**CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY**

**CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY WEEK AT THE NEW SOUTH WALES PARLIAMENT**

**PUBLIC LECTURE**

# "Islam and Christianity: Can the Two Live in Peace?"

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## Abstract

This public lecture deals with the inter-relationship of Christianity and Islam in the search for the creation of communities of peace around the world. It begins by looking at the violent worlds in which the two religions, particularly Christianity, began, and then goes on to look at the transformed communities of peace in the development of both religions, through examining the milieu of violence from which they developed, the transformed communities of peace then created, and the dynamics which

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created those transformed communities. It then goes on to observe the dynamics of peace and violence in the intercultural history of the two religions, by looking historically at cyclic-cultures and word-cultures and the interaction between the two, particularly as they relate to peace and violence. From this, the paper draws out conclusions on the experiences of peace and violence in relation to cultures.

**Introduction**

In this public lecture I wish to look at the inter-relationship of Christianity and Islam in the search for the creation of communities of peace around the world. In doing so, I speak as a Christian theologian, and must thus, in transparency, declare my theological basis. I begin by looking at the violent worlds in which the two religions, particularly Christianity, began, and then go on to look at the transformed communities of peace in the development of both religions, through examining the milieu of violence from which they developed, the transformed communities of peace then created, and the dynamics which created those transformed communities. In this I pay particular attention to Christianity, as it would be impudent of me to engage in too heavy analysis of Islam. In any case, there are others much better qualified than I to make such analysis of Islam. Nevertheless, I point to certain factors of significance in the history of Islam. I then go on to observe the dynamics of peace and violence in the intercultural history of the two religions, by looking historically at cyclic-cultures and word-cultures and the interaction between the two, particularly as they relate to peace and violence. From this, I seek to draw out conclusions on the experiences of peace and violence in relation to cultures. I do so not simply from a theoretical framework, but also from practical experience. I have had the privilege of lecturing in

Indonesia for over thirty-five years. During this time I have been involved in Christian – Muslim dialogue, both in Australia and in South-East Asia, particularly in Indonesia, over many years. Indeed, I have had the privilege of lecturing at the *Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (STAIN)*(The State Islamic University) in Malang. I have also had the joy of engaging in public dialogue with H.E. K.H. Abdurrachman Wahid (Gus Dur), former President of the Republic of Indonesia. However, more than that, at the request of the Indonesian authorities I was engaged in the peace process for the Molucca Islands (Kepulauan Maluku) in Indonesia between 2001 and 2005, when I took part in persuading the Christian population to engage in the peace talks, which mercifully have been very successful.

I speak as a Christian theologian. Who are we Christians? In theological terms, it is not precise to speak of our faith as "Christianity", as if it were some sort of ideology competing with other ideologies in the marketplace of ideas. Rather, we are the ones who bear the mark of Christ upon ourselves, symbolically on our foreheads, as it were [2] . In Rowan Williams' words, "(w)e carry the name of Christ. We are the people who are known for their loyalty to, their affiliation with, the historical person who was given the title of 'anointed monarch' by his followers – Jesus, the Jew of Nazareth" [3]. Our identity is not, first and foremost, as those who promote a particular ideology. Rather, it is as those who bear witness to God's action upon and within our personal and communal lives.

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[2] See WILLIAMS, R. "Christian Identity and Religious Plurality", in *Current Dialogue* 47 (2006), pp. 6 – 10.

[3] WILLIAMS, p. 6.

How do we listen to the voice of God? It is not our task as Christians 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, we need to take up this task theologically. 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.

