as follows: “Kidima peace model inspires Rio: customary law is best for dispute settlement” (<http://www.morungexpress.com>). This headline refers to the resolution of the “two-decades’ old confrontation over differences arising out of the usage of – Kedima and Kidima – by the villagers” of Kidima. The villagers decided unanimously in favor of using Kidima for all purposes. This is just one of many disputes settled in accordance with age-old peacemaking traditions, however.

The peacemaking traditions varied from tribe to tribe. While some tribes had an appointed mediator, many others worked through the collective leadership of the village council or the elders. The Angami, Ao, Tangkhul, Mao, Zeliangrong, Rengma, and Lotha tribes, as well as others, relied primarily on collective efforts for peacemaking, normally effected through their respective village council or elders. It is possible, even likely, that some of these tribes made use of both an individual mediator and the village council in the reconciliation process. A few tribes, such as the Konyak, Chakhesang, and Sumi, had their appointed mediators, known as *Lampu*,¹ *Demi*,² and *Chochomi*³ respectively. A person of high integrity was chosen to act as the mediator in the Chakhesang and Sumi tribes, while for the Konyaks, the *Lampu* was a hereditary position. It should be noted that even in the case of the appointed mediator, he or she had to work under close supervision of the village council or chief. Most Naga peacemaking was thus carried out collectively through the efforts of the community.

The typical peacemaking tradition always included the exchange of gifts,⁴ and of visits between the villages, and the sharing of community meals, which meant lots of eating, drinking and celebrating to mark the joyous occasion. The richness and depth of peacemaking can be gauged from the peace treaty pledge entered into between the Kezoma and Pfosemei villages, which reads as follows:

1. Whatever we’ve done upon one another before coming to know each other shall be forgiven.
2. Our friendship will not be broken and we shall not forsake one another until the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon are no more.
3. On the day of your trouble, I will be of your help and on the day of my trouble, you will be of my help.
4. On the day people oppress you, I will stand behind you and on the day people oppress me, you will stand behind me.
5. If you violate the treaty we have made, all harm shall be fall upon you and if I violate them, all harm shall be fall upon me.
6. This treaty made shall not be altered. (Hokey 2001)

For the purposes of this discussion, I have chosen two traditions that demonstrate the Naga’s rich traditions of peacemaking: they are the traditions of *Pukreila* and *Aksü*. While the former is identified with the Tangkhul people, the latter comes from the Ao tribe, who also represent the mediator/council dichotomy. The *Pukreila* demonstrate peacemaking through the initiative of the

¹ According to Y. Chingang Konyak, there are two types of *Lampu*: General or village *Lampu* and *Khel* (locality) *Lampu*. Y. Chingang Konyak of Mon, interview by author, July 28, 2003, Kohima, tape recording.

² V. K. Nuh of Thesulomi village, interview by author, July 28, 2003, Kohima. Nuh is an authority on Chakhesang culture, history and traditions. He is 70 years old.

³ Hekhevi Achumi of Dimapur, interview by author, July 21, 2003, Dimapur. Achumi is 61 years old and comes from a chief clan of Khumshimi village. He is an authority on Sumi culture, history and traditions.

⁴ The most common, but also highly significant gifts exchanged, include the spear and dao. The dao is a traditional Naga sword that can be used for all practical purposes. The exchange of gifts means much more than a ceasefire. Both spear and dao are made of iron, generally known for its cool and serene quality. Spear and dao therefore signify serenity and tranquility, peace and equanimity.

mediator, which is in fact unique, because the *Pukreila* is a woman.⁵ The *Aksü* is a distinctive example of peacemaking and reconciliation effected through collective efforts.

***Pukreila*, the Peacemaker**

In Tangkhul Naga society, a girl or woman married to a man from another village was called a *Pukreila*. (Shimray 1996, 2; Luikham 1961, 127; Elungkiebe 2001, 123-34). *Pukreila* is not the name of a person; instead it is a title conferred on a female married to a man from a village other than her own. This female is given a specific role to serve in the community: that of peacemaker. Since she is identified with the role of peacemaker, *Pukreila* is also the name of an office, that of mediation or peacemaking.

As noted above, Nagas were known for their war-making. However, war was always the last resort in any effort to secure justice. Justice for the Nagas was a relational term, and it cannot be understood outside the Naga cultural context. There were a variety of reasons for going to war. People went to war because of boundary encroachment, a woman being divorced unreasonably, denial of customary courtesy and right, or a village breaking the observance of *genna* etc. (Horam 1992, 91). Additionally, it was against the tribal value of land ownership to forcibly claim or encroach upon the land of another person or village. Such an action was treated as a serious crime. These are all related issues of justice and human equality.

Naga war-making was generally in the form of a declared war,⁶ fought between two or more villages or tribes at an agreed-upon time in an agreed-upon location, and which included a neutral party, acceptable to the participants, who would oversee the battle. In the case of the Tangkhul Nagas, this neutral party was the Tangkhul Long, the ranking social-political organization of the tribe, who usually monitored the event (Ankang 1999, 168). When the defeated camp retreated or surrendered, the victorious group was not to pursue or attack from behind. In the event that none of the parties could command a victory, the *Pukreila* had the right to intervene and neutralize the fight. Holding the *Zeithing*, a traditional iron staff, she would step between the two enemies and shout “Enough!” “Enough!” The intervention of the *Pukreila* ultimately led to the end of the war and the settlement of the dispute. Under customary law, *Pukreila* enjoyed special protection from both the villages. The provision of the law said, “You shall not harm a *Pukreila*” (Shimray 1996, 3). Consequently, no one dared harm her; indeed, to harm a *Pukreila* was to dig one’s own grave.

***Aksü*: The Feast of Goodwill and Friendship**

As with other Nagas, the Ao people were known for a tradition of peacemaking called *Aksü*, which translated literally means “pig dead or killed” (Jamir 2005, 3). *Aksü* is generally observed as a feast meal of pork in celebration of the settlement reached between opposing groups. Additionally, *Aksü* also means reconciliation arrived at through exchange of pigs between the parties. According to Takatemjen (1998, 117), “The practice of *Aksü*, i.e., the giving of pigs as a present was both frequent and valued.” *Aksü* could be observed between friends, families, clans, and villages. The observance of *Aksü* between villages, known as *Yimden Aksü*, was considered the highest form of

⁵ Of course, the *Pukreila* had to act on behalf of the village under the watchful eyes of the people and the Tangkhul Long, which is the body at the apex of the Tangkhul civil organization. Therefore, this is also a case of collective efforts of peacemaking.

⁶ Besides a declared war, which is known in Tangkhul Naga as *rairei pharei*, there were undeclared wars and wars with hostages. While a secret or undeclared war followed hide and attack tactics and was usually protracted, the war of hostages involved a person being taken and held in the village until a ransom was paid by the guilty party. The hostage could not be killed under any circumstance. Ako Shaiza of Ukhrul, interview by author, August 12, 2003, Ukhrul, tape recording. Shaiza, a former Tangkhul Long President, is an authority on Tangkhul culture and traditions. (Also Ankang 1999, 168 and Luikham 1961, 124-26).

Aksü and would be observed by the respective village councils on behalf of their people, to promote goodwill and diplomatic relations. (Takatemjen 1998, 117; Imchen 1993, 92). In its broadest use *Aksü* signifies the breaking down of mistrust, hatred, and hostility while affirming acceptance, forgiveness, peace and harmony between or among the villages; *Aksü* also serves to renew and reaffirm commitments for peaceful co-existence between or among villages, and the frequent exchange of gifts symbolizes these enduring relationships. Through such continuous observance of *Aksü*, the people feel that “the spirit of *Aksü* [is] everywhere” (Takatemjen 1998, 121). According to Takatemjen, the spirit of *Aksü* is comprised of the following:

The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of friendship.
 The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of sharing.
 The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of forgiveness.
 The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of healing.
 The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of peace.
 The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of harmony.
 The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of recognition.
 The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of goodwill.
 The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of brotherhood.
 The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of neighborliness.
 The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of unity.
 The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of acceptance.
 The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of co-existence.
 The spirit of *Aksü* is a spirit of reconciliation. (Takatemjen 1998, 120-21)

Jesus as the Host and Reconciler

The image of reconciler is often used to describe the significance of the salvific work of Jesus Christ. The Christian idea of reconciliation stems from, and is rooted in the death of Jesus Christ. Through death on the cross, all people are brought “at-one-ment” with God. New Testament writings are replete with this image of Jesus as the reconciler. In many of his letters to the new converts, Paul testifies to the redeeming work of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection in God reconciling the world. Not only is the world reconciled to God, but the world is reconciled to itself. Paul writes, “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19); and in the letter to the Ephesians, Paul refers to Jesus as our peace: “For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph 2:14). Mercy Amba Oduyoye, an African woman and theologian, affirms that Christ is “the one who has broken down the barriers we have created between God and us as well as among us . . . thereby saving us from isolation and alienation, which is the lack of community that is the real experience of death” (Oduyoye and Amoah 1994, 44).

The work of reconciliation in the Hebrew Scripture is shown to take place in a ceremonial context; sacrifices are offered to atone for the wrongs of the individual and nation. One example is Israel’s annual Day of Atonement (Lev 23:26), during which “elaborate ceremonies were performed . . . designed to expiate the sins of the whole nation.” (Dillistone 1983, 50). In other words, reconciliation is primarily the restoration of broken relationships between God and the world and the restoration of relationships between and among humans.

Peacemaking and reconciliation in the Naga context is also understood in this sense of mending broken relationships. As Aküm Longchari rightly points out, “A paradigm of restorative justice was characteristic of traditional Naga jurisprudence where the central concern was to heal the wounds, address the imbalances, and restore the broken relation.” (Longchari 2019). The goal of peacemaking then, is to create a condition of *shalom* at the individual and corporate levels; where

every form of brokenness is mended, every wound is healed, and peace and harmony prevail at all levels and in all places.⁷

Jesus exemplified the art of peacemaking through his teaching and day-to-day interactions with people. He associated freely and identified with those persons society judged to be sinners, including women, tax collectors, lepers, and the poor. (Gutierrez 1988, 12-22; Schottroff and Stegemann 1986, 6-16). He shared food with them, and acknowledged their inherent dignity as fellow beings created by God. We are told that Jesus dined with a sinful woman in the house of a Pharisee (Lk 7: 36-50), and that he accepted the hospitality of sisters Mary and Martha (Lk 10:38-42). Luke notes that Jesus did not shun tax collectors, since he shared a meal with Levi (Lk 5:25-32), and extended an unconditional invitation to another tax collector named Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10). Though tax collectors were assumed to be wealthy, they were among the most despised individuals or groups in Roman-occupied Palestine. The Bible thus speaks of “God’s preference for the poor.” Gustavo Gutierrez explains:

Such then is the preferential option: the dismantling of anonymity to give a name and a face. In general, Jesus has opted for the poor; but also, concretely, he has opted for people like the hemorrhaging woman. . . . When we speak of preferential love, and the love of God, preferably for the poor, we are speaking of giving the loved ones an identity, of making them feel like people. (Gutierrez 1997, 75)

By identifying himself with the poor and the downtrodden, Jesus was breaking down existing social norms and recreating a community characterized by respect, acceptance, and interpersonal relationships.

