From Malaysia to the Ends of the Earth

Southeast Asian and Diasporic Contributions to Biblical and Theological Studies

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Edited By
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Acknowledgments

While we invited others who could not participate for various reasons, the editors are delighted to have worked with each of the scholars who have contributed to this volume. Some of them worked diligently even when impeded starting in March 2020 by the coronavirus outbreak.

The pandemic also inhibited access to the Fuller Seminary campus and library for Elaine when she was a visiting fellow hosted by the Global Research Institute and the Center for Missiological Research at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California, during the first half of 2020. However, the time afforded by the fellowship enabled her to carry out some of her editorial responsibilities.

The editors are grateful to Yosam Manafa, Amos's graduate assistant, for help with formatting the entire volume according to Claremont Press's preferred style sheet.

We have allowed American or British spelling to stand, as preferred by our contributors.

Table of Contents

Part III
Missiology, Practical Theology, and Christian Education

Introduction:
Theologizing in Contemporary Malaysia – Prospects and Opportunities

Jonathan Yun-Ka Tan and Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan

When one thinks of Malaysia, the first thing that comes to mind is usually not the theological contributions of Malaysian Christians. Nevertheless, Malaysia features a growing and vibrant theological community if measured by the existence of its various seminaries and related educational institutions affiliated with the Asia Theological Association and the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia. On the global stage, one is able to observe an increasing number of Malaysians who have attained terminal degrees in the theological arena in North America, Europe (particularly, Britain), and Asia. While many of these PhDs in biblical and theological studies return to teach or work otherwise in Malaysia, a growing number are also living out their theological vocation around the world.

The wager of this volume is that, in a globalizing and postcolonial twenty-first century, Malaysian biblical scholars and theologians can contribute to a wide range of broader conversations out of the particularity of their own experience and perspective. Specifically, this volume brings together in one place for the first time leading Malaysian biblical scholars and theologians who seek, cumulatively, to advance the discussion on two fronts: one, centripetally vis-à-vis the specific opportunities and challenges confronting Malaysian Christians living in West Malaysia and East Malaysia, and two, centrifugally in relationship to the church evangelical-ecumenical and the theological academy writ large. It is driven by the gradual but palpable maturation of biblical and theological scholarship on the Malaysian ground as well as its various diasporic trajectories.

On the one hand, teachers and students in Malaysian institutions of theological education will benefit from a Malaysia-

centric set of analytical perspectives even as the church catholic and the broader biblical and theological guilds will also gain from the self-critical witnesses unleashed out of a postcolonial and diasporic Malaysian academy. On the other hand, although the works of Malaysian biblical scholars and theologians may not be as prominent and well-studied, compared to the contemporary biblical and theological scholarship from Latin America, Africa, or even India and the Philippines in Asia, nonetheless, they are just as useful for biblical scholars and theologians in Europe and North America who may be wrestling with the challenges and implications of the rapid growth in transnational migration transforming contemporary Europe and North America. Living in a multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural, and pluri-religious society, Malaysian Christian biblical scholars and theologians have a wealth of experiences and insights which would be relevant for biblical and theological scholarship in contemporary Europe and North America where traditional Eurocentric Christianity is increasingly no longer the dominant or normative voice. Grappling with their theological worldviews, methodologies, and approaches in response to cultural diversity and religious pluralism, biblical scholars and theologians in Europe and North America could learn a great deal from how their Malaysian colleagues have responded theologically to the cultural diversity and religious pluralism in contemporary Malaysia.

In order to understand and appreciate the insights of Malaysian biblical scholars and theologians, the majority of this Introduction seeks to present the readers of this book who may not know much about Malaysia with a brief history of Malaysia, its diverse peoples and religions, as well as familiarize them with a discussion of the contemporary socio-political realities, so as to provide a context for understanding the discussions and analysis by the various Malaysian biblical scholars and theologians. The final section of this Introduction will introduce the readers to the specific Malaysian scholars and their contributions to this volume from diverse perspectives. Hopefully, the contributions by these Malaysian biblical and theological voices could become a major catalyst for a creative and constructive biblical theological scholarship for the church and the academy in Malaysia and across the world.