**The Issue of Violence and Peace**

The three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam in historical order of appearance, were all born in a world of violence. Christianity began as a despised minority of a despised minority (Judaism) within the Roman Empire. Islam also knew struggle and violence, as did Judaism. However, within three centuries of being this despised minority of a despised minority, Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire. This Constantinian settlement had a profound impact on the church. Its immediate source documents (the New Testament) had been produced for a tiny community suffering persecution and violence. Now that Christianity was in a powerful position, how was it still possible to hear God's voice so clearly through them? In fact, the church found its symbiosis with state power so congenial that it found, for its future, life outside this situation difficult to contemplate. For Islam, too, the establishment of Islamic Sultanates and other forms of Islamic states provided great comfort after years of struggle. Equally, for Judaism, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 provided a symbiosis with state power unimagined in previous Jewish history. Christianity and Islam, along with Judaism, have known persecution, violence and oppression, but also congenial symbioses with state power.

In our current world it is, of course, essential that we seek communities of peace. That we should do so is important, for four reasons. First, as Christianity and Islam represent by far the largest religious communities in the world, they have a responsibility for the existence of violence and peace in our contemporary world. Both Christianity and Islam have as

their followers both the richest and the poorest on the planet. Second, despite its strong peace traditions, Christianity has been involved in violence at many times of its history. This is also so for Islam. Third, we differ from other world religions in being truly inter-ethnic and international. For example, in Australia the countries of origin or birth of Australian Muslims is wider in number than almost any other country in the world. Moreover, those countries are more evenly spread in terms of the numbers originating in each one of them. Fourth, Christianity and Islam, in their fourteen hundred years of common history, have both had ebb and flow in their influences. Throughout their common history there have been alternative advances and retreats for both faiths. Moreover, when Christianity or Islam has advanced in one place, it has often retreated in others. Where either of them has retreated in one area, often that one has advanced in another area. In this the dynamics of their history has often been similar. [4]

Moreover, the contemporary reality of our world 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. There is a pattern, in the words of Samuel Kobia, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, which "legitimatizes a culture of violence by invoking God arbitrarily to suit a particular agenda for aggression. As a result, insecurity, fear and anxiety characterize the lives of many people" [5] .

This culture of violence manifests itself in many different ways.

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[4] See, for example, MOFFETT, S. H. *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Vol 1. San Francisco: Harper, 1992; GILLMAN, I. and KLIMKEIT, H. J. *Christians in Asia before 1500*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002.

[5] 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.

There is the structural violence of domineering or negligent governments in relation to their populations. Corruption and the abuse of power often manifest themselves in violence. There are often structural forms of traditional violence. 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, 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. I have myself been witness to a very significant process of reconciliation between Christians and Muslims. Between 2001 and 2005 I took part in the reconciliation process between Christians and Muslims in the Molucca Islands in Indonesia, where I had worked and carried out research in the 1970s and 1980s. Both Muslims and Christians were involved 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. Towards 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. At the beginning of the dedication of the mosque, Christians brought the *tifa* (the equipment used in Indonesia 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. At the beginning of the dedication of the church, Muslims, 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.

**Violence and Transformed Communities of Peace**

As a Christian I need now to look at this phenomenon of violence and peace from the perspective of the birth of Christianity. 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 that violent world.

On the basis of our theological identity in Christ, we as Christians must take the New Testament writings, in this case as regards to community, most seriously. 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*. It is arguable that no document in Christian history has played a more influential part than Paul's *Letter to the Romans*. One simply has to reflect on the pivotal impact of *Romans* on Augustine and the development of Western Christianity, on Luther and then on Calvin and Cranmer and the political, social, and religious consequences of the Reformation, on Wesley and the emergence of the Evangelical Revival, on Karl Barth and his dominance of Twentieth Century Theology, and on

the Second Vatican Council and the Renewal of the Roman Catholic Church. A primary impetus for Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Wesley, Barth, and the Members of Vatican II came from Paul's writings, particularly from *Romans.* This letter is thus central to Christian self-identity and self-understanding. It forms a useful basis for the exploration of the understanding of Christian community based on identification with God in Christ, as it challenges the prevailing Greco-Roman culture of status based on potentially violent concepts through the ethical sections of *Romans*, particularly in Chapter 12.