Hospitality, Reconciliation and Table Fellowship

Jesus was the master of peacemaking and this was illustrated in his relationships with people. He lived peace in his involvement with the poor, the downtrodden, and the outcast; indeed one could say peacemaking was his way of life. By sharing a table and food with the marginalized and forsaken, Jesus demonstrated his message that in God’s Kingdom everyone is welcome, irrespective of occupation, gender or status. His actions spoke loudly that those who were seen as somehow less than worthy in the patriarchal hierarchy of Roman-occupied society were in fact valuable and worthy in the eyes of God, and they could be freed by the love of Jesus. At the same time he was also showing people that service to the least among society is a prerequisite for the Kingdom. Joachim Jeremias makes a poignant observation on these activities of Jesus:

In the East, even today, to invite a man to a meal was an honor. It was an offer of peace, trust and brotherhood, and forgiveness: in short, sharing a table meant sharing life Jesus’ meals with the publicans and sinners, too, are not only events on a social level, not only an expression of his unusual humanity and social generosity and his sympathy with those who were despised, but had an even deeper significance. They are an expression of the mission and message of Jesus’ (Mk. 2:17) eschatological meals, anticipatory celebrations of the feast in the end-time (Lk. 13: 28f; Mt. 8:11-12). (Jeremias 1971, 115-16)

Jeremias concludes that, “The inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation, achieved in table-fellowship, is the most meaningful expression of the message of the redeeming love of God.” (Jeremias 1971, 116). As exemplified by the traditional Naga feast of *Aksü*, as well as Jesus sharing

⁷ *Shalom* is a Hebrew term for peace which means wholeness or well-being. Peace in this sense, implies not merely a cessation of armed conflict, but a state of well-being of a person or community physically, materially, spiritually, and socially.

meals with those of the least, table fellowship signifies acceptance and the spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood between and among people; it signifies cordiality, friendship, and goodwill. Both the feast of *Aksü* and the stories of Jesus sharing food with the least of society offer strong and tangible images that can inform and enliven our understanding of hospitality and peace-making today. These are powerful images that can guide and strengthen Nagas as they seek to re-establish mutual respect among themselves and can also serve to encourage the people's sense of self-worth. Table fellowship is meant to be joyous and a celebration of the positive relationships people share with one another. It is a demonstration of persons or people being at one with each other.

The traditional Naga feast of *Aksü* reminds us of the significance of sharing our meals during a time when Naga society is torn by disagreement and factionalism, a time when Naga society suffers from fratricidal violence and death. Further, the Naga world today is complicated by the onslaught of booming tourism,⁸ and issues of illegal migrants/immigrants and refugees coming into our land. While people from outside the region are welcomed and treated as guests, there is a genuine underlying fear that the local people will be outnumbered by the others.⁹ Today, in fact, the whole of Northeast India, comprising eight states, is living in fear and trembling, because the Indian government is treating the region as a dumping ground for refugees and migrants/immigrants. The latest and the most controversial issue relates to the present government's attempt to introduce and pass the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) which will allow Indians (barring Muslims) settled outside of India to come and settle down anywhere they wish in the country. The main target, no doubt, is the north-eastern states. It is not easy to talk about hospitality and peace-making in a situation where life and death are at issue.

In Nagaland today, a theology of reconciliation would mean applying the biblical concept of reconciliation in addition to the spirit of *Aksü* (Takatemjen 1998, 127). It would mean following the example of Jesus Christ in letter and spirit and learning to lead a life that is informed by the spirit of *Aksü*. Jesus admonished his disciples to be doers of the word, rather than passive listeners, and said, "Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt 5:9). The thrust of Jesus' message is very clear: "Go and do likewise." Be the agent of peace. Peace and peace-making is future oriented and demands an aggressive pursuit. Speaking in the context of American Indian struggle for liberation, Taiaiake Alfred, a leading Kanienkeha (Mohawk) scholar and activist, states:

Peace is hopeful, visionary, and forward-looking; it is not just the lack of violent conflict or rioting in the streets. . . . Reconceptualized for our struggle, peace is being Onkwehonwe, breaking with the disfiguring and meaningless norms of our present reality, and recreating ourselves in a holistic sense. This conception of peace requires a rejection of the state's multifaceted oppression of our peoples simultaneously with and through the assertion of regenerated Onkwehonwe identities. (Alfred 2005, 28).

The challenge in applying this admonition to the Naga context is that, individually and collectively, we must assume the role of a *Pukreila*. The *Pukreila* was a powerful agent of peace in the society; her words were respected by one and all.

Today, by following the tradition of *Pukreila*, Naga women are actively involved in the peace-making process. Women's organizations such as the Naga Mother's Association (NMA), and the

⁸ In recent years the governments of the day have been promoting northeast Indian regions as tourism destinations to the world by hosting and organizing annual festivals such as Hornbill festivals in Nagaland, Sangai and Shirui, and Lily festivals in Manipur, etc., which have impacted negatively on the local people in terms of prostitution and trafficking of women and children, promotion of drugs, alcohol and other intoxicating substances, a threat to the cultural identity of local and indigenous people, environmental and ecological degradation, human rights abuses, etc.

⁹ The classic example is that the indigenous people in the state of Tripura have been reduced to a minority in their own land by outsiders; the tribal population was 31.8 percent according to the 2011 census.

Naga Women's Union of Manipur (NWUM) have taken a leading role, particularly in the ongoing negotiations between Naga national leaders and the Government of India. They are also actively working to forge unity between and among the various Naga political factions and insurgency movements. They have spoken out against the violence and killings perpetrated by both India and Nagas. Apart from their peace efforts, Naga women are working for social recovery and regeneration. They have taken initiatives to address the problems of drug and alcohol addiction among the youth, and they are providing essential care to persons afflicted with HIV/AIDS. These women are indeed the *Pukreilas* of our time.

While the *Pukreila* primarily symbolizes the role of women in peace-making, the call to be an agent of peace is for everyone, male and female, young and old. We are all called to be peace-makers wherever we may be; we can all be the *Pukreilas* of our time.

Liberation, Reconciliation, and Healing

There cannot be true liberation without reconciliation, just as there cannot be true reconciliation without freedom; they are two sides of the same coin. Liberation will encompass all that constitutes a condition of *shalom*, where justice, peace, and harmony prevail. Jesus' declaration that he came into the world so that people might have life in fullness speaks of a liberated life, a life also reconciled in Christ.

Having said this, it must be pointed out that there is no easy way to reconciliation and freedom. The notion of forgive and forget does not work unless the persons who are responsible for the wrongs committed are ready to own up to their responsibility. There can be no genuine reconciliation and freedom without the recognition and acknowledgement by the perpetrators of wrongs committed. There can be no reconciliation without first coming to terms with the realities of the past. Confronting the past is never easy; it is an agonizing and painful process, but the healing that comes about through such a process is real and worthwhile. The perpetrators must not only recognize the wrongs committed, they must also claim their culpability and express sincerely their intention to improve their ways. In the Naga's search for freedom and healing, it is critical that India recognize and accept the wrongs she has inflicted during decades of aggression against and domination of the Naga people. The Nagas were under British India rule from 1881 until 1947. In 1947, the British transferred power to India against the wishes of the Nagas and since then the Nagas have been struggling for their freedom from India. In fact, the Nagas declared independence in 1947 one day ahead of India. Every year, the Nagas observe August 14 as independence day, in spite of the fact that to date, the Nagas are not politically free.

It is true that healing within and among the Naga people must be sought and dealt with by the Naga people themselves in ways consistent with their culture and values. However, given the fact that the Naga peoples' suffering and loss are linked directly to India's aggression and occupation, such healing must be accompanied by the healing of the Indians. Speaking in the context of American Indian people, Tinker argues convincingly:

While the internal healing of American Indian communities may be Indian business at one level, any real healing or liberation in the world of American Indians must be paralleled by healing in the world of euro-americans in order for the healing of Indian peoples to be sustained. (Tinker 2004, 5)

This is very true also in the case of the Naga people vis-à-vis decades of Indian colonization. In order for healing to take place, India must not only recognize the identity of the Nagas as a people with a unique history as a sovereign nation, but they must also take responsibility for the decades of suffering of the Naga people.

The 2001 recognition of the unique history of the Naga people, important as that is, cannot ameliorate the genocidal crimes committed against them for over fifty-eight years. It is critically

important for the healing of both the Naga communities and Indians that India own up to its aggression rather than resort to the usual denials and subsequent intimidation.

A vital and affirming belief in Christ makes not only for a liberated life, it also provides for life in its fullest. The goal of liberation is to make possible the wholeness of life, but this wholeness is dependent on the Naga people being free from the reality of oppression they endure under India's occupation. Freedom must be experienced in the real physical world as well as in the spiritual life of the Naga people. The Naga people must be allowed to reclaim their past with a view to dreaming their own future. There is indeed power in naming and reclaiming; thus the healing process must begin with naming and reclaiming. Winona LaDuke asks:

How does a community heal itself from the ravages of the past? . . . I found an answer in the multifaceted process of recovering that which is "sacred." This complex and intergenerational process is essential to our vitality as indigenous peoples and ultimately as individuals. (LaDuke 2005, 11)

In a similar manner, Taiaiake Alfred, reminds indigenous communities of the importance of reclaiming their traditional values for their survival and future.

The only way we can survive is to recover our strength, our wisdom, and our solidarity by honoring and revitalizing the core of our traditional teachings. Only by heeding the voices of our ancestors can we restore our nations and put peace, power, and righteousness back into the hearts and minds of our people. (Alfred 1999, xii).