Malaysia: The Land and Its History

Located 4° north of the Equator in Southeast Asia, Malaysia comprises two distinct regions: West Malaysia or Peninsular Malaysia (*Semenanjung Malaysia*), which extends southwards from the Isthmus of Kra in Southern Thailand, and East Malaysia, which comprises the two states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo some 650 km across the South China Sea from West Malaysia. Strategically located between the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, Peninsular Malaysia and the island of Borneo were historically havens from the monsoons for merchant ships plying the lucrative trade route between India and China.

Peninsular Malaysia

Long before the advent of the Portuguese, Dutch, and English colonizers, the two great ancient civilizations of India and China greatly influenced the region which encompassed modern-day Peninsular Malaysia and introduced Hinduism and Buddhism into the land. The earliest known kingdom was the Buddhist Kingdom of Langkasuka in Patani (Kedah), which existed during the fourth to the sixth centuries CE.[1] Langkasuka was a vassal state of the Fou-nan Empire which stretched from Annam (Vietnam) to the region that is now modern-day Peninsular Malaysia.[2] In the seventh century CE, the Buddhist Sri Vijaya Empire from Palembang (Sumatra) overran the Fou-nan Empire, conquered the peninsula some time during 689 to 692, and used it as a base to control maritime traffic along the Straits of Malacca.[3] In 1025, the Sri Vijaya Empire was in turn overwhelmed by the Indian Buddhist King Rajendrachola I, and became a vassal of the Indian-Buddhist Chola empire.[4] However, the final blow to the Sri Vijaya Empire came during 1338 to 1365 when it fell to the Malay-Hindu Majapahit Empire of Java.

Islam was peacefully introduced into Peninsular Malaysia as early as the thirteenth century CE by traders and missionaries from the Muslim port kingdom of Pasai (Aceh), who brought Islam as far inland as Terengganu, judging from a stone inscribed in 1326 or 1386

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[1] Richard O. Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1962), 18, 24, 28.
[2] Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History*, 28.
[3] Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History*, 29.
[4] Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History*, 30.

with the oldest known specimen of Malay-Arabic script.[5] Islam was firmly entrenched during the era of the Melaka Sultanate when Parameswara, who was the first ruler of Melaka, embraced Islam in 1414 and adopted the name of Megat Iskandar Shah. In 1445, Muzaffar Shah assumed the title of *Sultan* and decreed Islam to be the official religion of the Melaka Empire. Under the patronage of successive *Sultans*, Islam spread throughout the peninsula as well as the island of Borneo. Much of the Islamic missionary work was done by Indian Gujarati missionaries, who bequeathed the Sufi form of Islam to the region.

The early years of the sixteenth century saw successive flotillas of warships bringing the European colonial powers and Christian missionaries: the Portuguese in 1511, the Dutch in 1641 and the British in 1786. In 1511, Alfonso d'Albuquerque captured Melaka for Portugal. However, Portugal lost possession of Melaka to the Dutch in 1641. The English influence began in 1786 with the arrival of a British expedition led by Sir Francis Light, who hoisted the Union Jack in Pulau Pinang (the island of Penang). The British took control of Singapore in 1819, Melaka in 1824, and Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Pahang in the 1870s–1880s.[6] With the transfer of the four northern states of Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, and Terengganu from Siamese suzerainty to Britain in 1909, as well as Johor which sought a British adviser in 1914, the entire peninsula came under both *de jure* and *de facto* British domination.[7]

Under British colonial rule, Chinese coolies were brought in to work in the ports and tin mines, while Indian indentured laborers were brought in to work in the rubber plantations. The Malays were kept out of the bustling economy and were encouraged to remain as

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[5] Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History*, 32.

[6] The British imposed direct colonial rule over Pulau Pinang, Melaka, and Singapore, all of which were Crown Colonies that comprised the Straits Settlements, while the four states of Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang were, strictly speaking, Malay states under the protection of the British Crown, which organized these states as the Federated Malay States (*Negeri-negeri Melayu Bersekutu*).

[7] Unlike the four states of Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang, which were, legally speaking, protected states (or protectorates) that made up the Federated Malay States, the northern states of Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, and Terengganu, together with Johor, collectively known as the Unfederated Malay States (*Negeri-negeri Melayu Tidak Bersekutu*) remained nominally autonomous although they came under *de facto* British colonial influence with the appointment of British advisers to the various sultans of these states. For further discussion, see Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History*, 53–95.

farmers and fishermen as a result of an "Edwardian nostalgia" which argued for the preservation of the "simple life of the Malays."[8] Adopting a paternalistic policy of *divide et impera* in order to maintain absolute political and economic control, the British colonial administration deliberately promoted ethnic divisions and encouraged the creation and entrenchment of multiple ethnic ghettos, each looking after its own interests vis-à-vis the others. Politically, each ethnic community was governed by its leaders who reported to the British colonial administration: the Malays by the *Sultans* and the Chinese and Indians by their *Kapitans*. The Malays were forced to share political power with the British, but had no role in the economy, while the Chinese shared economic power but had no role in politics, and the Indians remained at the bottom of the table, with minimal economic and political influence.

