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PUBLIC LECTURE

"Where lies Happiness? The Christian Understanding of Contentment and

Community"

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Introduction

The questions which I wish to address are:

- The basis of the Christian understanding of happiness and contentment

- Christian understanding of community

- Societal dynamics today and disintegration of community

- Christian response to threats to contentment and community

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

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

[3] Williams, *op.cit.*, 6.

ideology. Rather, it is as those who bear witness to God's action upon and within our personal and communal lives.

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, in its strictly theological sense, 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 Happiness

For Christianity, the question of "Where lies Happiness?" needs to be placed within the context outlined above.   For Christians, the life of peace and harmony described above presents a view of where contentment is.   It relates contentment with community, in that the existence of the church points to community as associated with a sense of peace and harmony.   Happiness for Christianity, then, would primarily be related to the concepts of harmony, peace and community, all under God's graceful action in the world.   Happiness thus is a given, rather than something to be strived for.   For this reason, Christianity at heart will be bemused at the need to think of actively searching for happiness.   Nevertheless, Christianity would look with great compassion on those who do not have a sense of the given-ness, indeed the God-given-ness, of happiness, that is, those who, as mentioned above, from Christianity's perspective find their self-identity solely within themselves, and find their self-justification and sole solace in themselves alone.   If the search for happiness is to be a substitute for this given-ness within Christianity, then Christianity will clearly appreciate that others may very well need to fill the void, or find a substitute.   This search for happiness may well be the burden of modernity.   Nevertheless, Christianity will also feel compelled to point out to followers of Christ and others where it believes enterprises based on marketing happiness may well be misguided

In recent times the issue of happiness has become the basis of a major marketing industry[4].   While in the past an individual might seek help in attaining happiness from the clergy, from a psychologist or a counsellor, or even a guru, today the marketplace seems to provide the answer.   As Hamilton points out[5], the result of this manifests itself in a variety of ways.   The acquisition of goods can be seen as a way of producing both happiness and security.   This relates also to the issue of self-esteem.   Self-esteem again is closely related to the branding of goods.   This has resulted in the democratisation of the luxury market[6].   Brands formerly considered to be luxury goods, and therefore only available to the very wealthy, are now available to everyone.   Therefore a person's identity can now associated with particular brands.

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[4] I am greatly indebted here, and in the following paragraphs, to my colleague, Professor Clive Hamilton AM. In particular, see C. Hamilton, "Against the Pursuit of Happiness: A Talk to the Sydney Writers' Festival, 27th May 2006".

[5] Hamilton, *op. cit.,* 2.

[6] Hamilton, *op.cit.*, 2 - 3.

Again, Hamilton points to the words of the head of planning at an international advertising agency: "Most people do not have a sense of self-worth. Buying luxury goods makes us feels special and successful. They make us feel valuable in a world that often tests out sense of self-worth"[7]. Australians are among the hardest working people in the world, despite the slogan of Australia being "the land of the long weekend". Insecurity and overwork fuel the growth of luxury goods as people reward themselves for working harder. Consumerism can now dominate our lives, so that even most large Australian airports have now become shopping malls[8]. As Hamilton points out, the influence of marketing goes to an incredible extent. A magazine can advertise a motor vehicle with the line: "Porsche's new baby, an excellent reason to delay yours"[9].

Individualisation, personal anxiety and discontent have made great advances. In *Affluenza*, Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss report that 13% of Australia adults at any one time experience high or very high levels of psychological distress while a further 23% report moderate levels of distress.[10] As a result of this, as Hamilton suggests[11], there has developed the self-help industry aimed at lightening the burden, an example of which is the work by Stephanie Dowrick entitled *Choosing Happiness* which includes headings such as "Trust yourself as a source of happiness". The icon of individualisation seems to be Madonna. She reinvents herself as a different person every three or four years. So far she has been among other things: an icon of female sexual power; a Scottish lady of the manor; and an international philanthropist. Normally for her, each change of identity appears to be related to a change of partner. However, what is important here is that she represents a high point of individualisation.

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[7] Hamilton, *op. cit.,* 3.

[8] Hamilton, *op. cit*., 4.

[9] Hamilton, *op. cit.,* 5.

[10] C. Hamilton and R. Denniss, *Affluenza: When Too Much is Never Enough.* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2005, 114 - 115.

[11] Hamilton, "Against the Pursuit of Happiness", 6; S. Dowrick, in collaboration with Catherine Greer, *Choosing Happiness: Life and Soul Essentials*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2005.

