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**“Public Theology - a Latin captivity of the Church? :
Violence and Public Theology in the praxis of the Church in Asia”**

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Abstract

This lecture looks at the development of Public Christian Theology in Asia. It asks two major questions. First, to what extent are the assumptions of Public Christian Theology actually the assumptions of Post-Enlightenment Western Christian Theology? This is a pressing issue for the methodologies in the Public Theology of Asian Christian

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theologians. Does the agenda of much Public Christian Theology actually address the situation of Christianity in Asia, for example, or only seek to address the internal *Angst* of Western Christianity? Second, where Christianity is a minority (albeit, large minority) faith, what is the contribution of a Public Christian Theology to the debates of civil society? This is especially pressing where the cultural aspects of a world religion other than Christianity (e.g., Islam in Indonesia, Buddhism in Thailand and Hinduism in India) heavily influence the agenda of the discourses of civil society. In addition to an overview, this lecture draws on the praxis of theology in Indonesia, especially during the reconciliation process (2001 – 2005) after the violence between Muslims and Christians in the Molucca Islands.

Introduction

I should, first of all, like to thank the University of Auckland School of Theology and St David's Presbyterian Church, at Khyber Pass here in Auckland, for their most kind invitation to me to deliver this annual University School of Theology lecture in Public Theology. I understand that this is the third year in which this lecture has been given, and I count it an honour to give it, after your two distinguished lecturers in the past two years, Professor Peter Matheson and Dr Marion Maddox. In particular, I would like to thank Professor Elaine Wainwright, the Head of the University of Auckland School of Theology, and the Reverend Doug Lendrum, the Minister of St David's Church, for their invitation, their kindness and their hospitality. Professor Wainwright was my very distinguished colleague in Brisbane for seventeen years. We were involved together in setting up and developing the School of Theology of Griffith University in Queensland, and in developing the Brisbane College of Theology. Our Research Higher Degree programme in

Griffith University and in the Brisbane College of Theology owed a very great deal to Elaine's outstanding scholarship, creativity, hard work, skill and care of her students and colleagues. It has also been my great pleasure to get to know the Reverend Doug Lendrum since we first met at the Global Network on Public Theology in the University of Edinburgh in 2007. We met again very recently at the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS) / Australian and New Zealand Society for Theological Studies (ANZSTS) / Public and Contextual Theology (PACT) Strategic Research Centre Conference on "Good Neighbours and Faithful Citizens: Theology in the Public Domain" in Canberra.

I am honoured also to have been invited to give the Ferguson Lecture 2007 in honour of one of Australasia's most distinguished theologians, the Reverend Dr Graeme Ferguson. I served from 1992 to 2000 as Principal of Trinity Theological College in Brisbane. A very great deal of what I put into practice there I learned from Graeme, who beginning before my time as Principal of Trinity had been Principal of the United Theological College in Sydney. The scholarship, verve and dynamism which Graeme brought to UTC were things for which we in the Uniting Church in Australia have always been most grateful. He literally got the place built. It is a privilege, sir, to deliver that lecture in your honour.

This lecture looks at Public Theology. Public Theology has come to the forefront in the theological consciousness of churches and Christians, particularly in so-called Western societies, in recent years. We now have a Global Network in Public Theology (GNPT), involving over twenty theological institutions in all continents around the world, including the School of Theology here in Auckland, the School of Theology at the

University of Otago, and, in Australia, the Public and Contextual Theology Strategic Research Centre (PACT) at Charles Sturt University. This was provisionally set up at a conference held at the University of Edinburgh in 2005, and formally constituted at a second conference held at Princeton in the United States in May of this year. From the middle of next year we in Australasia will have responsibility for hosting its secretariat for three years.

So, what is Public Theology? Why, indeed, has there been this interest in Public Theology? To the first question, “What is Public Theology?”, there have been a variety of answers. The most prominent has been that of David Tracy, of Chicago. His answer has been that Public Theology is a theology which engages three audiences, that is, the academy, the church, and society.

However, why the interest in Public Theology? Clearly the church in Western societies has faced the marginalisation and privatisation of faith and theology. Has that brought the reaction of promoting the public presence of theology? There is, of course, no logical reason why Christianity should not play into the public domain, any more than, for example, the trade unions, employer groups, doctors, legal practitioners, the teaching profession, miners, or any other group of citizens. Moreover, in terms of citizenry, Christians are probably as large a group in Western societies as any.

This lecture looks at Public Christian Theology in the Asian context. Many scholars in Asia, both of Christian faith and of other religions, would argue that in this context all theology is public. So the lecture looks at a number of questions.

The **first** issue that the lecture considers is the question as to what extent the assumptions of public Christian theology actually are the assumptions of post-Enlightenment Western Christian theology. This is a pressing issue for the methodologies in public theology of Asian Christian theologians. Does the agenda of much public Christian theology, for example, actually address the situation of Christianity in the Asian region, or does it in fact only seek to address the internal *Angst* of Western Christianity? Is public theology thus an expression of a “Latin Captivity” of the Church, or not?

The **second** issue that this lecture considers is the intercultural nature of Christian theology, and its implications for public theology. Where Christianity is a minority (albeit, large minority) faith, what is the contribution of a public Christian theology to the debates of civil society? Is the word “debate” the correct word? This is especially pressing where the cultural aspects of a world religion other than Christianity (e.g., Islam in Indonesia, Buddhism in Thailand, and Hinduism in India) heavily influence the discourses of civil society.

The **third** issue that this lecture considers is a concrete reality of Asian society, that is *violence*, and how Christian public theology is developed in that context. In this third section, I look at theological methodologies, and then go on to reflect on the dynamics of a New Testament theology frequently used in Asia in relation to violence. In doing so, I seek to find a method for engaging theologically with the fact of violence.

The **fourth** issue that this lecture seeks to address is to investigate the types of cultures in which theology is carried out, and to compare the

cultures surrounding Western Christianity with those surrounding Asian Christianity.