Sabah and Sarawak

Sabah and Sarawak formed part of the ancient Brunei Sultanate which at one time controlled the entire island of Borneo. Sabah came into existence as a commercial venture when the U.S. Consul to Brunei, Claude Lee Moses secured a 10-year lease for part of Sabah from the Sultan of Brunei in 1865. He sold his rights to Joseph W. Torrey, who in turn assigned his rights to Gustavus Baron de Overbeck, the Austrian Counsel-General in Hong Kong in 1875. In 1880, Baron de Overback assigned his interest in Sabah to Alfred Dent of the British North Borneo Company and Sabah became known as British North Borneo. The British North Borneo Company embarked on several land acquisition ventures from the Brunei Sultanate until 1905, when the State reached the boundaries which exist to the present day. In 1946, British North Borneo was turned over to the British Crown. Sarawak was given by the Sultan of Brunei to the English explorer and adventurist, Sir James Brooke, in 1844 as a reward for pacifying the marauding pirates who plundered coastal settlements. Sir James Brooke made himself the "White Rajah" and founded a dynasty which lasted three generations. Sarawak remained the private fiefdom of the Brooke family until 1946 when Sir Charles Vyner Brooke, the last "White Rajah" of Sarawak, abdicated and surrendered the state to the British Crown.

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[8] David Lim, *Economic Growth and Development in West Malaysia: 1947–1970* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1973), 60.

The Peoples of Malaysia

Contemporary Malaysia is a multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural, and pluri-religious society. According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, the population of Malaysia is 28.3 million, of which 94.32 percent live in Peninsular Malaysia, 3.21 percent in Sabah and 2.47 percent in Sarawak. The main ethnic groups are the Malays and other indigenous peoples, collectively classified as "Bumiputeras" by the Malaysian government and comprising 67.4 percent of the total population, followed by the Chinese at 24.6 percent, Indians at 7.3 percent, and 0.7 percent others.[9]

The Malays

The Malays (*Melayu*) were the earliest migrants in Malaysia, arriving in a series of migratory waves from the Yunnan province in southern China between 2500 and 1500 BCE.[10] They are by culture Indian-Hindu and by religion Muslim. Much of the Indian-Hindu influence on the Malay culture came through the Hindu Majapahit Empire and elements of Indian-Hindu influence can still be seen today in the Malay language or *Bahasa Melayu*,[11] customary rituals,[12] court ceremonies,[13] and the *wayang kulit*.[14] With the Islamization of

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[9] Malaysia Department of Statistics, "Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010," released July 29, 2011, accessed February 11, 2021, https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemeByCat&cat=117&bul_id=MDMxdHZjWTk1SjFzTzNkRXYzcVZjdz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09#.

[10] Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History*, 14.

[11] Examples of Hindu-Sanskrit words which are a part of modern Malay language or *Bahasa Melayu* include *agama* (religion), *upacara* (ritual), *dewa* (god), *dewi* (goddess), *karya* (creation), *puja* (worship), *naga* (dragon), *negeri* (state), *negara* (nation), *bangsa* (race), *sabda* (divine word or testimony), and *raja* (king).

[12] For example, the *bersanding* or matrimonial ceremony in a Malay wedding blends both Islamic and Hindu elements and has its parallel in Indian marriages and its origins in the Hindu concept of kingship. See Richard O. Winstedt, *The Malays: A Cultural History*, 5th ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 28–30.

[13] The Malay enthronement and royal ceremonies of Perak and Negeri Sembilan, "though covered today with a decent Muslim veneer, still retains all the elements of the Hindu ritual." In Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History*, 26.

[14] The *wayang kulit* was introduced by the Majapahit rulers of Java. Its plots are taken from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Before each performance, the *Tok Dalang,* who wears a yellow scarf and claims to be an incarnation of Vishnu, makes offerings to Siva, the patron deity of the actors, as well as the demigods of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History*, 28.

the Malay community from the beginning of the thirteenth century, Islam superseded the former Hindu and Buddhist civilizations.