**The Milieu of Violence**

In order to understand this ideal concept of community, we need to understand that it both reacts against, and transforms, Graeco-Roman cultures of the first century C E. We need, first, of course to look at the results of socio-scientific research on first century C E social organisation, on social interaction, and on religious organisations. We see parallels with this in the emergence of Islam.

As noted above, Christianity grew out of a situation of oppression, a despised minority of a despised minority. The rise of Islam in the Seventh Century of Christianity was not so oppressive, but involved an enormous struggle from a tiny minority. We look at the struggle Christianity to create communities of peace in this world of violence. We look, initially, at the world into which it was born.

*First*, in the world of Early Christianity, social groupings were based on kinship, ethnic issues, power, and politics. Kinship was the central factor of social organisation. The kinship group was the focus of individual loyalty, and had decisive influence over individual identity and self-

awareness. The security of each individual was grounded in the community, sharing as they did common interests, values and activities. Hence, the most basic unit of social awareness was not the individual. Individual consciousness was subordinate to social consciousness. [6] This dyadic consciousness too was the background for Islam.

*Second*, religion, like other social factors, was enmeshed in kinship and politics. Membership of a religious community was not necessarily based on religious relationships, but on bonds of kinship that gave structure to religious associations. Membership in religious groups was either involuntary or voluntary. Involuntary members belonged to a religion because, for example, they were born into a particular family. Voluntary membership in early Christianity stood in contrast to family-based religion. In the first century C E the religion of voluntary members resulted in a newly-created kinship group. [7] 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. Indeed, the struggle of the Christian community as a totality, for example in Rome, can be seen in relationship to these two types. It struggled as to which of these two types it in fact belonged. Again, a similar background existed with rise of Islam.

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[6] 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.

[7] 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.

*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. [8] Again, there is some evidence of this with the rise of Islam.

*Fourth*, in such an atmosphere, concern for honour and shame was significant. This was because honour determined social standing and was essential for social cooperation. Honour was the outward approval given to a group or an individual by others whose honour was not in question. The honour of an individual normally was dependent upon the outward approval given to one's group. On the other hand, people became shamed when they transgressed group standards or when they sought a social status to which public approval was not given. Honour was ascribed, for example, by birth into an honourable family, or by it being given or bestowed from honourable persons of power. It was acquired by outdoing others in social interchange. A person's sense of self-worth was therefore established by public reputation related to that person's associations rather than by a judgment of conscience. [9] This is not foreign to the experience of the early development and theological struggles of Islam.

## Transformed Communities of Peace

[8] PEARSON, L. *PopularEthics 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.

[9] MALINA, op.cit., 27-48.

Over against these four factors of community life in the Greco-Roman cultures of the first century C E, Paul summons Christians to a new form of religious organisation, a fictive kinship religious community based on identity in Christ in which membership is voluntary, and also to new social roles. These social roles are based on the twin concepts of peace or harmony, and mercy, in a complex of cultures where expressions of violence seem not only to have been common, but also accepted, as has been noted.

To understand the significance of peace or harmony, and the related concept of mercy, in Paul's writings, it is helpful first to look more widely in the New Testament at the Greek words commonly translated *peace* and *mercy*.

There are strong communal elements in the New Testament uses of *peace* and of *mercy*. There are also strong elements of God's desire for a world which ultimately is to be under God's rule. These factors we see as we look at the two concepts more closely.

The Greek word "εἰρήνη" (*eirēnē*) means *harmony* and *peace*. The verb "εἰρηνεύω" (*eirēneuō*) signifies *to be at peace* or *to live at peace* or *to keep the peace*. *Eirēnē* is also closely associated with the Hebrew term for *peace* and *harmony*, "שלום" (*shālôm*).