Fifth, and **finally**, this lecture seeks to answer the question as to what can we learn from the interaction of Christianity and cultures, particularly in the Asian region, to help us in the engagement of a public theology in general.

First: Public Theology – A Latin Captivity of the Church?

I need to begin by looking at the question of the “Latin Captivity” of the church. This term, the “Latin Captivity” of the church, is parallel to Martin Luther’s famous phrase, the “Babylonish Captivity” of the church (in its sixteenth century English translation). Luther, of course, was referring to the captivity of the church within its late medieval structure and form within Western Christianity. So I take this concept of Luther’s, and apply it, in general, to Western Christianity. I am not thinking here of Western Christianity as opposed to the Eastern Orthodox churches. Rather, I am thinking of Western Christianity as it has developed from the eleventh century in its variety of forms, including Catholic, Anglican and Protestant. These are the churches which factually have had the greatest impact on the growth of Christianity in Africa, the Americas and Asia, particularly since the sixteenth century. Specifically, for this lecture, it is Western Christianity which has had the most pervasive impact on the development of Christianity throughout Asia. Thus the question arises as to the extent to which the primary international agenda in theology has been, and continues to be, set by Western Christianity. This, then, leads to the question as to the extent to which Christianity in Asia is dominated by this “Latin Captivity”. I use the word “Latin” not

simply in the sense of language, although this may be involved too. Nor do I use it as applying only to the Roman Catholic Church, although that church is involved too. I use it in relation to the whole agenda of Western Christianity, so heavily influenced as it is by Latin thought-forms, philosophies and agendas. The literature on this in relation to Asia is significant.²

In addition, there is the issue of Erastianism (in the senses of both the political and the intellectual ascendancy of the state over the church in theological and ecclesiastical matters) and anti-Erastianism. In Western Christianity there have been both very strong Erastian and very strong anti-Erastian tendencies. These play heavily into the debates of public Christian theology.

Within the Latin tradition of Western Christianity of course comes the European Enlightenment. Here we see radical changes, but they develop within Western Christianity. Human beings, on the one hand, become more important than God. On the other, however, they become not fundamentally different from animals and plants. Both capitalism and Marxism derive from this Enlightenment vision of human beings as autonomous individuals without any reference to the Divine. It is a radical anthropocentrism. What distinguishes the effects of the Enlightenment is that it is, in its public face or public philosophy, atheist. The Christian faith is questioned, repudiated, or studiously ignored. Revelation, especially communal revelation, now has to prove its claim.

² See, especially, BOYD, R. H. S. *India and the Latin Captivity of the Church: The Cultural Context of the Gospel* (Monograph Supplement to the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, No. 3). London: Cambridge University Press, 1974; KITAGAWA, J. M. *The Christian Tradition beyond the European Captivity*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992. See, too, HAIRE, J. *The Character and Theological Struggle of the Church in Halmahera, Indonesia, 1941 – 1979* (*Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums*, Band 26). Frankfurt am Main und Bern: Lang, 1981.

However, the European Enlightenment did not deny the Christian faith, or indeed any religion, its place. That place is fundamentally in the private sphere. The Enlightenment relativised the Christian faith's exclusive claims, and thus placed it firmly in the area of the individual's personal rights. It taught that every individual was free to pursue his or her own happiness, irrespective of what others thought or said. This has continued in Western cultures to our times. It means that in Western Christianity individual faith and ethics, and the communal faith and ethics of like-minded individuals, can be nurtured and developed. Individual discipleship, and small communal or monastic groups, can flourish. However, the public face of Christianity is denied or ignored.

Here is the *Angst* of contemporary Western Christianity, in its inheritance of the Latin Western tradition. It faces a world where it sees the effects of the Enlightenment in the public place. What this tends to produce, in its eyes, is that people cannot take others seriously, and indeed do not need others. The *Angst*, then, of Western Christianity is that it follows from this that individuals can no longer take themselves seriously, and that, despite the fact that they now have liberty to believe as they wish, they can easily, following Nietzsche, live their lives in frenzied work and frenzied play so as not to face the fact, that is not to look into the abyss. It thus might seem that public theology is Western Christianity's way of addressing this *Angst*.

Second: Intercultural nature of Christian theology, including public theology

A vast literature has been produced on this issue since the first discussions of the so-called *theologiae in locō* took place in the late

1950s, now fifty years ago. I wish specifically to look at how the insights of almost the past half-century of theological debate in this area can inform the development of public theology. However, before that can be done, it is necessary to draw out some of these insights and see how they can be related to the development of public theologies, especially in societies as in Asia where emerging indigenous theologies are conscious of their Latin captivity.

This is particularly important for us in Australasia, in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, placed as we are, and so entwined with Asia, and, of course, the Pacific (or, preferably, Oceania).

The authentic gospel or Christ-Event-for-us³ is not pre-packaged by cultural particularity but is living. The church remains in a constant struggle between the acceptance of the Christ Event within its particular culture in each place, and yet in the wrestling with that which stands against its own particular acceptance in each place. In this sense the church is always both indigenous and *semper reformanda*. In recent times the term *glocal* has been used in this respect. It is perhaps because the Christ Event can never be exclusively identified with one culture or one type of culture that Paul employs the ambiguous term, “ἡ ἀκοή” (*hē akoē* – *the hearing*), to describe the action by which the Christ Event enters a person’s or a community’s life, that is, the crucial steps of grace and faith.⁴ Since Käsemann’s pioneering work, this, of course, has been seen in the varied theologies in the New Testament.⁵

³ I use the term “gospel” here in a sense not simply dependent on the Bultmannian use of the term.

⁴ See, for example, Romans 10: 16 – 17; Galatians 3: 2.