Islam has shown itself to be remarkably flexible in inculturating itself with animistic and Hindu elements among the Malays. Notwithstanding their Islamic faith, the *bomoh* and *pawang* who, as shamans and mediators with spirits, ghosts and demons, and performers of magic rituals which affect the passages of birth, life, love, and death, as well as the agriculture cycle of rice-planting and harvesting, continue to exert great influence on the lives of the Malays, rustics and urbane city dwellers alike. In this regard, many Malays continue to believe in the *semangat* (spirit) as the vital life force which is present in all living as well as inanimate objects such as leaves, stones, branches, and metal, and is the basis for the continuing belief in spirits and demonic possession.[15] Related to the doctrine of *semangat* is the doctrine of *keramat*, which is a corruption of the Sufi practice of "veneration of the saints."[16]

According to the definition of a Malay person in the Malaysian Federal Constitution, Islam is the defining essence of the Malay identity.[17] Mixed marriages were common in the past when the Islamic laws were not stringently enforced. This resulted in the Eurasian Portuguese-Malay community in Melaka and the Sino-Malay *Peranakan* or *Baba-Nyonya* community in Malaysia and Singapore. In practice, the contemporary Malay ethnic tradition is embodied in the Islamic religion, the Malay language or *Bahasa Melayu*, and the *Adat*[18] or customary traditions and usages of the

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[15] Winstedt, *The Malays*, 19–20. See also M.M.A. Rauf, *A Brief History of Islam with Special Reference to Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1964), 86–89.

[16] "A Malay *Keramat* is not only a saint or the grave of a saint who can interfere in the life of men and intercede on their behalf; *Keramat* can also be a tiger, a crocodile or an object endowed with certain magical powers." In Rauf, *Brief History of Islam*, 89.

[17] Article 160(1) of the Malaysian Federation Constitution defines a "Malay" as "a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, and conforms to Malay custom."

[18] The *Adat* regulates the behavior and actions of the Malay community. Its origin is rooted in the pre-Islamic ancestral tradition and was originally brought by the Malays to the Malay Peninsula when they emigrated from Sumatra. Because of its pre-Islamic origins, there are areas of conflict between the *Adat* and *Syariah* Law as embodied in the *Quran* and the *Hadith*, especially in the area of property inheritance. This conflict between *Adat* and *Syariah* Law is clearly seen in the matrilineal prescriptions of the *Adat Perpatih* among the Minangkabau Malays of Negeri Sembilan, which vest proprietary rights in the womenfolk and stipulate, *inter alia*, that all ancestral property belongs to the tribe and descend *via* the female issue. This

Malays.

The Chinese

The earliest reference to Chinese migration to the region that is now Peninsular Malaysia is in the *Sejarah Melayu*, which narrated the marriage between Sultan Mansur Shah (1456–1477) and the Chinese princess, Han Libao (漢麗寶 Wade-Giles: Hang Li Po). As dowry, the Sultan bestowed on her entourage a hill outside Melaka town called *Bukit China*.[19] Many of these early Chinese intermarried with the Malays, giving rise to the *Peranakan* or *Baba-Nyonya* community. However, the bulk of the Chinese immigrants came in the nineteenth century during the era of British colonial rule to escape civil war and starvation in the waning years of the Qing Dynasty and worked mainly as coolies in ports and mines. Subsequent generations of Chinese became successful at commerce and largely controlled the economy during British colonial rule. In an alien setting, the Chinese immigrant communities rallied around their native clan associations and shrines.

Today, the Malaysian Chinese are predominantly Buddhist with a sizeable Christian minority. Chinese Buddhism tends to be a syncretism of Confucianism, Daoism, and Mahayana Buddhism. Many Chinese Christians continue to observe Chinese festivals and customary usages in births, marriages, and deaths.

The Indians

Historically, Indian merchants visited the region that is now modern-day Peninsular Malaysia on the way to China as early as the fourth century CE. Indian merchants were also involved in the lucrative spice trade at the Melaka port during the Melaka Sultanate.[20] In the nineteenth century, Indian indentured laborers were brought in by the British to work in rubber plantations. Malaysian Indians are mainly Hindu, with a sizeable Sikh and Christian minorities. Around 3 percent of the Indians in Malaysia are Christians, comprising sizeable numbers of Syro-Malabar Catholics, Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Christians, and Mar Thoma Syrian Christians.