He concludes by saying, "The challenge for us is to commit ourselves to those teachings and to walk those indigenous paths" (236). Speaking in the context of the Naga people's search for healing and recovery, Longchari also notes the importance of reclaiming stories:

I believe to move forward, we must first begin to understand where we came from and where we are today! In order to do so, we must reclaim our heritage, reclaim our stories, erase the myths that have distorted our identity and begin addressing our history in a way that embraces the richness of our cultures and one that will liberate us from the parochial systems that continue to suffocate us. (Longchari 2019)

The healing process for the Naga people must begin with the naming and reclaiming of neglected stories and traditions. Reclaiming their history and regaining the vision to dream their own future are essential to any efforts to bring wholeness back to the Naga people.¹⁰ Our examination of two peace-making traditions of the Naga people, the traditions of *Pukreila* and *Aksü*, are in direct contradiction to the colonizers' insistence that Nagas were and are war-mongering savages. In fact they were and are a peace-loving people who place great value on friendship and harmonious co-existence. These traditions of peace-making and reconciliation and the reconciling works of Jesus Christ can go a long way towards enriching our understanding and efforts at peace-making in our world today.

The Naga people deserve the freedom to determine the kind of future they want without any interference from outside forces. St. Paul says in Galatians, "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1). The freedom for which Christ has set us free includes the Naga people's freedom to reclaim their histories and the ability to dream their own future. The liberation and healing of the Naga nation must take place on

¹⁰ Essential to this effort will be the reinstitution of the traditional democratic system of requiring a consensus in political decision-making and implementation. Traditionally in Naga villages everyone has a voice in decisions that affect the community. This is still practiced today in most villages and represents an Indigenous version of what has been referred to as "deep democracy," as articulated by Khan (1998, 92-95 and 101-2).

two fronts: reconciliation between and among the Naga people, and the reclamation of their stories and subsequent opportunity to dream their own future in a way that is consistent with their culture and values. It is fundamental that the Naga people unite themselves for the just cause of their struggle and keep alive in themselves the right to dream their own future.

Finally, the physical and psychological effects of the oppression, domination, and genocide inflicted on the Naga people by the British and India require a power that can only be provided through a Christological belief and understanding infused with the reconciling and healing potential of the combined values of the Naga tradition and the living Jesus.

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MULTI-FAITH INITIATIVES ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES: ASSESSING RELEVANT ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR COOPERATIVE ACTION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The present study has two primary objectives, the first being a focus on why the term “ multi-faith dialogue” seems more relevant than “interfaith dialogue,” and the second being a short account of some relevant (semi) multi-faith dialogical initiatives and their related cooperative actions for ecological sustainability. By surveying the available resources, the current research attempts to ensure readers are familiar with activities largely unexplored by contemporary scholars. In so doing, it will enrich the current discourse on the environmental crisis in light of multi-faith dialogical and collaborative initiatives.

Introduction

In different multi-faith dialogical initiatives and programs, some faith leaders, spiritual persons, religious scholars, theologians, and clerics (e.g., Azizan Baharuddin, Esther Sarojini Daniel, M Bala Thamalingam and K.V. Soon among others), are involved in working together to alleviate the current ecological crisis. In so doing, religious and spiritual traditions are also mutually illuminated, and at the same time, faith communities are becoming more hospitable to one another, despite their theological disputes and cultural demarcations. More significantly, such activities allow and inspire faith leaders (e.g., Rabbi Warren Stone, Sister Ilia Delia and Imam Yahya Hendi, to note just a few) and practitioners to share their respective religious and spiritual knowledge of nature, as well as their current experiences of environmental degradation, with their counter-parts from other religious and cultural traditions. As a result, some major faith and spiritual traditions are receiving updates and timely interpretations, thereby directing the attention of the communities concerned on a path of sustainable peace with people of diverse cultures, and also peace with the natural world. In this matter, faith and spiritual traditions have an essential role in reaching a solution. In fact, non-religious people and those in secular institutions and organizations do not deny the significant role of faith communities in reconstructing and reforming human attitudes and behavior to ease the present ecological crisis; they appreciate the potential contribution of faith traditions and urge faith communities to work with them in addressing ecological issues. Keeping all these positive ideas in mind, the present study attempts to review the significant contributions of various (semi) multi-faith dialogical organizations on ecological questions and some of their related initiatives to involve people of all classes in a commonly-shared burning issue of our time.

This is not a critical study of these co-operative initiatives. The focus is instead on assessing those objectives and activities that seem significant in addressing environmental issues from a collective perspective.

Why “Multi-faith Dialogue” is a more relevant term than “Interfaith Dialogue”

“Multi-faith dialogue” generally refers to a conversation among religious scholars and practitioners of different religious traditions on some common or specific grounds (Scarboro Missions 2018). While “multi-faith dialogue” is often used as a synonym for “inter-faith dialogue,” there are some basic differences in meaning and application between these two terms. “Interfaith dialogue” implies a dialogue between two faiths, while “multi-faith dialogue” indicates more than two faiths in a systematic conversation. When scholars and practitioners of two faith traditions are engaged in a conversation aimed at reaching some common ground, it is called an “interfaith dialogue,” and when such a conversation is held among scholars and practitioners of more than two faith traditions, it is called a “multi-faith dialogue.”

Both interfaith and multi-faith dialogue apparently serve the same purpose, but in a deeper understanding, they seemingly do not carry the same significance and weight. Scholars such as Roberts and Mullins are critical of the term “interfaith dialogue” and its methodology. Roberts (2012, 19) calls interfaith dialogue in which participants talk with one another about certain issues, but ignore the real truth about their theological differences, “loosey-goosey” (quoted in Saleem 2013). His criticism seems very negative; this could be phrased in a more constructive way. However, he proposes multi-faith dialogue in the place of interfaith dialogue, arguing that “we have fundamental differences, but the best of our faiths teach we should get along” with others for achieving some common purposes (quoted in Saleem 2013). Mullins argues that the term interfaith dialogue, can cause some to become confused about their own religious convictions. They may interpret it as a reason to turn from their exclusive belief systems. Thus a degree of anxiety and fear can be created among the followers of faith traditions when they first hear this term. Mullins’ statement seems partially true, for when interfaith dialogue began in the modern period about forty years ago, this kind of fear worked among the general practitioners of religious faiths, and it took time to dissipate. Moreover, Mullins distinguishes multi-faith dialogue from interfaith dialogue for three reasons: (1) unlike interfaith dialogue, multi-faith dialogue does not lead to misunderstandings about an amalgamation of theological conceptions; instead there is a common ethical understanding of shared problems; (2) multi-faith dialogue has the scope to include conservatives and fundamentalists in the conversation, while this a rarely-considered possibility in interfaith dialogue; and (3) multi-faith dialogue accepts theological exclusivism and promotes social inclusivism, while interfaith dialogue discourages expressions of theological exclusivism and only inspires social inclusivism (Mullins 2011).

From Mullins’ arguments it is clear that multi-faith dialogue engages a broader range of people from different faith traditions than interfaith dialogue. Similarly, Riddell offers clarification about the vast scope of a multi-faith dialogue compared with interfaith dialogue when he states: “inter-faith means between people of different faiths, suggesting two separate sides; whereas multi-faith indicates a space where everyone is welcome, no matter what their belief tradition” (Riddell 2012). It is thus explicit that multi-faith dialogue is broader than interfaith dialogue and covers more topics for discussion among the followers of different faith traditions. Contemporary scholars like Saleem (2013), Riddell (2012), Mullins (2011) and Knitter (1995) advocate multi-faith dialogue for working together, based on certain common purposes, in order to tackle shared problems.

As the present environmental crisis is both a global and local issue, its solution requires a collaborative and combined action plan by peoples from every corner of the world, irrespective of caste, colour, faith, nationality, gender, etc. A dialogue with this purpose should not be limited to

the scholars and practitioners of faith traditions, but should include as many religious and cultural traditions as possible, as well as secular people, public agencies, policy makers, non-governmental organizations, civil society members, businessmen and women, transnational and international organizations, media journalists and so on. The more people included in this process, the greater the force available to reduce environmental problems. To achieve a meaningful dialogue, the current researcher advocates an inclusive approach with a combined working plan. Such dialogue should not be mere gossip over some cups of tea or coffee, which some scholars, for example Roberts (2012, 19) have already questioned; it should instead be a heart-to-heart conversation that leads to cooperation in reforming attitudes presently shaped by materialistic and mechanistic world-views, in favour of an eco-spiritual world-view. Given the present study takes a religious perspective, it is quite reasonable to narrow down the discussion to the dialogical initiatives among people of multi-faith cultures.

Collaborative Actions of Multi-faith Organizations

It is worth mentioning that there have already been multi-faith dialogues on environmental issues by scholars, religious leaders and practitioners of different religions. Multi-faith organizations are mostly voluntarily in nature, where clergy, religious leaders and general participants are inspired to work for the betterment of humanity. Below I review some of these organization and their activities to present a clearer picture.

The Cheltenham Area Multi-Faith Council, founded in 2001 in response to the situation in the United States after 9/11, is now working to increase awareness about the essential need for equilibrium between humans and the environment, alongside its main agenda of creating a more tolerant situation for people of all faiths (Epstein 2018). The council was initially formed by Muslims, Jews and Christians, but it works for other religious and cultural traditions, also. Irrespective of creed, colour, gender and ethnicity, local communities participate in its cooperative ventures on programs such as campaigning for recycling and making people conscious of the requirement for ecological equilibrium.

The Southern African Faith Communities' Environmental Institute (SAFCEI), founded in 2005, works with the noble vision of "people of faith caring for living earth" (SAFCEI 2018). SAFCEI aims to support faith leaders and their communities in the region by developing an inner consciousness and a deeper sense of responsibility about leading a balanced life of environmental sustainability. The institute accords the utmost importance to a spiritual feeling for the environment and a moral duty to non-human animals. As part of its routine work, SAFCEI celebrates world day every year with multi-faith leaders and collectively prays for the creation. In the meantime, SAFCEI (2018) has three common bases for ecological equilibrium: (1) the intrinsic value of nature; (2) being respectful in the service of nature; and (3) a sense of interconnectedness with the natural world.

Based on the eternal wisdom of religious and spiritual traditions, the U.S. organization, GreenFaith, founded in 1992 as Partner for Environmental Quality (PEQ), and in 2004 renamed GreenFaith, educates and trains people of multi-faith traditions to work for environmental sustainability (GreenFaith 2018a). Through various successful programs – e.g., faith-based solar initiatives, environmental justice tours and lawsuits, and joint programs with other international and local organizations, GreenFaith has become a global leader in addressing environmental issues (GreenFaith 2018b). With the Multi-Faith Sustainable Living Initiative project, funded by the KR Foundation, GreenFaith works to transform lifestyles among faith communities and to build a world-wide movement for behavior reformation in favor of sustainable living (GreenFaith 2018c).