⁵ See KÄSEMANN, E. “Begründet det neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche?”, in *Evangelische Theologie*, München, Vol. XI, 1951/52, 13 – 21 (subsequently published in

If the Christ-Event-for-us in each place lives in widely diverse cultures, then for the whole people of God there can only be a true fullness of that event or gospel if there is true inter-confessional, inter-traditional, international, interracial and inter-cultural fellowship; for the church of Christ is a fellowship which transcends space and time. The gospel, especially today, can only be lived in its fullness through sustained and widespread inter-cultural theological reflection and action. For the Christ Event, to which these factors point as in Grünewald's painting⁶ constantly before Karl Barth, is only truly the same if differently expressed in different cultures.

This now needs to be applied to public theology. It is not enough that indigenous theological reflection, oral and written and otherwise expressed, and related action, should take place in Asia, Africa, the Carribean, the Americas and the Pacific. That this should happen is important, but it does not go far enough. Public theology should not be seen as the appendix to theology, or even more the appendix to dogmatics, church history or practical theology; rather it should be at the heart of theological and dogmatic reflection, as its concerns were in the multi-cultural context of the beginnings of Christianity.

Third: Public Theology in the Praxis of the Church in Asia

KÄSEMANN, E. *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, Erster Band, 2nd Edition. Göttingen: Vandenhoech und Ruprecht, 1960); KÄSEMANN, E. "Zum Thema der Nichtobjektivierbarkeit", in *Evangelische Theologie*, München, Vol. XII, 1952/53, 455 – 366. (subsequently published in KÄSEMANN, E., 1960).

⁶ "The Crucifixion of Christ", a panel of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1512 – 1515) by Matthias Grünewald.

Asian Christian theologies, in the main, make little or no distinction between the public and the private. Thus, they are in a situation entirely different, on the whole, from that of post-European Enlightenment Western Christianity. For this lecture, the main difference is in the conception of the public sphere within which these Asian theologies are articulated.

In much of Asia public discussion of religion forms the normal pattern of life, quite unlike the marginalised and privatised place of religion in the post-European Enlightenment Western world. Equally, being a Christian, whether a church leader or church member, frequently necessarily involves the person in communal, public and political activity. This involvement has to do with Christian presence, self-propagation and survival in a multi-religious context.

Indigenous Asian Christian theology has, of course, a very long history, as outlined so clearly by Samuel Moffett⁷, and also by Gillman and Klimkeit.⁸ However, if we look specifically at the development of self-conscious *theologiae in loco* or contextual theologies in Asia in recent times, that is, since the late 1960s, a number of significant factors occur.

First, there is the communal nature of these theologies. These theologies are not conceived for private purposes, but have the whole community as their audience.⁹ This is seen in a number of significant indigenous

⁷ MOFFETT, S. H. *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Vol 1. San Francisco: Harper, 1992.

⁸ GILLMAN, I. and KLIMKEIT, H. J. *Christians in Asia before 1500*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002.

⁹ See WICKERI, P. L., ed. *The People of God Among All God's Peoples: Frontiers in Christian Mission*. Hong Kong/London, Christian Conference of Asia and the Council for World Mission, 2000; WIDYATMADJA, J. P. *Kebangsaan dan Globalisasi dalam Diplomasi*. Yogyakarta (Indonesia): Yayasan Bimbingan Kesejahteraan Sosial/Kanisius, 2005.

Asian theologies. Let us look, for example, at the Korean concept of *han* as used in *Minjung* theology¹⁰, at the writings of Kosuke Koyama¹¹ and at the work of Choan-Seng (C S) Song.¹² This communality relates both to the Christian community and to the interaction between the Christian, minority community and the wider community in each Asian society.

For the *Minjung* theologians this relationship is with the wider Buddhist and Shamanist communities of Korea. The Korean concept of the *minjung* is that of the people who have been put aside and robbed of their subjectivity in history, either by outsiders or by internal oppressors. The word is created from two Chinese characters, “*min*” and “*jung*”, which can together be translated as “the mass of the people”.¹³ Its emphasis is on the people’s loss of subjectivity. It thus has some similarity to the New Testament concept of “ὄχλος” (*ochlos*). The Korean concept of *han*, so close to the heart of *Minjung* theology, refers to the sense of unresolved resentment against injustice and suffering, a sense of helplessness in the face of overwhelming odds, especially overwhelming violence, and a feeling of being totally abandoned. Again, we think of our Lord’s cry, “Why have you forsaken me?”¹⁴ *Han* also points to a feeling of acute bodily pain, a feeling of helpless suffering, and an urge to right a wrong.¹⁵ An example is given is the account of Miss Kim

¹⁰ See BEVANS, S.B. *Models of Contextual Theology (Faith and Cultures Series)* (revised and expanded edition). Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004, 77 – 78.

¹¹ BEVANS, 95 – 99.

¹² See, for example, SONG, CHOAN-SENG (C S), *Christian Mission in Reconstruction*. Madras: CLS, 1975; SONG, C S. *Third Eye Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979. See too KOSHY, 219.

¹³ MOON, C. H. “*Minjung* Theology”, in *Ching Feng* 26 (1983), 48

¹⁴ Mark 15: 34 (NRSV).

¹⁵ SUH, David Kwang-sun. “*Minjung* and Theology in Korea”, in Kim Yong Bok, ed., *Minjung Theology: People as Subjects of History*. Singapore, Christian Conference of Asia, 1981, 27; MOL, D.

Kyong-sook. Mis Kim was an executive committee member of a Korean trade union. On 11 August 1979 she was shot dead during a demonstration organised by two hundred women workers demanding that the Government party (the New Democratic Party) work out a fair solution to their labour dispute. According to the letter which she left for her mother and younger brother (in case she should die during this labour dispute), she recounted that sometimes she was not paid for her work in the factory over the previous eight-year period. She had no opportunity to attend church because of her work on Sunday. Her testament was for a deepening of personal and community piety (church attendance and Bible study) and stronger support for the trade union movement.¹⁶ For the *Minjung* theologian David Kwang-sun Suh¹⁷ this concern is always with the wider Shamanist, Buddhist, Confucian and Neo-Religionist communities of Korea, who respectively represent approximately 25%, 15%, 13% and 14% of the South Korean population, with Christians representing over 30%.