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violates the general *Syariah* prescription that all property passes *via* the male issue. For an in-depth discussion, see F.H. Sianipar, "Religion and *Adat*," *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 14, no. 1 (1972): 28–32.

[19] Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History*, 18.

[20] Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History*, 20.

The Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia

The indigenous peoples of Peninsular Malaysia are collectively known as *Orang Asli*. By virtue of their ethnicity, they are classified as *Negrito*, *Senoi*, and Proto-Malays. The *Negrito* community is the smallest but oldest of the *Orang Asli* communities. They are believed to have migrated to the peninsula some 25,000 years ago and are found mainly in the mountainous and densely forested regions in the northern central states of Kedah, Perak, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang. The *Senoi* are the second wave of migrants who arrived some 6,000 to 8,000 years ago and are mainly found in the jungles of Perak, Kelantan, Pahang, and the coastal areas in Selangor. The Proto-Malays are the last wave of migrants who came some 4,000 years ago from Sumatra and the various islands in the Indonesian Archipelago. They are the nomadic or semi-nomadic inhabitants of Pahang, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, and Johor.[21] Despite various government development programs, some 80 percent of the *Orang Asli* population live below the poverty line and are threatened with disintegration of their social and communal fabric caused by the encroachment of modern society on their customary lands as well as rapid deforestation and industrialization.[22]

The Indigenous Peoples of Sarawak

The three largest communities of indigenous peoples of Sarawak are the *Iban*, *Dayak Darat*, and *Melanau*. Other smaller communities include the *Bidayuh*, *Kayan*, *Kenyah*, *Kajang*, *Kelabit*, *Murut*, *Punan*, and *Penan*. The *Iban*, who are predominantly Catholics, are the largest indigenous community, forming about 30 percent of Sarawak's population. They have largely been assimilated into the modern society and many young Ibans have become political and community leaders, teachers, doctors, and public officials. The *Dayak Darat*, who are also predominantly Catholics, number about 9 percent of Sarawak's population. They continue to lead a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle mainly in the interior of Sarawak. The *Melanau* comprise about 9 percent of Sarawak's population and are mainly found in the coastal areas of Sarawak.

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[21] Iskandar Carey, *Orang Asli: The Aboriginal Tribes of Peninsular Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976).

[22] Jojo Fung Jee Vui, "An Indigenous-Serving Missiology: Models, Methods, Mission Strategies: Orang Asli Mission in the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples" (STL thesis, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, 1994), 11–21.

Many modern *Melanau* are Muslim and have adopted a Malay lifestyle.[23]

The Indigenous Peoples of Sabah

The principal indigenous peoples of Sabah are the *Kadazan-Dusun*, *Bajau*, and *Murut*. The *Kadazan-Dusun* are believed to have migrated to Sabah from Southern China some 15,000 to 21,000 years ago.[24] They are predominantly Catholics and form about 30 percent of the population of Sabah. Originally farmers who inhabited the West Coast and the interior of Sabah, the contemporary *Kadazan-Dusun* are very well educated, with a vocal intelligentsia and strong middle-class. They have maintained their own distinctive language, culture, and a strong sense of ethnic consciousness which is centered on the *Tadau Tagazo Kaamatan* and the *Kadazan-Dusun* Cultural Association.[25] The *Kadazan-Dusun* are politically very active: they were at the forefront of the fight for Sabah's independence from Britain in the early 1960s and the fight against the Federal government's increasing encroachment on Sabah state rights and privileges in the 1970s and 1980s.[26] The *Bajau* constitute about 10 percent of Sabah's population. They are a sub-category of proto-Malays who are predominantly Muslim and are further subdivided into *Bajau Darat* and *Bajau Laut*, the former being skilled equestrians and cattle raisers while the latter are mainly fishermen living in houses built on shallow coral reefs. The *Murut* are a small community numbering about 3 percent of Sabah's population and predominantly Christian. They live in longhouses by the river banks deep in the mountainous regions of Sabah and practice shifting cultivation, supplemented by hunting and fishing.[27]

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[23] Thu En Yu, "'Muhibbah': The Church's Ministry of Reconciliation in the Pluralistic Society of Malaysia" (DMin diss., San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1995), 35–37; and David Bingham, "The Iban Experience of Religion: As Pagans, As Christians," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 20 (1983): 117–24.