In analysing Australian society I find that one of the most helpful sources of information is that of the house planning of the middle and upper middle class in socio-economic terms. These groups like to live in the outer suburbs in semi-rural conditions, while at the same time, if possible, being no more than 45 minutes form the CBD. The illusion of bush-living is associated with work in the city. There is no celebration of the city as in 19th century Europe. It speaks of isolation at home despite work in the city.

However, there is a central unresolved tension here. On the one hand, there is a high degree of individualisation with all its anxieties and all the therapies necessary to deal with that. This simply builds on Jean-Paul Satre when he said "hell is other people". This can be seen in:

- The rise of individualism
- The delusion of the self-esteem movement
- The rise of victimology
- The growth in short-cuts to happiness (chocolate, red wine and sex!)

On the other hand, there is the immense desire for community. This includes the following factors;

- The need to focus on the human not the material
- Working for others, not self
- Seeking benefits that have value in themselves
- Striving for community

The Issue of Community

The contemporary reality of our world continues to be one of violence. The irony of the ending of the Cold War is that it has coincided with the new unleashing of regional and ethnic 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" [12] .

This culture of violence manifests itself in many different ways.
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.

Transformed Communities
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

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[12] S. Kobia, quoted in World Council of Churches News Release entitled "Restating the Ecumenical Vision demands Conversion, says Kobia", Geneva, 15/02/2005. Cf. J Burton. *Conflict: Resolution and Provention*. London: Macmillan Press, 1990, 1 – 2; 13 – 24; S. Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has declined* . New York, Viking, 2011.

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.

Transforming Community

In order to understand this ideal concept of community, we need to understand that it both reacts against, and transforms, Greco-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. [13] 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. [14] 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.

Third, 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

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

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

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. [15]   This is not foreign to the experience of the early development and theological struggles of Islam.

Transformed Communities

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.

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[15] Malin, *op.cit.*, 27 - 48.

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 "οἰκτιρμός" (*oiktirmos*) and "ἔλεος" (*eleos*). Both refer to *mercy* and *compassion*, while *oiktirmos* additionally means *pity*. The verbs "ἐλεέω" (*eleeō*) and "ἐλεάω" (*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.

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.

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.

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.

Community, Security and Contentment 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.

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. [16]

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 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.

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,

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[16] As in the first words of the *Pirqê Abôth*. See H. Danby,. *The Mishnah* (translated from the Hebrew by H. Danby), "The Fathers" ("Pirqê Abôth"). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933, 446 – 461.

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 cultures in the creation of community

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*. [17]

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.

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 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.

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. [18]

Contentment, Community and Theology

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[17] On this issue in general, see further R.H.S. Boyd, *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; J. Haire, *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; J. M. Kitagawa, *The Christian Tradition beyond European Captivity.* Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992.

[18] *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.

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.

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. [19]

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.

Fifth, the communal nature of expressing theology calls both Christians and Muslims 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 [20].

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[19] Haire, *op. cit*., pp. 320 – 326.

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.

Seventh, truth can be communicated without aggression.   Therefore, the ecumenical movement internationally, in and of itself, as it brings the churches together, is central to the creation of peaceful communities. [21]

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.

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 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

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

[21] See, for example, M. M. Thomas and P. Abrecht, eds., *World Conference on Church and Society: Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of our Time*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967, *passim.*

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.

The Christian Concept of Contentment, Happiness and Community

The Christian concept of community is based on the fact that humans self-identify within community. They are therefore anti-individualistic in terms of meaning. People exist in community. Those churches, many as they are, which latch on to the happiness industry and the prosperity Doctrine churches, are in fact fraudulent representations of the heart of Christianity and have no connection with the New Testament understanding of contentment, happiness and community. A movement away from such misguided concepts of Christianity is seen in the revival of interest in the Trinitarian doctrine of "God- in-Community" and in wider Eastern Orthodox concepts currently being explored in Western theology**.** Christianity sees existence as "to love God and to enjoy Him forever" in answer to the question : "What is the chief end of man? (*sic*)." [22] Christian theology does not speak of striving for happiness. Rather it speaks of the assumption that all is secure in God's hands and that there is to be eternal contentment at the end of history. It therefore does not set us up to strive for happiness. Rather we are set up to live in contentment in the certainty that all will be well. However, all cannot be well unless there is wellness for all. Of itself, for Christianity, contentment is something that is assured, and individual striving for happiness of itself is something that is bound to fail, and in any case is not the primary intent of human living.

Thus we reach two principles:

1. Christianity stands over against all misguided, and at times fraudulent, activities of the happiness industry.
2. Community is at the heart of all human happiness.

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[22] *Westminster Shorter Catechism,* Question 1.