Equally for Koyama it relates to the wider Japanese community, and to the wider Buddhist community of Thailand¹⁸, and for Choan-Seng Song it relates to the wider Daoist and Confucian society of both Taiwan and China.¹⁹ Song uses the concept of the Mask Dance as a means of expressing communal theology in the public space. The dance helps the

“*Minjung* Theologie, Zuid Koreaanse Bevrijdingstheologie in een geïndustrialiseerde Samenleving”, in *Wending* (1985), 20 – 21.

¹⁶ SUH, Nam Dong. “Towards a Theology of *Han*”, in Kim Youn Bok, ed., *Minjung Theology*, 54.

¹⁷ See KOSHY, 306.

¹⁸ See BEVANS, 96 – 99, 169 – 170.

¹⁹ See, especially, SONG, C S. *Third Eye Theology*. See too PO Ho Huang, *From Galilee to Tainan: Towards a Theology of Chhut-thau-thi* (ATESEA Occasional Paper No 15). Manila: Association for Theological Education in South East Asia, 2005.

community, including both Christian and non-Christian, overcome the toil of the day, including the effects of structural violence. However, for Song, its importance is much greater. Song sees the dance in its social, political and theological contexts.²⁰ Through the dance, the plight of the poor and the achieving of justice without violence are portrayed. It inspires human resourcefulness in a merciless society. It exhibits the nearness of God to humanity, in God's favour as well as God's disfavour. So the communal mask dance, in the public space, is a political manifesto as well as a prayer for a community in trouble. According to Song, the dance comes from what is called the "experience of critical transcendence".²¹

Second, there is the close inter-relationship of the personal, the political and the public. This is seen clearly, for example, in the work of Johannes Leimena²² and of T. B. Simatupang²³ in Indonesia, particularly in relation to the debates of the late 1940s as to whether or not Indonesia should become an Islamic State. Leimena, a Presbyterian from the Moluccas, served as Prime Minister of Indonesia in the 1950s. In the period after the so-called attempted Communist Coup in 1965, Leimena was questioned by officials of the *New Order* (*Orde Baru*) Government of President Suharto concerning the activities of former President Soekarno. He refused to implicate Soekarno as a Communist, insisting

²⁰ SONG, Choan Seng. *Theology from the Womb of Asia*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986, 218 – 219.

²¹ SONG, Choan Seng. *Theology from the Womb of Asia*, 219.

²² LEIMENA, J. "De Ontmoeting der Rassen in de Kerk", in *De Opwekker*, 1941, 626 – 642; LEIMENA, J., "The Task of Restoring Fellowship Within the Church and the Indonesian Nation", *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 9: 3 (1968), 57 – 64. See too VAN KLINKEN, G. *Minorities, Modernity and the Emerging Nation: Christians in Indonesia, a biographical approach* (*Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Volume 199*). Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003, 122, 137, 189 – 190, 218 – 220.

²³ See VAN KLINKEN, 97, 123, 147, 169 – 170.

that Soekarno had primarily been a nationalist. What is more significant for this lecture is that Leimena insisted that his co-operation with all the independence revolutionaries of whatever background, as a Protestant Christian, had been part of his Christian calling. For Leimena, Soekarno, a nationalist of joint Muslim and Hindu background, had been one of his colleagues, and he refused to join in activity to betray or discredit him. Again, Simatupang, a Lutheran from North Sumatra, served as a General and Chief of Staff in the Indonesian Army during that decade too. In his writings he insists on the living relationship between the faith of Christians, on the one hand, and their thinking and activities in relation to the ongoing revolution in a nation like Indonesia in its striving to bring about a more just society without violence, on the other.²⁴ Again, this close inter-relationship of the personal, the political and the public is seen in the work of Mamen Madathilparampil Thomas, or M M Thomas, in India²⁵, against the background of debates on the state as secular or as influenced by Hinduism. Thomas, a member of the Mar Syrian Church of Malabar, spent much of his career involved in the issues of Christianity and society, both in India and through the World Council of Churches²⁶, and completed his career as Governor of the Indian State of Mizoram. Unlike the early indigenous Indian theologian Vengal Chakkarai, who was interested in the *bakti-marga*, “the way of devotion”, Thomas was

²⁴ SIMATUPANG, T. B. *Tugas Kristen dalam Revolusi* (“The Christian Task in the Revolution”). Jakarta: Badan Penerbit Kristen, 1967; SIMATUPANG, T. B. *Keselamatan Masa Kini* (Salvation Today). Jakarta: Badan Penerbit Kristen, 1973.

²⁵ THOMAS, M. M. *The Christian Response in the Asian Revolution*. London: SCM, 1966. THOMAS, M. M. *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*. London: SCM, 1969. See too KOSHY, N. *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia*, Volume 1. Hong Kong: World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region, Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs, and Christian Conference of Asia, 2004, 32 – 33, 111 – 112, 179 – 180.

²⁶ See, for example, THOMAS, M. M. and ABRECHT, P., eds., *World Conference on Church and Society: Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of our Time*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967, passim.

interested in the *karma-marga*, “the way of action”. One of his aims was to contribute to a humanized world community, along with other religious traditions. Especially in his work, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, Thomas demonstrates how Christianity has constantly had responsibility for introducing new elements into Indian society, particularly in facing the three challenging Indian issues of group over individual, of certain individuals over others, and of male over female. The introducing of these new elements have brought about many changes to the core of Indian society, both politically and otherwise, and also to Hinduism itself.²⁷

So, in looking at the issue of public theology on this occasion, this lecture takes one of the major realities of the Asian context, that is, the reality of **violence**. It thus seeks to do public theology in the praxis of the church in Asia, against a specific, and at times overwhelming, background. This is because the issue of the prevalence of violence in Asia is dominant, and because of the relationship between violence and theological debate.

The contemporary reality of Asia²⁸ is one of deep violence. The irony of the ending of the Cold War is that it has coincided with the unleashing of uncontrollable violence, especially in Asia. The combination of high technology and seemingly medieval tribal conflict has become the pattern particularly in the West, which “legitimizes a culture of violence by invoking God arbitrarily to suit a particular agenda for aggression. As a

²⁷ BOYD, R. H. S. *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*. Madras: CLS, 1975, 312.