[24] Thomas Rhys Williams, *The Dusun: A North Borneo Society* (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1966), 3–4.

[25] Francis Loh Kok Wah, "Modernisation, Cultural Revival and Counter-Hegemony: The Kadazans of Sabah in the 1980s," in *Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia*, ed. Joel S. Kahn and Francis Loh Kok Wah (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 243.

[26] See discussion in Loh, "Modernisation, Cultural Revival and Counter-Hegemony," 225–53.

[27] Thu, "Muhibbah," 37–40.

The Religions of Malaysia

Around 61.3 percent of Malaysia's population is Muslim and 19.8 percent Buddhist. Malaysian Christians are exclusively non-Malays and hover around 9.2 percent of the population, followed by Hindus (6.3 percent), and followers of Chinese religions (1.3 percent).[28] Although Islam is the official religion of Malaysia and the majority of Malaysians are Muslims, freedom of religion in Malaysia is guaranteed under article 11(1) of the Malaysian Federal Constitution,[29] subject to the constitutional prerogative of federal and state governments to pass laws against the propagation of other religions among Muslim Malaysians.[30]

In response to the Malaysian Muslim majority's relentless pressure against Malaysian Christians, the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM)[31] was established in 1986 as an umbrella organization for Malaysian Christians comprising the Roman Catholic Church, the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM) representing the mainline Protestant Churches, and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) representing the Evangelical, Brethren, and Pentecostal churches. The CFM consists of around 5,000 member churches and encompasses around 90 percent of the total Christian population of Malaysia. It seeks to present a united Christian front to negotiate with the Malaysian government on contentious religious issues generally, and Muslim-Christian matters in particular. The CFM is also an active member of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Taoism (MCCBCHST). The MCCBCHST was established in 1983 to promote understanding, mutual respect and cooperation among the different religions in Malaysia, resolve

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[28] Malaysia Department of Statistics, "Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010," released July 29, 2011, accessed February 11, 2021, https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemeByCat&cat=117&bul_id=MDMxdHZjWTk1SjFzTzNkRXYzcVZjdz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09#.

[29] As article 11(1) of the Malaysian Federal Constitution makes it clear: "Every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it."

[30] According to article 11(4) the Malaysian Federal Constitution, "State law and in respect of the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan, federal law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam."

[31] CFM was formed in January 1984 as the *National Christian Assembly of Malaysia*. It adopted its present name in 1986.

interreligious issues, and make representations to the Malaysian government on religious matters.[32] In practice, the MCCBCHST has become an organized channel for dialogue between the non-Muslims and the Malaysian government on issues of religious freedom and the impact of encroaching Islamization on the rights of the non-Muslim religious minorities to practice their faith without interference or fear.

Christianity's Minority Status in Postcolonial Malaysia

With the exception of the Philippines and Timor-Leste, the Christian presence across Asia generally, and in Malaysia in particular, is characterized by Christians comprising a significant minority religious community in the midst of dominant and resurgent religious majorities, which, in the case of Malaysia, is the Islamic revival in Malaysia. Here, the term "minority" is used as a convenient category to classify a community which is numerically small in comparison with other larger groups in its midst in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic class, culture, religion, or other categories. One should also note that this term often highlights the *imbalance* of power dynamics between a minority group vis-à-vis the dominant majority group, with the latter occupying positions of power and harassing the minority group to conform to its norms and expectations,[33] as we will see in the context of religious majority-minority dynamics in contemporary postcolonial Malaysia.

Under the British colonial policy of divide and rule, the Malays were given political power while control over trade and economy was given to the Chinese. This political-economic division continued after Malaysia gained its independence from Britain on August 31, 1957. Not surprisingly, this fired up many Malays who were unhappy with the continued Chinese control of the Malaysian economy. The built-up tensions exploded in a series of violent racial riots by extremist Malay nationalists against the Chinese community on May 13, 1969.[34]

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32 Paul Tan Chee Ing and Theresa Ee, "Introduction," in Tunku Abdul Rahman, et al., *Contemporary Issues on Malaysian Religions* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1984), 13.

33 For further discussion, see Hubert M. Blalock, *Toward a Theory of Minority-Group Relations* (New York: Wiley, 1967); and Edna Bonacich, "A Theory of Middlemen Minorities," *American Sociological Review* 38 (1973): 583–94.