The Australian Religious Response for Climate Change (ARRCC), founded in 2008, brings members from all major faith traditions of Australia to work collectively to address climate change (ARRCC 2018). Considering climate change a vital moral and spiritual problem for modern human

beings, the ARRCC promotes an ethical and ecologically friendly lifestyle, and advocates climate justice policies from multi-faith approaches (ARRCC 2018). Thirty-five faith-based organizations in Australia have agreed to cooperate with the ARRCC to reduce global warming. Through diverse programs and activities—e.g., negotiation with government and policy makers, publication of newsletters, the fossil fuel investment movement, climate marches, campaigns for lowering individual ecological footprints etc.—this multi-faith environmental organization is playing a noteworthy role in reducing global temperatures (ARRCC 2018).

The U.S. based National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE), founded in 1993, works with scholars of Catholic, Jewish and Protestant traditions on environmental issues by fostering religious voices and making religious practitioners aware of climate change and global warming (NRPE 2018b). The NRPE sees taking care of God's creation as "an inherent part of religious life" (NRPE 2018a). With this core objective, it provides relevant resources in the form of moral guidelines for environmental ethics and focuses on how humans of different faith traditions should act for environmental protection as a God's representatives on earth and as custodians of His beautiful creation. Though NRPE is primarily an alliance of Christian and Jewish environmental groups, it also supports other faith traditions in their efforts to achieve environmental sustainability.

The UK based Eco-Faith, founded in 2007, created "The Big Green Believers' Agreement" to encourage commitment to a more sustainable environment through significant change in lifestyle (Eco-Faith 2018b). This agreement is based on an idea of the common grounds of faith traditions. Eco-Faith realizes peoples of religious and spiritual traditions may differ from one another based on their theological and cultural differences, but they cannot deny their common and shared responsibility to the earth and moral obligation to take care of the environment (Eco-Faith 2018a). From its inception, Eco-Faith has tried to make people conscious of environmental challenges and educate them in how to respond to these from multi-faith traditions.

The Green Pilgrimage Network (GPN) was founded in 2011 by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) and the World Wildlife Federation (WWF) with the noble mission of keeping pilgrimage places green and clean through planting more trees and banning cars. Its members try their best to implement such policies by convincing the relevant authorities and the devotees performing their pilgrimages. In fact, GPN was created as an independent organization in response to the question: "Why are the world's holiest places not the world's cleanest and most cared for places?" (EGPN 2018). In line with this specific purpose, GPN has been working since its inception to keep pilgrimage sites as models of environmentally friendly places, according to the spirit of faith traditions. GPN has selected twenty-eight sacred places across the globe for its pilot project (EGPN 2018). In the meantime, it has produced a number of handbooks, for instance *Green Guide for Hajj* (for Muslims) and *Green Temple Guide* (for Hindus), instructing pilgrims to be attentive about keeping the holy places clean and green while performing their rituals.

Though the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) is basically a secular organization, its initiative in connecting multi-faith traditions with secular bodies in respect of environmental sustainability is considerable (ARC 2018). Since its inception in 1995, the ARC has been working with diverse religious communities, following a policy of be "proud of your own tradition, but humble enough to learn from others" (ARC 2018). Taking a similar approach, it also invites secular environmental groups to work with multi-faith communities for environmental protection. The ARC sees religious and spiritual traditions as campaigners for environmental sustainability, because these groups can protect the natural environment by educating people and developing in them a sense of responsibility. It thus assists faith communities to develop environmental programs in light of their religious teachings and moral imperatives regarding the natural world. More importantly, the ARC brings religiously-based environmental organizations and secular environmental groups together in a platform of mutual understanding in order that they might work collectively to alleviate the present ecological crisis.

Like the ARC, the Center for Earth Ethics (CEE) is a secular body working on environmental sustainability, but its working policy and pattern relate to a multi-faith approach. The CEE connects the global society with local people. It sees that without making a deep connection between global affairs and local interests it is not possible to reshape the economic paradigm from its presently destructive approach to more ecologically sustainable economic activities (CEE 2018a). With this end in view, the CEE seeks to work with multi-faith and indigenous communities among others, and inspire them to disseminate traditional wisdom and a deeper awareness of the human-nature relationship. Through its “Eco-Ministry” program, the CEE brings multi-faith leaders together with secular environmental leaders in a joint initiative to take combined action from local to global levels (CEE 2018b). Likewise, through its “Original Caretakers” initiative, the CEE hears the unheard voices of indigenous communities and brings those sayings into mainstream views of nature (CEE 2018c). Furthermore, the CEE argues that there are some important moral imperatives in indigenous and native people’s cultures and faith traditions that should be exposed and evaluated as significant means of finding our lost connection with the earth.

Religion, Science and the Environment (RSE), founded in 1993, is a UK based Non-Governmental Organization looking for common ground among multi-faith leaders, scientists and environmental activists in order to save the natural environment (RSE 2018a). It tries to create an alliance of faith leaders, professional scientists and environmental NGOs to enhance awareness of the need for ecological equilibrium and implement a combined action plan accordingly. Through its “Symposia Study,” the RSE focuses on the water environment. It arranges to “visit sites of special concern, to meet officials and NGO representatives in the countries visited, to propose solutions, and to initiate schemes or institutions for environmental cooperation and education” (RSE 2018b). The RSE believes that the analytical tools of science and the messages of faith and spiritual traditions of the world should function harmoniously for environmental protection. So far, the RSE has achieved some significant results, for instance, financial commitments from international institutions, and regional cooperation among governments and non-governmental organizations, etc. (RSE 2018b). With its Halki Ecological Institute and other training initiatives, RSE increases awareness of cooperation on environmental issues among regional states, and regularly conducts environmental training for clergy, journalists, educators and youth (RSE 2018b).

The Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation (RCFC), founded in 1997, works as a forum for various religious organizations and faith groups in order to save forests from further degradation. The RCFC emphasizes the religious and spiritual values of wild-life, and at the same time, criticizes a utilitarian world-view and the commercial interest in forests (FORE 2018e). It has composed a series of advisory statements based on religious and spiritual wisdom and moral imperatives for pursuing a policy that involves the complete cessation of commercial logging. Through projects like “The Reform the World Bank Initiative,” “Spiritual Value of Wilderness” and “Opening Book of Nature,” the RCFC attempts to achieve its goals.

Religious Witness for the Earth (RWE), founded in 2001, brings people from different religious and spiritual traditions together and organizes them based on a shared responsibility, i.e., the protection of the earth (Harvey 2017). Through teaching a “loving spirit, selfless courage, and moral authority of rights movements,” the organization attempts to grow a nonviolent public environmental movement (Harvey 2017). In the meantime, RWE’s public witness programs have received many positive responses in Canada and beyond.

The Spiritual Alliance for Earth (SAFE), founded in 2000 as an offshoot of the United Religious Initiative (URI), works for an environmentally friendly future for humans and non-human animals (FORE 2018b). SAFE tries to bring multi-faith communities together with secular environmental groups for combined action to reduce present environmental problems. It advocates environmental activism through dialogue, education, campaigning, celebration of Earth Day, and by conducting environmental fairs. SAFE sees “caring for creation” as a central task both for secular and spiritual groups (FORE 2018b).

An Oslo-based multi-faith working group focuses on “Ecology and Spirituality” in Norway. In a response to the call of “Emmaus”—a Church-based dialogue center in Oslo—the group was established in 1994 with seven representatives from major faiths (Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Catholicism, Lutheranism and Bahaism), as well as a representative from the alternative spiritual movement, Alternative Network (Leirvik 1994). From its inception, the group has fostered dialogue among multi-faith communities to enhance mutual collaboration and cooperation among people of diverse faiths and spiritual traditions. By focusing on a deeper connection of humans with the natural world, growing ethical and spiritual awareness, teaching religious moral imperatives, organizing multi-faith dialogues, and connecting individual and governmental responsibility to the environment, the group is playing an appreciable role in restoring interconnectedness between modern humanity and nature.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has launched a special program “Sacred Earth: Faiths for Conservation” to work with multi-faith leaders and communities to articulate moral guidelines, ethical imperatives and spiritual feelings concerning the sacred value of the natural world (WWF 2018). WWF’s Sacred Earth program emphasizes the point that faith traditions have enormous impact on human thought and behavior. Furthermore, it sees that the power of faith traditions is not limited to spirituality and ritual, but also carries a silent force to convince human beings to achieve targeted results by deploying their full efforts. With these influencing factors of worlds of faiths in hand, WWF’s Sacred Earth program attempts to build a global dialogue among multi-faith communities and faith-based institutions in order to reform the present destructive attitudes to the natural world.

Sisters of Earth International, originally founded in 1994 as “Sisters of Earth,” works as an informal network of multi-faith and multi-cultural women. Although it was primarily an informal organization of religious women, especially Roman Catholics in the United States and Canada, it has now become an international organization for both secular and religious women. Sisters of Earth International has had success in bringing women from different groups and diverse communities together, and convincing them to work for the common interest of Earth through dialogue and an exchange of views. Through a growing awareness of the essential need for ecological sustainability and the need to educate people about earth spirituality, Sisters of Earth International attempts “to attain spiritual and ecological healing on a global level” (FORE 2018c).

EcoFaith Recovery works as a network of multi-faith communities in the United States seeking to restore an earth-honoring and life-honoring lifestyle through growing a sense of belonging to the natural world (EcoFaith Recovery 2018). It is basically a voluntary organization, which brings leaders from diverse faith traditions to work for a combined leadership approach to healing the earth based on traditional wisdom and faith-based moral imperatives.

Interfaith Power and Light (IPL), founded in 2000, promotes multi-faith perspectives to address climate change by focusing on the religious concept of stewardship. IPL brings the voices of multi-faith communities to policy deciders at local, state, national and transnational levels (IPL 2018). With backing from religious and spiritual communities, IPL puts pressure on policy makers to reform present policies in favor of renewable energy sources. Concurrently, it suggests people need to be frugal in utilizing energy. Moreover, IPL attempts to convince congregations and people of multi-faith communities of the moral and ethical guidelines of religious and spiritual traditions in addressing the issue of climate change (Earth Ministry 2018a).

The Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns (INEC) was founded in 1992 as an offshoot of the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) to work for environmental sustainability (FORE 2018d). Now INEC articulates people of diverse faith traditions and tries to convince them to work together over the shared issue of the present ecological crisis. INEC organizes conferences and workshops to promote multi-faith dialogue on environmental issues (FORE 2018d). In every program INEC connects faith groups with environmental issues and campaigns to develop awareness about people’s responsibility to natural world.