²⁸ This lecturer has lectured in Asia now for thirty-five years, including thirteen when he was resident in Indonesia.

result, insecurity, fear and anxiety characterize the lives of many people”²⁹ throughout Asia.

This culture of violence manifests itself in many different ways. There is the negative impact of economic globalisation, which continues to widen the gap between the haves and the have nots. There is also the structural violence of domineering or negligent governments in relation to their populations. Corruption and the abuse of power often manifest themselves in violence. In addition in the Asian region, there are often structural forms of traditional violence, mainly based in patriarchal societies. These result in gender discrimination, forced labour migration, discrimination against young people and those with disabilities, and discrimination based on race, caste, and class. Surrounding human life itself is the violence against the environment.

Against this rather gloomy picture of the Asian region, positive signs must also be noted. There is a yearning among young people for true manifestations of peace and of peaceful communities. In the aftermath of the Tsunami there were remarkable efforts to create communities of peace in various places. Again, the speed of reconciliation after ethnic and communal violence often has been very rapid. Despite violence, there is evidence of a vast amount of resilience among populations who have been deeply wounded.

Between 2001 and 2005 I took part in the reconciliation process organised by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia for the Molucca Islands, the capital of which was the city of Ambon.

²⁹ KOBIA, S, quoted in World Council of Churches News Release entitled “Restating the Ecumenical Vision demands Conversion, says Kobia”, Geneva, 15/02/2005. Cf. BURTON, J. *Conflict: Resolution and Provention*. London: Macmillan Press, 1990, 1 – 2; 13 – 24.

In 2001 and 2002, I visited Halmahera in the North Moluccas, where I had served for thirteen years in the 1970s and 1980s, and saw the results of the Christian – Muslim violence, which had been stimulated by the political situation in Indonesia at that time, and aggravated by elements within the Indonesian military. Events too terrible for words had occurred. Both Muslims and Christians were involved in violence. Let me just give one example. Six of my former students in Indonesia, all ordained ministers, were killed. One of them was the Rev Albert Lahi. He was in the vestry of his parish church when elements of the *Jihad*, aided and abetted by elements of the military, arrived. He knew that his case was hopeless. He asked to be allowed to pray. His wish was granted. He put on his preaching gown and knelt by the communion table. He prayed for his church, for his nation, for his congregation and for those about to kill him. The Sunday school children who observed the whole incident told me what happened. Then he stretched his head forward and was beheaded. His head was carried on a pole around the village. His body was dragged by the feet for all to see. Yet in this same village, and in this whole area, reconciliation has come about. Christians too, were heavily engaged in violence. However, since 2002 both the Muslim and the Christian populations have been slowly but surely slowly working their futures out together, in a quite remarkable display of creating communities of peace. At the end of the peace process a remarkable communal act of reconciliation occurred. A rebuilt central mosque and a rebuilt Christian church were both dedicated. Both had been destroyed in the violence. On the Friday, at the beginning of the dedication of the mosque, Christians on their knees brought the *tifa* (the equipment used to call Muslims to worship), which they had had made at their own expense, to the Muslim community, as their gift for the new mosque. On the Sunday, at the beginning of the dedication of the

church, Muslims, again on their knees brought a large bell, which they had had made at their own expense in the Netherlands, as their gift for the new church. Both promised never to engage in violence again with their neighbours.

Against the situation in which we find ourselves, in which we find incredible violence in our communities, but also the resilience of the human spirit, we need to seek a public theology. That we should do so is important, for two reasons. First, as Christianity represents just over one third of the global population, it has a responsibility for the existence of violence in our contemporary world. Second, despite its strong peace traditions, Christianity has been involved in violence in much of its history. Within this, we need to hear the voice of God because that is central to our identity as Christians.

Doing Theology in the midst of Violence

How do we listen to the voice of God? It is not our task primarily to invoke God for our particular view of the world, but rather, in humility, to sit and listen as that divine voice comes to us.

Therefore, in looking at how we move towards a public theology, let us, in this lecture, take up this task theologically, as we must as Christians. Let us first go to the very heart of our existence as Christians, and as the church. The inexplicable will of God to be for, and with, humanity implies that the church's life cannot begin to be understood in terms of the structures and events of the world. Equally, God's inexplicable will to be God with, and for, humanity implies that we should always understand our life as Christians theologically. These simple, yet

profound, facts derive from the mystery of the triune God not to be God apart from, or separate from, humanity, but rather to make God's very life intersect with the unity of the Son of God with us. Our theological basis as Christians and as the church is in the wonder of God's condescension, in the intentionality of God's solidarity with sinners, that is, with those who find their self-identity solely within themselves, and find their self-justification and sole solace in themselves alone, without any reference to God. The church is called to exist solely through the solidarity of Jesus Christ with those who are alienated from God, by Christ going to the extremes of alienation for humanity, so that humanity might through him come close to God. At the heart of our faith is expressed the fact that God does not wish to be alone in celebrating the wonder God's inexpressible love for humanity. God in Christ calls into existence an earthly body of his Son who is its heavenly head, in order that humanity may responsively rejoice with God in the harmony and peace which God has established for creation.

If the being of the church and its life is predicated upon the grace of Jesus Christ as itself defining God's action in the world for the reconciliation of creation, including humanity, then its life of peace is that which it receives from him, who is its life. The church's very existence will be shaped by the manner in which it confesses this truth to be its very life.

Violence and Transformed Communities of Peace in the New Testament

On the basis of our theological identity in Christ, we take the New Testament writings, on Christian community especially, most seriously. Like our struggle to be faithful disciples of Christ to-day in a world of

violence, Christianity was born in a milieu of political and social violence. The evidence which we have both from the New Testament and from non-Christian sources of the First Century C E point to the constant struggle of Christianity to survive in such a climate. Clearly that climate of violence also influenced the language and concept-construction of many parts of the New Testament. Nevertheless, it is also very striking how early Christianity sought to transcend this violent world.