34 Goh Cheng Teik, *The May Thirteenth Incident and Democracy in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971); and Leon Comber, *13 May 1969: A*

In the aftermath of these riots, the Malaysian government instituted the New Economic Policy (NEP) to promote racial reconciliation and bridge the economic inequality between the Malays and the Chinese in an effort to rebuild a shattered civic society. Unfortunately, the NEP also institutionalized racialized politics, communalism, Malay dominance in nation building, and Malay sovereignty (*Ketuanan Melayu*) over the other minority communities in all matters political, social, and economic, leading to widespread economic inefficiency, corruption scandals, cronyism, and nepotism as a small Malay elite controlled the political and economic levers of powers to the exclusion of ordinary Malays and other races.[35] As the tangible economic benefits of the NEP failed to trickle down to the ordinary rural Malays, the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), a Malaysian Islamist political party capitalized on widespread rural Malay discontent to champion Islamization as the alternative to the cronyism and corruption of the NEP.

Responding to the rising popular Malay support of PAS's Islamization platform, the ruling political elite likewise adopted a similar policy of Islamization to blunt PAS's tactics.[36] Unfortunately, the Malaysian government's heavy-handed program of Islamization has resulted in increased religious tensions between the Muslim majority vis-à-vis other religious minority communities in Malaysia. As a religious minority, Malaysian Christians often find themselves targeted by the Malaysian Government's Islamization program. For example, the Malaysian government prohibited *Bahasa Indonesia* translations of the Bible in 1981. When Malaysian Christians vehemently protested, this ban was relaxed in 1982 to permit the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* and *Bahasa Malaysia* translations for liturgical worship and personal devotions. However, current law prohibits their dissemination and circulation among Muslims in Malaysia.

Because of the constitutional definition of a "Malay" as, among other things, "a person who professes the religion of Islam" as discussed previously, the issue has arisen whether a Malay can renounce Islam to become a Christian. Pursuant to article 11(4) of the Malaysian Federal Constitution, the states of Pahang, Perak, Melaka,

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Historical Survey of Sino-Malay Relations (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Asia, 1983).

[35] James Chin, "The Malaysian Chinese Dilemma: The Never Ending Policy (NEP)," *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies* 3 (2009): 167–82.

[36] For case studies and critical discussions, see Joel S. Kahn and Francis Loh Kok Wah, eds., *Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992).

Sabah, and Terengganu have passed legislation criminalizing apostasy (*takfir*) by Malaysian Muslims, as well as the actions of non-Muslims who proselytize their faith to Muslims.[37] The strict apostasy laws attracted international condemnation in the case of Lina Joy, who sued in the Malaysian Federal Court in order to force the Malaysian National Registration Department to record her religious conversion from Islam to Christianity on her identity card. However, her case was narrowly dismissed by the Malaysian Federal Court[38] and she was forced to leave Malaysia.

An ongoing point of contention between Malaysian Christians and the Muslim establishment is the controversy over the use of the term *Allah* for God by Malaysian Christians. In 1991, the Malaysian Parliament passed legislation to prohibit the use in non-Islamic literature of, among other things, the term *Allah* for God. Malaysian Christians were outraged against this prohibition of the use of *Allah* for God, arguing that it impinged on their right to use the term *Allah* in the translations of the Bible into the national language (*Bahasa Malaysia* or *Bahasa Kebangsaan*), as well as in public worship and prayer meetings. The issue came before the courts in 2007 when the Malaysian Minister of Home Affairs prohibited the Malaysian Catholic periodical, *The Herald*, from using the term *Allah* in its *Bahasa Malaysia* edition. The then Catholic Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, Murphy Pakiam, sought a judicial review of the Minister's decision before Justice Lau Bee Lan, who held that the term *Allah* is not exclusive to Muslims and the Minister of Home Affairs had no legal authority to prohibit *The Herald* from using the term *Allah* in its *Bahasa Malaysia* edition.[39] Justice Lau's decision was overturned by the Malaysian Court of Appeal upon appeal by the Minister of Home Affairs.[40] Ultimately, the Federal Court refused leave to the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur to appeal against the Malaysian Court of Appeal, thereby affirming the Court of Appeal's judgment upholding the Minister of Home Affairs' original 2007 blanket ban

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[37] Rita Camilleri, "Religious Pluralism in Malaysia: The Journey of Three Prime Ministers," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24, no. 2 (2013): 231.