The Living Earth Center (LEC), formerly the Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry (CESRM), is a local organization based in Mankato Minnesota, and works to promote an ecologically-friendly environment through education, advocacy, campaigning, social gatherings, conferences, etc. (Living Earth Center 2018). The center regularly collaborates with people of different faith groups and emphasizes religious moral guidelines and spiritual insight for ecological sustainability. It runs Mankato's community garden on a voluntary basis using organic methods (Living Earth Center 2018), and inspires the community to concentrate more on organic cultivation and organic food productions.

The Center for Spirituality in Nature (CSN) is primarily based on Christian moral and spiritual guidelines, although it articulates other elements from different religions and spiritual traditions as well (CSN 2018). CSN aims to utilize the resource materials of the spiritual traditions of the world to transform humanity's broken relationship with the earth and to form a sacred community based on spiritual insights nature. With a variety of programs, such as campaigns, publications, and workshops, etc., CSN attempts to reconnect humans deeply with the natural world.

The Center for the Celebration of Creation (CCC) was founded in 1990 by Chestnut Hill United Methodist Church to "promote spiritual and environmental awareness" among people of all faiths and spiritual traditions (FORE 2018f). From its inception, the center has been celebrating Earth Day, organizing lectures on environmental issues, cooperating with public agencies with regard to renewable energy sources, educating congregations about environmental issues, requesting policy makers take steps for green technology, and providing guidance on measures for restoring the human-nature relationship (FORE 2018f).

Earth Ministry (EM) organizes multi-faith and spiritual communities to work collectively for environmental justice. EM attempts to transform faith-based moral guidelines into actions to alleviate the present environmental problems (Earth Ministry 2018b). With its resources of faith and spiritual traditions it cooperates with policy makers, public agencies, workers, businessmen, health partners, non-governmental organizations, the media, etc., to achieve environmentally-friendly policies (Earth Ministry 2018b). EM sees the earth as a sacred place for living peacefully with other creatures; thus it never supports any non-viable human actions in nature. By emphasizing environmental stewardship, it advocates responsible human behavior toward the creation of God. Through a variety of activities, it attempts to convince primarily multi-faith communities to be more effective advocates for ecological equilibrium, and trains them to work as environmental activists and let their voices heard by others (Earth Ministry 2018b). In order to bring about a revolutionary change in religious institutions, it works for greening worship places, such as churches, mosques, synagogues, pagodas, temples, etc.

On April 4, 2017, the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) and Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (TARUC) jointly organized a multi-faith dialogue on environmental issues, where four religious scholars representing Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam took part in the discussions, which were attended by some thousand students from Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (TARUC), the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) and the University of Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) (Bernama 2017). By focusing on the Islamic term "khalifa," Azizan Baharuddin argued protecting the ecological balance is an entrusted responsibility of humans. With reference to biblical stewardship, Esther Sarojini Daniel noted humans are custodians of God's creation. M Bala Thamalingam emphasized the inseparable partnership of humans with the natural world from a Hindu approach by connecting to the Hindu concept of "karma". For his part, K.V. Soon talked about an urgent need for an awareness development program from a Buddhist perspective (Bernama 2017). All the speakers unanimously declared that, despite theological differences, faith and spiritual traditions can work together for environmental sustainability by providing their followers with moral imperatives and ethical guidelines. They advocate multi-faith cooperation and action to address the present ecological crisis. Such mutual trust and combined effort may come from a fruitful dialogue among diverse faith and spiritual

traditions, as they argued, and thus multi-faith dialogues on ecological issues should be held frequently.

The Malaysian Climate Change Group (MCCG) works with Malaysian multi-faith communities—Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and indigenous people—to address climate change (WWF Malaysia 2015). The MCCG organizes dialogue between people of diverse faith and spiritual traditions and requests them to explore religious and spiritual moral guidelines from their various perspectives to focus concentration on the sustainability of the environment (WWF Malaysia 2015). The group thus attempts to create a platform of religions and spiritual traditions that will deepen the human relationship with the natural world and bring about a significant reformation in environmental attitudes and actions.

In an annual gathering of TRUST Women's Interfaith Network (WIN), held from June 17-18, 2013 in Jerusalem, more than fifty women from Christian, Druze, Jewish and Muslim communities gathered to talk on environmental issues from their respective faith traditions (ICSD 2018). In this women's multi-faith eco-gathering there were four study sessions, where a representative from each faith community talked about the importance of ecological equilibrium from their own faith perspective (ICSD 2018). Among other effects, this made participants conscious of the impact of their ecological impact on the environment and taught them how individuals can reduce their ecological footprints. During this two-day gathering, participants stayed overnight with women of other faith traditions and freely shared their views of nature with one another. Sometimes, they sang together to emphasize their deeper relationship with the natural world.

The Luther World Federation (LWF) engages in multi-faith dialogue to address the climate change issue. The federation sees climate change as a challenge common to all human beings, especially people of faith and spiritual traditions (LWF 2018). Daniel Sinanga of the Luther World Federation suggests connecting climate justice with multi-faith dialogue and an action plan (LWF 2017).

In a joint statement, religious and spiritual leaders—Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh—all supported the Paris Agreement and all other decisions adopted at COP 21 (*Interfaith Climate Change Statement to World Leaders* 2016). The statement was signed by 270 faith leaders among others. Here faith leaders unanimously emphasized the importance of protecting the earth from further degradation. They reiterated caring for the natural environment as an inviolable human moral responsibility. They criticized present rates of carbon emissions and urged world leaders to reduce these as quickly as possible. They called for world leaders to produce renewable energy and consider green technologies (*Interfaith Climate Change Statement to World Leaders* 2016). They expressed the hope that world leaders will take the necessary steps to implement the agreement and that governments will be committed to accelerate those decisions (*Interfaith Climate Change Statement to World Leaders* 2016.). Furthermore, religious scholars also urged the people of the world to take care of the earth at an individual level by considering it a sacred place.

On November 16, 2011, in a joint venture with the United States Embassy to the Holy See and the World Faiths Development Dialogue, the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs (BCRPWA), organized a video conference on multi-faith dialogue and cooperation to address ecological issues. In the conference, religious scholars from Christianity, Islam and Judaism presented moral guidelines for environmental sustainability from their respective faith traditions, and these presentations were heard by some representatives of the U.S. government and the World Bank. In his talk, Rabbi Warren Stone emphasized environmental activism and faith-based advocacy from the Jewish faith tradition. Stone advocated connecting religious moral teachings to action, by working from local to global levels, campaigning for green technologies, using renewable energy sources, and greening religious places and educational institutions with solar panels and gardens (BCRPWA 2011). While highlighting the legacy of St. Francis of Assisi, Sister Ilia Delia talked about the Christian view of environmental sustainability. Criticizing White's argument, she

stated Christianity is a creation-centered faith tradition where the natural world is regarded as sacred and humans are nominated by God to be guardians of the creation, not its tyrants or destroyers (BCRPWA 2011). Noting humans are an inseparable part of nature, Imam Yahya Hendi stated that unless one is an environmentalist, no one can claim to be a true human. In his view, to be a Muslim fundamentally means being an environmentalist (BCRPWA 2011). With regard to sustaining the environment, Hendi suggested raising moral voices from faith and spiritual perspectives, teaching environmental ethics in all sorts of educational institutions, and applying more pressure on political leaders for environmentally-friendly state policies. This video conference was moderated by Katherine Marshall of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, and attended by his excellency, Mr. Ertharin Cousin, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Agencies in Rome, and Mr. Kanta K. Rigaud, an environmental specialist of the World Bank, among others. Every speaker expressed their common concern about the environment and suggested creating a link between religions-based environmental ethics and human activities in nature by connecting multi-faith and spiritual traditions with the present ecological crisis.

As requested by Connect4Climate, multi-faith leaders from Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism gathered at Bologna, Italy, on the eve of the meeting of G7 ministers, where they issued a letter requesting the ministers of G7 countries to take the necessary steps to protect the earth's forest areas from further destruction (da Silva 2017). In the meeting, multi-faith leaders came to a unanimous decision that the earth is a common home for both humans and non-human animals, and thus should not be rendered unfit by human activities for non-human entities. They argued that humans are morally bound to make the earth a better place for all (da Silva 2017). Multi-faith leaders did not avoid the issue of poverty, which was the core agenda of the G7 meeting, and argued for a holistic development process where ecological sustainability is given priority by arguing that poverty cannot be addressed without tackling the ecological crisis (da Silva 2017).

All member states of the United Nations (UN) set up the agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. The United Nations is working to achieve these goals by 2030. It is a challenge for the UN to reach a more sustainable world by this time. Undoubtedly the program is ambitious and considerable. Without cooperation from all sides it will be impossible to reach the targeted goals by 2030. Faith institutions, religious leaders, faith-based non-governmental organizations, and faith communities have all been asked by the United Nations to play an active role. They can do this by utilizing the precious resources of faith traditions, especially religious moral guidelines and ethical teachings, in order to change present perceptions of nature and human behavior in relation to the natural world. In different programs of the United Nations, multi-faith leaders are engaged in dialogue with one another alongside non-religious environmental activists, representatives of non-governmental organizations and policy makers. In a multi-cultural dialogue on environmental issues, held April 23-24, 2016, and organized by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Department of Environment (DoE) of the Islamic Republic of Iran, scholars and practitioners of diverse faith and cultural traditions talked heart-to-heart, seeking "lasting solutions" to current environmental problems (UNEP 2016, 2). From their respective faith and cultural traditions, they discussed some important notions—"Mother Earth" (coined by Bolivia), "ecological civilization" (proposed by the Chinese government) and the "Happiness Index" (used by Bhutan)—which are considered by some countries as alternative approaches to the sustainability of development (UNEP 2016, 2). Representatives of multi-faith and multi-cultural traditions unanimously supported environmental ethics, and furthermore, claimed that traditional moral concepts and spiritual world-views could make the present form of environmental ethics stronger. In this regard, they reiterated that the natural world should not be treated for its instrumental value, because it has its own intrinsic value; non-human animals are morally significant, so their rights should be preserved. They are inseparably connected to the cosmic order and God, and so any wrong treatment violates the natural system and ignores God's connection to His creation. Since human life is dependent on the natural world, humans should be

more gentle when they utilize natural resources and should express their gratitude when performing religious rituals. Human wellbeing is deeply related to the wellbeing of non-human animals, so suffering of non-human creatures adds suffering to humans. Sustainability should be given priority over greed and a consumer-based life-style, and humans should live harmoniously with nature (UNEP 2016, 7). Through all these ethical guidelines, religious and spiritual leaders brought the concept of a “duty of care” to modern human beings (UNEP 2016, 9).