A microcosm of the New Testament understanding of building communities of peace for all can be seen in the ethical sections of Paul's writings, especially in those ethical sections in his *Letter to the Romans*, frequently used in Asian contexts.

In order to understand this ideal community, living out its theology in public, we need to understand that it both reacts against, and transforms, Graeco-Roman cultures of the first century C E.

First, in the world of Early Christianity, social groupings were based on kinship, ethnic issues, power, and politics. Individual consciousness was subordinate to social consciousness.³⁰

Second, religion, like other social factors, was enmeshed in kinship and politics. In the first century C E the religion of voluntary members

³⁰ MALINA, B J. *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981, 55-66, 60-64; MEEKS, W A. *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, 90-91. Cf. THEISSEN, G. *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics and the World of the New Testament*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1992, 272 – 278.

resulted in a newly-created kinship group.³¹ Although it appeared to be similar to, or to look like, any other kinship group, it was in fact a created or fictive kinship grouping. In early Christianity, language of the natural kinship group, for example “household (of faith)”, was used for a created kinship group. It struggled as to which of these two types it in fact belonged.

Third, there is considerable evidence in the First Century C E within Greco-Roman culture of intense expressions of emotion, through outbursts of anger, aggression, pugnacity, and indeed violence. Moreover, these appear to have been socially acceptable.³²

Fourth, in such an atmosphere, concern for honour and shame was significant. A person’s sense of self-worth was established by public reputation related to that person’s associations rather than by a judgment of conscience.³³

Over against these four factors, Paul summons Christians to new social roles. They are based on mercy, peaceable conduct and reconciliation in a culture where expressions of violence seem to have been normative. The call for transformation now means new expressions of group identity. No longer based on kinship or ethnicity, group identity nevertheless seeks to retain the intense cohesion of former groups. Paul’s community

³¹ THEISSEN, G. *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (edited and translated by John H Schutz). Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982, 27-40. Cf. ESLER, P. F. *The First Christians in their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific approaches to New Testament interpretation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994, 6 – 12.

³² PEARSON, L. *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece*. Stanford: University Press, 1973, 193; WEDDERBURN, A J M. *The Reason for Romans (Studies of the New Testament and its World)*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988, 81-83. Cf. LOADER, W. R. G. *Jesus’ Attitude towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels*. Grand Rapids (Michigan) and Cambridge (UK): Eerdmans, 2002, 177.

³³ MALINA, op.cit., 27-48.

members bind themselves together as one body in Christ. This metaphor is poignantly suitable in a society where self-awareness arises from group association rather than from individual worth. The ideals of honourable and shameless conduct are altered in that they are not primarily derived from society outside. Rather, enhanced honour for the community derives from its incorporation into its risen Lord. Patterns of social co-operation are modified as a result. A new communal identity as one body in Christ is thus reinforced.

The social groupings see their identity as coming from beyond themselves. Their self-understanding and their life together are defined by the kindness or mercy of God and by the truthful harmony (or peace) which God gives. The other factors in the transformation include cohesiveness within the group based on an understanding of God's action from outside. For that reason, attitudes of peaceful harmony are central to the community's identity. Moreover, no other identity marker (ethnicity, gender, class, or status) may be accepted as absolute. Honour derives from the faith-life of the community, originating from beyond. The original groupings are transformed by the new ideal of a central awareness of their relationship with God.

In addition, throughout the ethical sections of *Romans* attitudes to those *outside* the newly created Christian social groupings are to be the same as to those *within* them. There is to be no distinction. All are to be treated in the same way.

We thus see the radical way in which Paul took hold of Greco-Roman categories of group identity, and then applied to them new metaphors, including that of the body of Christ, so as to create in them a totally new

identity. Present-day individualism makes it difficult for us to see the significance of the dynamism of Paul's transformation of a received aggressive culture. Moreover, throughout world history Christianity has had both success and failure in being able to present and live out this newly transformed identity in Christ. To this varying success and failure, and the reasons behind it, we now turn.

Fourth: Theology in the intercultural history of Christianity

Cyclic culture

Let us now look through one particular lens at the processes of the spread and development of world Christianity. Let us see how the category of peace, and the ideal of communities of peace, developed on the one hand, or were restricted on the other, as Christianity expanded. Christianity was born within an immediate Jewish cultural environment, surrounded by an Aramaic and Hebrew vocabulary, and Semitic expectations. However, this integrated Judaism in its strict and official vesture, rejected Jesus of Nazareth and later turned against Paul as he championed freedom from the Law through Jesus Christ. As the New Testament and second and third century C E writings demonstrate, Christianity penetrated much more easily into Hellenistic culture, including Hellenistic Judaism, than into the culture of Judaism itself. From Hellenism Christianity developed into the wider Greco-Roman culture, and subsequently moved into Northern and Eastern Europe, in addition to its movements into Asia. Why was it that it found its movement into Hellenism much easier than its movement into Judaism? It was because Hellenism was more of a culture in the original sense of that word than Judaism. Hellenism was much more related to primarily agricultural

societies whose deepest concern was with being in harmony with nature. The Christ Event spoke of birth, growth, development, maturity, death, resurrection, and new life. This was a cycle. It fitted the cyclic world of agricultural life. It was a cyclic culture. That world spoke of planting, development, maturity, harvest (or death), new life, renewed fertility of the soil, and new growth. The Jesus story fitted the pattern of agricultural life. It had also been similar to the Old Testament dramas of the Prophets and Psalms, where they had spoken of destruction and rebirth.

However, in first and second century C E Judaism, a different world had emerged. There was no longer the drama of the Old Testament Prophets and Psalms. Now first and second century C E Judaism tended to stress the precise following of particular divinely-inspired words, which had been uttered up until the time of Ezra and the “Men of the Great Synagogue” and thereafter had ceased.³⁴

So the gospel lived and flourished in a *cyclic and agricultural mode* as it was interwoven into agricultural societies. In this way, on the whole, the gospel moved north and west, in addition to its movement east.