In the New Testament, *eirēnē* refers to two distinct states of peace. *First*, it means the final salvation and harmony of the whole community, and thus of the whole of each individual person. Zechariah proclaims this expected state of salvation and harmony of the whole community in Luke 1: 76 – 79. The Angels' Song in Luke 2: 14 refers to this salvation and

harmony which has come to the earth. This concept is again referred to in Hebrews 13: 20 – 21. It is this idea of peace which Paul himself uses in II Corinthians 5: 16 – 19. There he speaks about Christian believers, being justified by grace in faith, having peace with God through Christ. These believers, Paul says, will be granted salvation. So the concept has a future orientation, referring to the final end of history.

*Second*, on the basis of its future orientation, *eirēnē* refers to a condition here and now of peace and harmony, guaranteed by what will occur at the end of time. This divinely-willed state in the here and now includes Christians' well-being, and their harmony with God, with one another and with all human beings. This idea appears in Hebrews 12: 14. Paul uses it in Ephesians 4: 1 – 3. So, again, the concept has also a present orientation. This present orientation refers in the first instance to the state of the whole community, and then to the individual as part of it.

The First Century C E Greek terms for *mercy* are "οίκτιρμός" (*oiktirmos*) and "έλεος" (*eleos*). Both refer to *mercy* and *compassion*, while *oiktirmos* additionally means *pity*. The verbs "έλεέω" (*eleeō*) and "έλεάω" (*eleaō*) mean *to show kindness* or *to be merciful*. Human mercy, therefore, denotes the divinely intended attitude of Christians towards others. It signifies sympathy and loving-kindness, which are to be exhibited in relationships, particularly through acts of help to the needy. This we see in Matthew 9: 13, in relation to Jesus' attitude to eating with outsiders, and in Luke 10: 37, in relation to Jesus defining the neighbour who may be an outsider. The neighbour was indeed none other than the despised outsider who showed mercy to the person on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell among thieves.

Thus, in the definitions of both of these terms as they were used in the New Testament, we see sustained communal elements, and also sustained pointers to the ideal of a society which is ultimately to be under God's rule. An example of this is in *Romans*. In Romans 12: 1 Paul describes Christian life against the background of these terms, using metaphors from the sacrificial cult. This cult spoke of the offering of the central parts of a community's life to the power of God. For Christians, this is now to suggest that Christians are to give themselves permanently to the rule of God, as this way has been opened for them through God's self-sacrifice in Christ. The sacrificial cult continues to point to the rule of God throughout the community. It also points to an individual's relationship with God within the community's relationship with God. This is based on Paul's theological argument in Romans 5: 1 and 9 – 10, where he describes how *peace* (*eirēnē*) and *reconciliation* ("καταλλαγή"; *katallagē*) have been given by God to God's community in Christ.

**The Dynamics of Transformed Communities**

So, if we now return to Paul, and specifically to *Romans*, we can observe how he deals with the four factors of community life in Greco-Roman culture outlined above.

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 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. Within Islam, we see parallel dynamics, particularly in relation to the formation and ongoing life of the *umma*.

The social groupings thus 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. Again, we can notice parallels with the development of the Islamic *umma*.

However, for Christianity, there is another factor of immense significance. 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. Again, we should note the parallels with Islam, particularly in relation to the other "Peoples of the Book",

Christians and Jews, for example in Muslim ordinances in relation to Muslim marriage to a Christian or Jew.

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 total 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.

**Religion in intercultural history**

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.

**Cyclic culture**

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. [10]

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.

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[10] 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.

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

Within Western trading Christianity of course comes the European Enlightenment. Here we see radical changes, but they develop within Western Christianity. Revelation, especially communal revelation, now has to prove its claim. The European Enlightenment does not deny the Christian faith, or indeed any religion, its place. That place is fundamentally in the private sphere. The Enlightenment relativises the Christian faith's exclusive claims, and thus places it firmly in the area of the individual's personal rights. Christianity, in this view, is thus no

longer fundamentally communal. It is one logical development of Christianity in a *word-culture*.