At a multi-faith meeting in Bristol, organized by the United Nations and held in September 2015, spiritual and religious leaders requested world leaders to take practical steps for environmental protection (UNEP 2016, 28). More explicitly, they urged saving wildlife and forest areas, planting more trees, producing and using green technologies, reducing dependence on fossil-based energies, and investing more money in renewable energy sources as an alternative to fossil-based energies.

As part of developing multi-faith and spiritual approaches to ecology and environmental ethics, the Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) at the Divinity School of Harvard University and the Forum of Religion and Ecology (FRE) at Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies have been playing a significant role as academic institutes (Sayem 2019, 134). Between 1996 and 1998, CSWR organized international conferences on the theme of world religions and ecology, and religious scholars and leaders of diverse faith and spiritual traditions participated in academic discussions among themselves and with experts in the fields of ecology and environmental ethics. In the three years from 1996 to 1998, more than 800 scholars of multi-faith traditions and environmentalists attended the conferences (Tucker and Grim 2007). From the results of these academic dialogues, the Center produced a ten-volume series of books connecting the worlds of faith and spirituality with ecology (CSWR 2018). The Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology (FRE) arose from the 1996-1998 series conferences held at the Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) and now works as “the largest international multi-religious project” with regard to faith and the environment (FORE 2018a). The Forum is a very rich online platform providing information about diverse faith-based and spiritual approaches to the environment. It attempts to restore the human relationship with nature by focusing the resources of multi-faith and spiritual traditions. In addition, in the cases of both the CSWR and FRE, an ideal academic couple (husband-wife)—Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim—played a significant role connecting the worlds of faith and spirituality with environmental studies (Sayem 2019, 132, 147). More importantly, they successfully conducted multi-faith dialogues on environmental issues and managed academic gatherings where religious and spiritual leaders talked with, among others, scientists, economists, policy-makers, political leaders, and representatives of the World Bank and United Nations (Tucker and Grim 2007). In this way, both Tucker and Grim moved dialogue from being interfaith to multi-faith and multi-disciplinary. They are credited with the introduction of a multi-disciplinary dialogue on environmental sustainability, by connecting faith and spiritual communities with all other relevant stakeholders.

Conclusion

It has become evident that the above-mentioned dialogical initiatives and activities are promoting multi-faith cooperation and action to lower rates of environmental degradation. Such collaboration is not limited to faith communities; these programs are connecting non-religious people, secular environmental activists, policy makers, public agencies, non-governmental organizations, civil society members, scientists, businessmen, media-people, journalists, transnational organizations, international bodies, and the like. There is a growing optimism positive change will result from the combined efforts of people from all walks of life. To reach sustainable environmental levels, human beings have to do more work, and here faith and spiritual traditions can work as a very supportive force, with multi-faith dialogue expected to serve this purpose more

swiftly. Since many people follow faith traditions, leaders of these traditions can easily reach their audience, and make an appeal to their followers. Though it is difficult, it is not impossible that people will be convinced by these efforts to reform their attitudes and rectify their behaviors in favor of environmental sustainability.

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HOSPITALITY AS A PARADIGM IN MISSION: AN ECUMENICAL AND INDIGENOUS EXPLORATION¹

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And if a stranger sojourns with you in your land you shall not mistreat him. But the stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself. Lev 19:33-34

Keep on loving each other as brothers (and sisters). Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them, and those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in body also. Heb 13:1-3

ABSTRACT

Hospitality is missional in every aspect, as it invites others to experience the redemptive bliss and hospitality of God. As Christians we believe that we are created and called to live in community both with God and others. This means hospitality needs to become one of our priorities in reaching out to our neighborhoods. Hospitality to strangers gives us a chance to see our own lives afresh; through different eyes. One of the basic reasons for unfulfilled hospitality is difference. We feel more comfortable with those who share our likeness and interests, etc. Another factor is the individualism that has overshadowed communitarian living. This has promoted privatization, and satisfaction with the “I own, therefore I do not need my neighbor” attitude that gave birth to a selfish, competitive and unjust lifestyle.

This paper explores the ecumenical and indigenous aspects of hospitality with special reference to the Ao-Naga tradition in north east India, and further proposes hospitality as a paradigm integral to mission. Initially outline the biblical foundations of hospitality and then move on to speculate about hospitality through an ecumenical exploration that pinpoints the missional dimension of, and call to hospitality. Four aspects of the indigenous people’s understanding of hospitality will be highlighted: the blessing of hosting, sharing as an aspect of hospitality, reciprocity as an act of hospitality, and hospitality in the midst of brokenness. Later I attempt to infuse this with a Christian understanding of hospitality, showing how it can be established as a paradigm for Christian mission.

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Introduction

Hospitality is missional in every aspect, as it invites others to experience the redemptive experience and hospitality of God. As Christians we believe that we are created and called to live in community, both with God and others. This calls for hospitality to become one of our priorities when reaching out to our neighborhoods. Hospitality to strangers gives us the chance to see our own lives afresh, through different eyes (Koenig 2001, 5). The online *Oxford Dictionaries* (2018) defines hospitality as “the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors or strangers.” This definition is comprehensive in the sense that it already implies friendship, generosity and attentiveness to the other—whether friend or stranger/guest. Parker Palmer reminds us that we need to see strangers, not simply as the ones who need us, but as people we also need, in order that we may know Christ and serve God in “truth and love.” In his words, hospitality is the act of

...inviting the stranger into our private space, whether that be the space of our home or the space of our personal awareness and concern. And when we do, some important transformations occur. Our private space is suddenly enlarged, no longer tight, cramped, restricted but open and expansive and free. And our space may also be illuminated. . . . Hospitality to the stranger gives us a chance to see our own lives afresh, through different eyes. (Palmer 1986, 132)

This paper attempts to explore the ecumenical and indigenous aspects of hospitality and further proposes to employ this as a paradigm for mission.

Challenges to Hospitality

One of the basic reasons for unfulfilled hospitality is difference.² We are attracted to, or more or less comfortable with those who look like us, have common interests, or even similar religious views and culture. We like things or people that are similar and familiar. Expectations and likenesses are established and we open up depending on whether or not they are similar to us. Strangers are different; they are not like us. We are not familiar with them and this unknown-ness gives rise to discomfort and even fear. On this basis, many views are formed and we find ourselves content with simply being judgmental, and keeping our distance from others instead of engaging in relationships with them. In response, Matthew Carroll suggests that the differences between us are to be celebrated, not feared. As Christians, we believe each human being is created in the image of God, and as such, we should embrace the uniqueness of every individual (Carroll 2011, 521). While preserving our own uniqueness, difference must not become a barrier, but should be considered a blessing for unity.

Individualism has overshadowed communitarian living and this hinders our welcoming of the stranger. Individualism fosters a mentality in which everything becomes about us, and if others are weak or poor, let them also work hard to come up to our level. Moreover we are taught to be self reliant and take pride in what we can do and earn. This thinking is lubricated by the competitive world created by globalization under the umbrella of modernity. There is nothing wrong with having confidence in ourselves, but there is a danger when our understanding of independence is equated with the perception that receiving assistance from others is weakness.

² Difference is seen as a gift of God (cf., Tower of Babel and Pentecost Gen 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-11). The gift of difference is to be celebrated and remembered as God disciplining those who seek power over people. During Pentecost, people were filled with the Holy Spirit, and confused by the phenomenon. However each of them could understand their own language. Pentecost is not just a call to unity under Christ, but is also a call to understand everyone's difference (Russel 2009, 54).

Individualism has also promoted privatization. There is a widespread understanding that a family has their own car, tools, appliances, land or house, and does not need to rely on others nor share with others. The market-place and modes of payment have opened up opportunities where obtaining the necessities of life has been made easier for families. Such a philosophy of life hinders our spirit of hospitality and sharing. Hence, individualism has given birth to a lifestyle that is selfish, competitive and unjust. Technology connects us to people around the world with just a click of a button, but that is not like face-to-face relations. It is hospitality that engages us with our neighbors,³ transforms relationships, and is the meaning of true discipleship. Hospitality can bridge the divisions that exist in our society. Despite the risks that are involved in hospitality to strangers, when hospitality happens, God is encountered in a new way:

Hospitality questions one's way of thinking about oneself and the other as belonging to different spheres; it breaks down categories that isolate. Hospitality involves a way of thinking without the presumption of knowing beforehand what is in the mind of the other, dialogue with the other is essential. . . . To welcome the other means the willingness to enter the world of the other. (Richard 2000, 12)

Hospitality is therefore transformational and it can also occur in deeply counter-cultural contexts. John Taylor's reminder is still fitting in today's context—if one is closed up against being hurt or blind towards one's fellow-humans, one is inevitably shut off from God also. One cannot choose to be open in one direction and closed in another (Taylor 1972, 19).

It is becoming clear that, as Christians, there is a requirement to welcome strangers and care for them, which is a reminder of God's hospitality toward us. The early church also considered hospitality an important discipline. To offer care to strangers was one of the distinctive features of being a Christian. Hospitality therefore becomes an opportunity for us to serve God through wider avenues by enlarging our space of togetherness. What Christine Pohl said in this regard is significant: "Hospitality resists boundaries that endanger persons by denying their humanness. It saves others from the invisibility that comes from social abandonment. Sometimes, by the very act of welcome, a vision for a whole society is offered, a small evidence that transformed relations are possible" (Pohl 1999, 64).

Biblical Foundations of Hospitality

Biblical narratives depict the traits of hospitality in the form of hosting and visiting. Abraham left his home and kinsmen to become a vulnerable stranger, dependent on the hospitable reception of the residents of an alien land. There is an awareness of a deeper dimension to hospitality in the story of Israel, as they were on many occasions at the mercy of strangers. Another interesting insight we find in the matter of hosting and visiting is reflected in Hebrews 13:2: i.e., when Abraham encountered God's angels in three visitors (Gen 18); when Lot hosted strangers he did not know (Gen 19); and when a poor widow encountered a messenger of God by receiving Elijah into her lowly house (1Kings 17). To all of these individuals were added blessings beyond their comprehension. The book of Leviticus illustrates a latent conflict between an outgoing concern for all humans, and a fear of legal impurities that might be contracted from others. Nevertheless, even there, the hospitality that is enjoined on the people extends beyond ethnicity. The alien (*advena*) who dwells in the land should be treated like a native (*indigena*), and loved (*quasi vosmetipsos*), "as though he (she) were yourselves" (Lev 19:33-34) (Tavard 2007, 246). This reception-hospitality

³ Luke 10:29-37 narrates an incident following the question about the identity of one's neighbor. Jesus' idea of neighbor is not only the Samaritan who showed mercy to the victim, but he also insists that we are to be neighbors even to the ones who are despised. Jesus does not define who is a neighbor. We must simply be neighbor to everyone, since the definition of neighbor is not linked to our religious or cultural understanding.

is seen as a welcoming of all by each. Boaz, allowing Ruth, the foreigner, to “pick glean, drink, and eat, and instructing his workers to leave some stalks for her to pick” demonstrates his welcoming heart. Not only that, his declaration to marry Ruth again demonstrates hospitality, regardless of the boundaries set by tradition and community. He did not just welcome a Moabite woman who was a stranger and outsider; his acts of hospitality enabled a stranger to be part of the community. His hospitality is seen as the “outworking of God’s plan of salvation in the world” (Chan 2014, 674-5; Payne 2012, 73).