However, it did not enter the world of Judaism to any large degree. As it moved west and north and east, the transfiguration of agricultural society meant that the gospel was totally interwoven into the fabric of the culture.

It also began to mould and to direct the cyclic impulses of the culture.

Wholeness, harmony, rhythm, and ritual (in water, and around a thanksgiving meal) were the means by which the gospel was expressed.

Baptism was the water ritual; Holy Communion was the thanksgiving

³⁴ As in the first words of the *Pirqê Abôth*. See DANBY, H. *The Mishnah* (translated from the Hebrew by H. Danby), “The Fathers” (“Pirqê Abôth”). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933, 446 – 461.

ritual. Both were central means of expressing the faith. Many parts of central, northern and western Europe were evangelised in this way. The movement was slow and halting. Yet the interweaving continued. Celtic Christianity developed in this way – deeply cyclic, and deeply agricultural. There were movements also into western Asia, to India and to areas further east where Christianity developed in this way in the first millennium.

Word culture

There was, of course, from time to time, resistance to the gospel, but on the whole the development of Christianity was communal. Christianity thrived in this cyclic world, and expressed itself communally. There were internal communities of peace, and frequently relations of peace with surrounding faiths. However, another world existed in which Christianity had not been able to develop so well. This was the world of a trading- and word-culture. It was the world of first and second century C E Judaism into which Christianity had not been able to develop in the first millennium. However, with the rise of travel and trade, Christianity began to develop into a trading- and word-culture, that is, into a culture in which wholeness, community, harmony, and ritual received less attention, and more attention was given to common standards to guide diverse peoples as they sought to live together. The development of trading- and word-cultures occurred largely in the period from the fourteenth century C E, often referred to as the Modern Period, taking in as it did the European expansion in trade and commerce, the Renaissance and the Reformation, and industrial modernisation.

This was a world quite different from that of the agricultural world. Journeying individuals and communities needed clear-cut ordinances in warding off their dangers and temptations, far from the cyclic life of the soil which they had left behind. That cyclic world had been so clearly transfigured by the Christ Event, and celebrated in ritual as a means of expression and teaching. The *trade- and word-culture* was different. Guidelines were needed to bind communities together. Doctrine, ethics, church polity, and management were all important. The emphasis was to be on the Book (the Bible), the Guide to the Book (Confessions and Catechisms), and the Interpreter of the Book (the Preacher).

Parallel cultural emphases occurred in other trade and word religions, specifically Judaism and Islam. In Christianity, in this word and trade form, there is emphasis on the Bible, the Confession and Catechism, and the Preacher. In Judaism, there is a parallel emphasis on the Torah, the Mishnah and Talmud, and the Rabbi. In Islam, there is a parallel emphasis on the Koran (Qūran), the Sharī'ah, and the Faqīh.

The interaction of cyclic and word cultures

So now Christianity succeeded in operating in two cultural modes, *the cyclic- and agricultural-mode* on the one hand, and *the word- and trade-mode* on the other. However, the critical issue arose during the period of evangelisation, from the late eighteenth century C E onwards. Could Christianity, which largely existed in a word and trade cultural mode in the mission-active nations, translate itself again into the cyclic and agricultural cultural modes of the receptor cultures? If the mission-active cultures had been those that were still in the original cyclic and agricultural mode moving into new cyclic and agricultural receptor

cultures, then the spread of the gospel would have been relatively simple. However, mainly they were not. They were trade- and word-cultures. In the process of evangelisation a variety of reactions occurred. In some situations, the spread of the gospel was highly successful, as, for example, in many parts of the Outer Islands of Indonesia, and in North-East India.³⁵ In other situations, it was extremely difficult, as, for example, in Japan, in parts of India, and in parts of China.

In the development of Christianity in the cyclic and agricultural mode, great emphasis was placed on the baptising of communities and cultures into the faith. Once whole Christian communities had been established, then there tended to be harmony and peace both within those communities and in relation to the surrounding societies. However, although trade- and word-culture communities encouraged peace *within* their community, they did not necessarily encourage community with those *outside* the faith-group. Often colonial Protestant communities were internally cohesive, but aggressive towards the world around them, including toward indigenous religions. So in the West Indies and in the Southern States of the United States, the local population was enslaved, or slaves imported, and the slaves simply acquiesced in the colonists' religion. There was little attempt to translate the gospel into the indigenous community. In Australia, minimal attempt was made to translate the gospel into indigenous cultural terms. In China, Japan, and India, parts of the population was antagonised by Christianity.³⁶

This stands in stark contrast to the teachings of the New Testament, epitomised in Paul as we have seen, where Paul's ethics for *internal*

³⁵ This was so also in much of the Pacific and in parts of the African continent.

³⁶ See BOYD, 117 – 119; HAIRE, 322 – 323.

Christian life are exactly the same as his ethics for those *outside*. You treat the outsider in exactly the same way as you treat your Christian sister or brother.

Violence, peace and cultures

Now we come again to the issue of violence and communities of peace. In ecumenical and evangelical terms, we need the gospel in both cyclic and word cultures. Where the church has been primarily related to an agricultural- or cyclic-culture, it needs the struggle with the divine graceful criticism of that transfiguration in order to be *semper reformanda*. It needs to hear the voice in word form to be constantly reformed. Equally, a church which is primarily related to the gospel in a word- or trade-culture, needs always the struggle with the divine fact of incarnation, that God has placed God's church in the world.

However, we need to be aware that the existence of the church in word- and trade-cultures has a tendency to work against building communities of peace.