**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 parts of the Outer Islands of Indonesia, in North-East India, in much of the Pacific and in parts of Central, East and West Africa. 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 cultural terms of the indigenous community. This occurred too in Australia. In China, Japan, and India, parts of the population was antagonised by Christianity. With the spread of Islam, such dynamics occur too. However, here the dynamics are the opposite of those experienced by Christianity. For Islam they have been largely how a faith carried on a *word- and trading-culture* could be transferred to a *cyclic- and agricultural culture*. [11]

In all of this, Christians need to be reminded of the teachings of the New Testament, epitomised in Paul as we have seen, where Paul's ethics for *internal* 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 Christian 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

[11] On this issue in general, see further 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; 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; KITAGAWA, J. M. *The Christian Tradition beyond European Captivity.* Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992.

transfiguration. It needs to hear the voice in word form so as 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 too 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 Germany in the 1930s. Fourth, it is observed in the antagonism between specific traditions of Islam and certain traditions of Christianity in the United States. Fifth, in his Cyril Foster Lecture in the University of Oxford, the former British Foreign Secretary 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 has been to recapture civic political culture by finding ways of allowing space for these affiliations within a framework of shared values. [12]

**Religion, Culture and Theology**

[12] *Oxford Today* 19: 3 (2007), 4.

Therefore, a number of things are incumbent upon us. *First*, we need to be aware that creating communities of peace from the Pauline tradition means creating attitudes of peace and harmony towards those *outside* which are the same as to those *within* the faith-community. [13] Here Christianity has significant parallels with Islam.

*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 the New Testament, and specifically Pauline, teaching, in that they can tend to an aggressive attitude to those *outside the community*, while fostering cohesiveness within the faith-group. Again, there is resonance with such tendencies in Islam.

*Third*, we need to stress the importance of cyclic- and agricultural-culture forms within the expressions of Christianity, and to see how word- and trade-culture expressions of Christianity can in our time be translated into cyclic forms. [14]

*Fourth*, 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.

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[13] See, for example from a Muslim perspective, H. TARMIJI 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.

[14] HAIRE, pp. 320 – 326.

*Fifth*, the communal nature of expressing theology calls both Christians and Muslims in particular to advance, at all opportunities, the eight goals of the Millennial 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 [15].

These are indeed expressions of communities of peace.

*Sixth*, this way of communal harmony is necessary in the ways in which the churches live their lives. Consensus decision-making, mutual celebration, the interest in others' rituals and festivities are important in being Christian. Here too there are parallels in Islam.

*Seventh*, truth can be communicated without aggression. [16] Therefore, the ecumenical movement internationally, in and of itself, as it brings the

[15] See http://www.un.org/millennium goals/

[16] See, for example, in the history of asian Islam and Asian Christianity, LEIMENA, J. "De Ontmoeting der Rassen in de Kerk", in *De Opwekker*, 1941, 626 – 642; SIMATUPANG, T. B. *Tugas Kristen dalam Revolusi* ("The Christian Task in the Revolution"). Jakarta: Badan Penerbit Kristen, 1967; 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; SIMATUPANG, T. B. *Keselamatan Masa Kini* ("Salvation Today"). Jakarta: Badan Penerbit Kristen, 1973;V AN 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. (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.)

churches together, is central to the creation of peaceful communities. [17] Again, the style of interfaith dialogue, particularly between Christianity and Islam, is pivotal in creating societies of peace.

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. As we seek models to overcome violence around the globe, Paul's picture of the Christian community as a vehicle of transformation to overcome violence is a powerful and liberating word. Much of this vision is reflected too in Islam.

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 Christian 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

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[17] 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.*

he says that we should look through the top part of our glasses to see the church and the world as God intends it to be, united and in harmony. With the bottom of our lenses we see the church and the world as it actually is, divided. Although we look at life day by day with the bottom part of our spectacles, we should also always live as if the top part were reality, as if there was true harmony in the world. So it is with 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.