This pattern continues in the New Testament, as the disciples encounter the resurrected Christ in a stranger they meet on their way to Emmaus, and who they then host when night falls (Luke 24:13-35). Jesus became flesh to live as a guest among us (John 1:14). He taught in ways that send an invitation to his festive banquet, which is, in fact, a powerful metaphor for the Kingdom of God, in which all are equally welcomed. The concept of Christian hospitality is made clear in the parable narrated in Matthew 25, when the righteous say to Jesus, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go visit you?” (Matt 25: 37-39). In doing what Jesus commanded here—visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger—we are living out a very different set of values in relationship. We are according dignity to others; we are breaking social boundaries; we are including those who are so often excluded; we are engaging in transformation (Ross 2014, 5). Jesus holds the entire world accountable to the criteria of love and care for the “least”.⁴ Gustav Stählin underscores the linkage between the love of Christians for one another (*philadelphia*) and hospitality (*philoxenia*) (Stählin 1967, 20-21). Furthermore, John Koenig notes that Pauline expressions of this kind of caring are found in expressions such as “extend hospitality to strangers” (Rom 12:10) and “welcome one another . . . as Christ has welcomed you (Rom 15:7) (Koenig 2001, 26-29).

Hospitality in Ecumenical Explorations

The ecumenical dimension of hospitality was first noted in the Anglican context when Christian mission was seen as turning around the two poles of “embassy” (announcing the gospel to others) and hospitality (receiving the other so as to better live the gospel).⁵ The first case of ecumenical hospitality between the Catholic Church and the WCC seems to have been the presence of five official Catholic observers at the third Assembly of the WCC in New Delhi in the year 1961. The following year, an example of hospitality was given when Pope John XXIII invited Orthodox and Protestant churches to send observers to the Second Vatican Council of 1962 (Tavard 2007, 245). Further, our contemporary situation of multi-religious and multi-cultural societies provides a new context for questioning the traditional closed-shop nature of Christian theology and its attitude of a closed particularity. There is, therefore, a growing recognition that Christian theology must justify being “Christian” by articulating a theology of religion at large and incorporating this into its traditional responsibility for its own distinctiveness. Such a theology of religion can only emerge through a process of dialogical encounter with people of other living faiths and not through an *a priori* Christian logic.⁶ Similarly, while affirming the division based on economics, class, race,

⁴For details see Gray (1989, 255-72).

⁵ Refer Cragg (1992). His insight was echoed at the Lambeth Conference of 1998, which recognized hospitality as a dimension of its missionary perspective.

⁶ The challenge before us is not that of producing a proper hypothesis to account for the presence of religious diversity in our midst, but rather to let that diversity, with all its specific claims of religious truth and experience, question our Christian convictions and theological presuppositions. It is in this process of mutual encounter that the concerns of a Christian theology of religion become very much intertwined with the general theological task of defining Christian self-identity amid others (Rajashekar 1987, 458-9).

colour etc., the tenth WCC General Assembly statement on the “Way of Just Peace” affirmed that churches can be advocates for peace by building cultures of peace and transforming conflicts. In this way they may empower people on the margins of society, thereby enabling both men and women to be peacemakers (WCC 2013). In this new approach, and in dialogue with other faith traditions, certain dimensions need to be taken into consideration.

The Missiological Dimension

The witnessing paradigm of Jesus Christ is grounded in the Bible,⁷ and is reflected in the activity of the early church.⁸ In the modern period there are various ways of conceptualizing the call for witness, of which one is mission. From an ecumenical perspective, the Edinburgh Conference of 1910, which was a conference of western denominational mission agencies, met with under the theme “The evangelization of the world in this generation.” However, in 2010 it was affirmed that there is no centre for mission: mission happens “everywhere to everywhere,” a view that recognizes the irrelevancy of the binary structure of home base and “mission field.” Thus the concept of giver and receiver within mission enterprises has been challenged, highlighting the need for growing together in Christ, relying upon the power of the spirit of God (Balia and Kim 2010). Thus, today the church is called to witness to Christ by sharing in God’s mission of love through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

An important ecumenical leader once stated that “we cannot compromise mission because it is not ours; it is God’s. But in the midst of pluralistic societies, we are bound to review and re-evaluate our prevailing missiological perceptions, strategies and methodologies. A new missionary self-understanding will help us to resolve the continuing dichotomy between dialogue and mission. In fact dialogue is neither the end of mission nor a new instrument for mission. It is, in a sense, an outreach aimed not at converting the other, but witnessing our faith in interaction with the other” (Aram I 2003). Since Christian mission is embedded in the salvific act of God, and, fully aware that God’s saving work transcends church boundaries, reveals itself in history in manifold ways: “An inclusive understanding of God’s salvific act will lead the church to consider other religions as part of God’s plan of salvation and not as mere ‘mission fields’” (Aram I 2003). Hence, in a pluralistic environment our mission strategy is not to seek to add new members to our fold; rather we should seek to identify “Christic values in other religions and awaken the Christ who sleeps in the night of the religions” (Khodr 1971, 141-2). The Moderator of the conference therefore asserted that it was his conviction “that this missiological self-perception and self-articulation of the church will not jeopardise *mission dei*; rather it should open to new horizons” (Aram I 2003).

Call to Hospitality

Given the historical tension between mission and dialogue, it is no accident that the WCC (2006) document “Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding”⁹ defers to what is essentially an ethical category in the arbitration between the two. Its applicability to both international relations and internal Christian division is telling. Yet “hospitality” remains an ethical category and functions essentially to encourage relationships between people of different faith communities. In other words, it belongs most fittingly at the dialogue end of the tension between

⁷ In the great commission Jesus charges, “Go unto all the world and make disciples . . . teaching them to observe all that I have taught” (Matt 28:19-20).

⁸ The spread and growth of the early church point to an emphasis on evangelism, which was made possible because of a commitment to this task. It is also to be noted that the early church did not set out to change the world; that was not their goal either. They were well aware that Christ’s kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). Rather, they set out as Christian disciples to witness to the world (Acts 1:8) and extend God’s kingdom. For details see Schmidt (2001, 39), Allbee (2005).

⁹ This document is the result of a two-year process in response to suggestions made in 2002 at the WCC Central Committee between staff and networks in the conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), Faith and Order and the Office on Interreligious Relations and Dialogue (IRRD).

mission and dialogue (Race 2005). In similar way, the Scriptures witness to the unknown blessings one might experience by showing hospitality to others (see Heb 13:2), for in being open to others in their otherness we encounter God in new ways. Moreover our willingness to be open to others and to accept them is the hallmark of true hospitality. Thus hospitality is both the fulfilment of the commandment to “love our neighbours as ourselves” and the means of discovering God in new and wider avenues (Matt 19: 19; 22: 39; Mark 12: 39; cf. Lev 19: 18). This is also a way of giving indigenous people the right to life, liberty and security in every context.

Postmodernity may have contributed to the contemporary awareness of otherness, because hospitality can be both opportunity and risk. The danger in our encounter with the other is that it might increase fear of otherness, rather than lead to enhanced understanding. Indeed, otherness can be experienced even in relation to ourselves. When relations with others fail, the question remains of how we should respond to, and overcome the fear of the other. Henceforth, in situations of political or religious tension, acts of hospitality may require great courage, especially when there are people who disagree with us, and even consider us as their enemies. Furthermore, the presence of inequality between two parties, distorted power relations, and hidden agendas, can spark a fire between the parties that hampers a progressive dialogue.

The plurality of religions has now been accepted as a fact of life. Christians have not only learned to co-exist with the adherents of other faiths, but have also been transformed by such encounters. Hence the statement that “we have discovered unknown aspects of God’s presence in the world, and uncovered a neglected elements of our own Christian traditions. We have also become more conscious of the many passages in the Bible that call us to be more responsive to others” (WCC 2006, para. 39).¹⁰ Practical hospitality and a welcoming attitude towards strangers eventually leads to the creation of a space for mutual transformation and may even result in reconciliation (Gen 14; Acts 10: 34-35). Drawing upon the consequences of such biblical experiences can widen our understanding of mutual hospitality among peoples of different religious traditions. From the Christian perspective, the statement affirms that, “this has much to do with our ministry of reconciliation. It presupposes both our witness to the ‘other’ about God in Christ and our openness to allow God to speak to us through the ‘other’” (WCC 2006, para. 42). By contrast, a triumphalist attitude can lead to religious animosity and violence. Hence the statement above recognizes that it is hospitality that allows us to accept others as created in the image of God, and that enables us to know that God talks to us through others, in order to teach and transform us and vice versa. Enriching effects such as these are the result of authentic witness.

Hospitality among Indigenous People

For indigenous people, being hospitable is considered a fundamental virtue and practice, and is followed in many cultures around the world. People’s homes are always open to welcome visitors and entertain them with food and drink, and to listen to their stories through the offering of time and attention, thereby respecting the situation of the guest and so forth. Hospitality is one of the hallmarks of indigenous people. For the Ao Naga it is called *sobaliba*, a word that embraces the etiquette, and the ethical principles that abide in and guide a person individually, and in the community collectively. A person who lives a life fulfilling this principle is honored and respected in the community. Coupled with biblical teachings, *sobaliba* teaches people to be hospitable to others. People’s obligation to care for the stranger (*ainer/tangar*) maybe because of their experiences as sojourners coming in contact with people of different orientations, languages, ethnicities etc. This corresponds with the Israelites’ experience as strangers in the land of Egypt,

¹⁰“Religious Plurality and Christian Self-understanding” is a document in response to suggestions made in 2002 at the WCC Central Committee and was aimed at three staff teams: Faith and Order, Interreligious Relations, and Mission and Evangelism. It must also be noted that this document does not represent the view of the WCC. The discussions show how important and controversial the matter is, and this document was thus shared as background for discussion and debate.

and in the wilderness, through which they learned to be hospitable, and which serves as a reminder of and witness to God's hospitality. There are stories and traditions among indigenous people also that guests and strangers might be angels bringing promises and blessings. Hence offering care to strangers is one of the distinctive features of indigenous people. One Ao-Naga folktale goes like this:

Lijaba [a deity]¹¹ came disguised in the form of an old man, almost naked, having sores all over his body. He sought for shelter but everyone made excuses saying "Behold, we wait for the coming of Lijaba." Some would say, "we are observing *anempong* (*genna*) because a child is born to us today." Others said "we have *genna* because a calf is delivered by our cow today and so we cannot entertain you today." No one in the village welcomed him in. Finally on the outskirts of the village there were two orphans, namely Yarla and Asatula, who welcomed him in. At first they were reluctant because of their poverty and also they could see that the old man was not carrying anything to offer them, so they said, you know we do not have enough food to entertain you. But the old man replied, I have enough for the three of us. In the evening the old man asked them to keep the pot on the fireplace, and took a grain of rice from his head and put it into the pot. To their great amazement the pot was filled with rice. In the same way, he peeled a small piece of skin from his knee and cooked it in another pot. Lo and behold! It turned into a pot full of meat. The three of them had a delicious meal that night.