This is frequently so across religious divides. Thus it is especially so where there is a meeting between two word- or trading-culture religions. There are four poignant examples of this. First, it is seen in the struggle between particularly the strident word-culture form of Judaism and the word-culture form of Islam in the Middle East. Second, it was observed in the violence of the past between Muslims and Christians in urban areas of Indonesia. Third, it is seen in the attack of word-culture Christianity against the word- and trading-culture Judaism in Nazi Germany. Fourth, it is observed in the antagonism between specific traditions of Islam and

certain traditions of Christianity in the United States. In his recent Cyril Foster Lecture in the University of Oxford, Jack Straw has argued that the Cold War had eroded traditional political identities and encouraged people to retreat back to identities defined in terms of cultural, ethnic, national, gender or religious affiliations, and that the challenge was to recapture civic political culture by finding ways of allowing space for these affiliations within a framework of shared values.³⁷

Fifth: Christianity, Culture and Doing Public Theology

Therefore, a number of things are incumbent upon us.

First, we need to be aware that creating communities of peace means creating attitudes of peace and harmony towards those *outside* which are the same as to those *within* the faith-community.³⁸

Second, we need to be aware that Christianity needs both its cyclic- or agricultural-culture forms on the one hand, and its word- and trade-culture forms on the other. However, we need to be aware that its word- and trade-culture forms have a tendency to go against New Testament teaching, in that they can tend to an aggressive attitude to those *outside the community*, while fostering cohesiveness within the faith-group.

Third, we need to stress the importance of cyclic- and agricultural-culture forms within the Asian expression of Christianity, and to see how word-

³⁷ *Oxford Today* 19: 3 (2007), 4.

³⁸ See, for example from a Muslim perspective, H. TARMIDI TAHER. *Aspiring for the Middle Path: Religious Harmony in Indonesia*. Jakarta: Center for the Study of Islam and Society (CENSIS), 1997; MUHAMAD ALI. *Teologi Pluralis-Multikultural: Menghargai Kemajemukan Menjalin Kebersamaan*. Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2003; H. M. OASIM MATHAR, ED. *Sejarah, Teologi dan Etika Agama*. Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Interfidei/Dian, 2003.

and trade-culture expressions of Christianity can in our time be translated into cyclic forms.

Fourth, Asian theology, including public theology, therefore, is not simply a matter of engaging in word-culture exercises (in, for example, doctrine, ethics and polity). It is as much an expression of faith through liturgy, drama, dance, music, and communal living.

Fifth, the communal nature of expressing theology in Asia calls Asian Christians in particular to advance, at all opportunities, the eight goals of the Millennium Declaration (MDG) of the United Nations, that is, to

1. eradicate poverty and hunger;
2. achieve universal primary education;
3. promote gender equality and empower women;
4. reduce child mortality;
5. improve maternal health;
6. combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
7. ensure environmental sustainability; and
8. develop a global partnership for development ³⁹.

These are indeed expressions of Asian *theologiae in locō*.

Sixth, this way of communal harmony is necessary in the ways in which the Churches in the Asian region live their lives. Consensus decision-making, mutual celebration, the interest in others' rituals and festivities are important in the Asian way of being Christian.

³⁹ See http://www.un.org/millennium_goals/

Seventh, truth can be communicated without aggression. Therefore, the ecumenical movement in Asia, in and of itself, as it brings the Churches together, is central to the creation of peaceful communities for all.

We in our time live in a deeply ambivalent age, an age of high technology and of medieval conflict, and an age as strangely confident of the saving powers of the market-place as a previous age was strangely confident of the saving powers of collectivism. Yet both these ages have reflected inbuilt cultures of violence. In this age, Christians are called to follow Paul in speaking of, and living out, the wonder of God's mercy, peaceful harmony and reconciliation with humanity. Christians are thus called to a life of praise, which embraces all of our personal and social life, in all its practical, ethical, religious, political and intellectual aspects. That praise will be both culture-transforming and culture-renewing, over against the self-worship of individuals and nations in our time.

This vision of Christian community is eschatological in nature. It pictures the end of time as now already beginning to be operative. One of the great leaders of the ecumenical movement, Archbishop William Temple, served as Archbishop of Canterbury for only two years from 1942 to 1944. One of his lasting images to the ecumenical movement was that of the Christian with bi-focal lenses. In his writing he says that we should look through the top part of our glasses to see the church as God intends it to be, fully united. With the bottom of our lenses we see the church as it actually is, divided. Although we look at the church day by day with the bottom part of our spectacles, we should also always live as if the top part were reality, as if the church was already completely united.

So it is with the public theology of communities of peace. With the top part of our spectacles, as it were, we see a world community of peace and harmony. With the lower part of our spectacles, we observe the world as it is. Although we daily look at reality through the lower part, we must live as if the upper part is reality too. In the church, we have to model what fully harmonious and peaceful communities are. For that reason we need to use consensus models of discussion. We need in our Churches to celebrate peace. For Christians, it is not just *what* we do, but *how* we do *what* we do that is important. Just for a moment think of the violence of language structures and procedures in your Church. How can we speak of peace in the Asian region unless we model it? Perhaps the greatest enculturation or *theologia in locō* which we need in Asia is to express the style of our theological existence through Asian forms of peace. Our western inheritances in Asia have not always helped us in this. Public theology in Western Christianity has at times been violent. Where physical violence is less likely to occur, as in Western civil society discourse, is Christianity more likely to engage in violent language? Is this violent language more acceptable where faith is a private matter, and therefore the form of the language of theology has less relevance to civil society? Does the tendency to marginalisation and privatisation mean that the style of the language of public theology does not matter?

However, in cultures where violence is close to the surface, then the style of language and the methodologies of public theology are paramount. The way we express public theology, the way in which we preach, the ways in which we engage in the worship of God, the ways in which we engage in community services, the ways we live to express this שלום (*shālôm*).

The gospel is not pre-packaged by cultural particularity. Thus the styles of Christian public theology, both word and praxis, not just its agendas, must vary from culture to culture, if they are to reflect the same gospel. If public theology in each place lives in widely diverse cultures (which has been referred to as *glocal*), then for the whole people of God there can only be a true fullness of that public theology if there is true inter-confessional, inter-traditional, international, interracial and inter-cultural fellowship; for the church of Christ is a fellowship which transcends space and time.