The next day when they were sitting at the *salang* (a verandah-like platform attached to the house which is made of bamboo) the old man overlooking the fields of the villagers asked the two sisters to identify the owners of the fields. They named them one by one but they did not mention the owner of the field that belonged to them because it was so small and they were ashamed to disclose it. The younger sister, who could not hold it in, intentionally dropped her comb and when her sister went to collect it, she told the old man that the smallest field actually belonged to them. This indeed turned out to be a blessing for the two sisters! The old man blessed their field and cursed all the fields that belonged to the villagers. After blessing them the old man left and disappeared out of sight. They had a plentiful harvest.¹²

A concept of hospitality that suits indigenous people and their context can, I believe, be helpful as a resource that strengthens Christian hospitality. The above folktale represents an act of hospitality at the individual/family level with implications for the practice/understanding of hospitality. Similarly, at the collective level there is also a practice of hospitality manifest through the concern of the community. The people are agrarian by nature and their livelihood/economy, especially in the village context, depends on the produce from their fields. When there is sickness or difficulty in any family, the neighbors or community come forward to extend their help to complete the work in their field. For instance, during sowing time, if the owner of any field falls sick, neighbors voluntarily come together and complete the work in one day. It is understood that everyone will bring along their own food, and tools appropriate for the work. There is also a practice of fetching firewood for helpless families, voluntarily helping with building a house, etc.

Indigenous people are in fact known for their knowledge embedded in and associated with their land, culture and the practice of hospitality. It is difficult to find a single word to describe hospitality in an indigenous language, as it is often described or referenced through terms according to the situation. This understanding among the indigenous community, especially the Ao-Nagas and Mizos, is represented through the concept of *sobaliba* or *tlawmngaihna*. Such concepts and practices instill the *awashi* (mannerisms/etiquettes) toward others and that is how it becomes

¹¹ The word *Lijaba* means the one who enters the earth. *Li* means earth, *zaba/jaba* means enter. Hence, the meaning is the one who enters or indwells the earth.

¹² This folktale has been known to the writer since childhood. Such stories with lessons are narrated by grandparents and parents to their grandchildren and children.

understood that sharing and showing hospitality is one's responsibility or duty. Showing hospitality to others is like a sacrament, a pledge toward co-brothers and sisters. Words like *sasukini* (hospitality in the Sumi dialect), and *tejungnu* (hospitality in the Ao dialect) are used, but they do not encompass the whole meaning or understanding. *Ainer* (visitor/stranger in Ao language), *inami sasu keu* (hosting visitors in the Sumi language), and *sasuvi* (welcome in the Sumi language), are other words that instill an understanding of hospitality in the indigenous people.

The Blessing of Hosting

Just as the story of Abraham's hospitality to strangers reveals that the stranger is God, who then blesses his host, so here the story emphasizes that the stranger is *Lijaba*, the Supreme Being. The two orphans' hospitality turns into a blessing for them. There is a strong belief among the people that the Supreme Being is merciful to those who allow him to enter their homes and invite him to stay with them. However, if he is turned away, he brings wrath upon their fields and lives. There is a belief that *Lijaba's* visit is accompanied with unusual blessings as well as curses; he pours abundant blessings on the land, even multiplying the little that people have. A useless thing is transformed into enormous blessings. Hence, people are careful not to displease any stranger, lest by mistake they turn away *Lijaba* and invite calamity. This notion corresponds with the biblical injunction to be kind and generous to others, especially the destitute. In this act, the angel of the Lord may be entertained. In such situations, food is an important component of the sharing between host and guest.

Sharing as an Aspect of Hospitality

The two sisters willingly accepted the old man into their house despite their poverty. Even though they did not have much they offered space in their home. Thus people make sure to share what and in whichever way they can with their guests. A rich person's richness can be considered worthwhile only if he or she shares with the community or the needy. That is why the Ao-Nagas have a practice of hosting a feast of merit.¹³ Excessive accumulation of wealth is not approved by *Lijaba*, because wealth can make a person proud and also insensitive to the needs of others. Moreover it is a violation of *sobaliba*, which is the core sustaining principle of the Ao community (Longchar 2000, 18). This is paralleled in the biblical account, where God commands the people of Israel to gather manna according to each family's need: not more, not less. Some disobeyed and gathered more than was sufficient and this angered Moses their leader, and God as well (Ex. 16). Greed has no place in the responsible actions of a person, because people are to share if they feel that they have been blessed more than the rest.

Reciprocation as an Act of Hospitality

Reciprocation is a mutual exchange between individuals. There are many examples of exchange, and some have been practiced through the ages. Such reciprocity is seen in the way *Lijaba* provided. He saw that the two sisters had nothing to offer except space for a night's rest. So *Lijaba* asked them to keep the cooking pot on the fireplace and upon scratching his head he took a grain of rice and it multiplied, filling the pot. Again he peeled a skin from his knee and the pot the tiny piece was transformed into curried meat sufficient for them all. The implicit logic here is that it is not always on the part of the host to give, but the reciprocity of the guests makes hospitality complete. Both host and guest are expected to see each other's vulnerability and respond appropriately. The ability to identify and acknowledge one's vulnerability is an aspect of fulfilling hospitality. Accordingly, when a visitor is invited into a home, he or she will be given a space in the house and will eat the same meal.

¹³ The feast of merit is a given by a rich man for the whole village as acknowledgment of God's blessing upon their harvest.

Hospitality amid Brokenness

The fact that the two sisters were living in the outskirts of the village reflects their status. As orphans, they are not well regarded in the society. Desertion, isolation, stigmatization or ostracization are some of the identical situations or experiences that many people face today. The reason they were reluctant to invite their guest indicates they did not have enough space to host guests in their home. Lack of food is also suggested in the story, limiting their ability to share with others. The following day when Lijaba and the two sisters were overlooking the fields, they were ashamed to identify their field to Lijaba because it was so tiny. This also speaks of the woes and pains of landless farmers, compelled to depend on rich and merciless landlords, whose dominating and harsh dealings add to their suffering. Despite their poverty and limited resources, the story highlights the sisters' humble hospitality in welcoming Lijaba into their home. They demonstrate the act of hospitality to the stranger even in the midst of their brokenness. This indeed answers the question of how to accommodate our Christian mission and ministry toward our co-creatures.

Christian Hospitality

By way of conclusion, let me note how hospitality should be part and parcel of our Christian life. The example of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially when it comes to hospitality, reveals the essence of Christianity. Jesus is the one who honors persons of different cultures, nationalities and religions. Along with his fellow disciples, he honored and respected "others in their otherness," such as the Samaritan woman, the Roman Centurion, Simon the Cyrenian, the outcasts, sinners and so forth. Jesus treated righteous and sinners equally, seeing in each a child of God blessed with "the image and likeness of God." The incarnation itself is God expressing hospitality, so that we too can become divine (Phil 2:7). This initiative from God, which is inexpressibly unique and astounding, restores our broken relationship with God and with all creation. This leads Christians to confess Jesus Christ as the one in whom all of humanity comes together and calls for an attitude of hospitality in our relationships with others.

With this in mind, and not because of religious or ethical obligations, our Lord offers his greatest commandment (Mark 12: 30-31): the reason for giving this mandate is in order for us as individuals and as members of the church to take up our abode in eternal communion with Jesus by imitating him. There is reciprocity in hospitality, which is what is intended when Jesus says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). This idea is further elaborated in Jesus's prayer in John 17:21, "As you, Father are in me and I in you may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." While reflecting on the Lord's Prayer, during the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Sang Chang asserted that injustice in this world is evident in disparity of wealth. Hence, the challenge that, as equipped disciples, we must stand on the side of God and resist and transform all life, destroying the forces of injustice in social systems and structures. Justice will be realized only when there is bread for everybody and not only for some rich and affluent individuals (Chang 2018). True Christian relationships are expressed in receiving, welcoming and offering hospitality to and from others, including those who belong to other communities or religions. This mutual hospitality mirrors the indwelling of the creator in us and in the midst of our human relations, and may represent hospitality in its truest sense. Ironically many Christians proclaim their love for God but fail to show hospitality to others. The hospitality of God, who receives sinners as just without any merit of their own, should be the model of our behavior, as we personally respond to God in faith, and collectively, as we gather in communities for the praise and glory of God (Tavard 2007, 253).

As Christians, it is therefore our responsibility to be open to others in the kenotic love that comes out of identifying with Jesus Christ (Matt 15:21-28; 8: 5-11). Furthermore our Christian mission should focus on doing mission in Christ's way: through kenotic love, humility, identifying in openness with the victims of the society, hospitality to strangers, and respecting cultural, ethnic

and social diversity, especially the dignity of each human being. Mission according to Kosuke Koyama (1993, 285), is “extending hospitality to strangers”. In this we should be ready to accept others in communion with the risen Christ (Matt. 25: 31-46). Lesslie Newbigin, while underscoring the need for a hermeneutic of the gospel, in terms of which a congregation believe the gospel and live by it, asserts that “the community of faith must live out that faith as a community of truth” (Newbigin 1989, 227, 229). A community of believers cannot be conceived without the sharing of love, in Christ’s way and in specific ways, according to the needs of each cultural and social context (Balía and Kim 2010, 209). In exploring the theme of hospitality, the Christian is called to affirm the importance of hospitality as a significant mark of Christian communities. We need to take the biblical, indigenous and ecumenical call to practice hospitality seriously, as we seek to live our commitment in a context characterized by discrimination against, and marginalization and exclusion of, various sections of people.

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