[38] Lina Joy v. Majlis Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan dan lain-lain [2007] 4 MLJ 585 (Federal Court).

[39] Titular Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur v. Menteri Dalam Negeri and Kerajaan Malaysia [2010] 2 MLJ 78 (High Court).

[40] Menteri Dalam Negeri & Ors v. Titular Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur [2013] 6 MLJ 468 (Court of Appeal).

on the use of *Allah* by non-Muslims.[41]

On the one hand, we see how minorities generally, and the Christian minority in Malaysia in particular, come under pressure all the time from the Malay Muslim majority in Malaysia, which possesses the political clout to enforce its vision and values in the contemporary Malaysian society. We also see this in action where the Malay Muslim majority feels that its dominance in society and politics is under siege from the Christian minority, even though the Malaysian Christians would argue that they often experience insecurity and vulnerability from rising Malay nationalism and Muslim fanaticism. But on the other hand, being a minority also affords Malaysian Christians the opportunity to be the "little flock" who are able, paraphrasing Peter Phan, to take their "Malaysianness" seriously as the context of their being Christian.[42]

Responses to the Experiences of the Malaysian Christian Minority Communities: The Volume

This volume, then, represents the contributions of the Christian minority scholars in Malaysia as well as Malaysians living and teaching and doing ministry in the diaspora. All the authors have roots in either East Malaysia or West Malaysia. They come from diverse denominational and theological backgrounds—Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Mainline. Many common themes run through the volume—multiplicities of ethnicities, languages, cultures, and religions, hybridity, history of colonialism, resurgence of Islamization, faith and praxis of Christian minority, interreligious tensions and relations, and the *Allah* controversy. The volume is organized into three sections: Part I consists of four essays on Biblical Interpretation, Part II on Theology and Ethics with three essays, and Part III dealing with Missiology, Practical Theology and Christian Education with three essays.

The first essay on Biblical Interpretation, "Treatment of *Gēr* as a Guide to Interreligious Dialogue," is by Fook Kong Wong, who is

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[41] Titular Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur v. Menteri Dalam Negeri & Others [2014] 4 MLJ 765 (Federal Court).

[42] Responding to the challenges of being religious minorities in Asia, the birthplace of the great religions of the world which are experiencing massive revival and growth, Peter Phan writes, among other things, that Asian Christians have to "take their Asianness seriously as their context of being Christian." In Peter C. Phan, "*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 37 (2000): 218.

professor of Old Testament at Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary. Wong's essay begins with a study of the concept of *gēr* (foreign resident) in the Pentateuch, suggesting that while the term may have different meanings in different historical periods, it most often refers to an outsider by the intended readers, the natives. Analyzing the Mosaic laws pertaining to the treat of the *gēr*, Wong argues that these laws can serve as guides for interreligious dialogue since they were intended to facilitate relationships of the local population with foreign residents who would likely have espoused different religious beliefs. Drawing on the work of Michael Wyschogrod, an Orthodox Jew and a strong proponent and active participant in Jewish-Christian dialogue, whom Wong considers as a theological inclusivist or a tolerant exclusivist, Wong argues that, in a more theologically conservative Christian context in Malaysia, a tolerant exclusivism or inclusivism is preferred over pluralism for interreligious dialogue.

The second essay by Elaine Wei-Fun Goh, who teaches Old Testament at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia (Malaysian Theological Seminary), is entitled, "'Even If (God Does) Not, We Will Not': A Christian Reflection from Daniel 3." The essay is an attempt to read Daniel 3 for wisdom for Christian living and witness as religious minorities in the context of a majority Muslim country. Goh identifies such events as the unsolved disappearance of a pastor, the continuing prohibition of the use of the word *Allah* in the Bible and other publications in the national language, and offensive remarks directed against ethnic Chinese and Christian minorities as challenges to Christian witness. Doing an in-depth analysis of the Daniel text through three main points—challenge, persistence, and hope—Goh addresses such issues as the ethnic hostility perpetuated by a small and vocal group of radical Muslims against ethnic Chinese and Christian minorities, the enduring boldness and courage of the minorities in the face of religious harassment and racial aggravation, and their unwavering hope in midst of such social challenges.

The third essay in this section on biblical interpretation is "Populism and Nationalism: A Yahwistic Critique of Jonah's Religious Nationalism" by Philip P. Chia, who teaches at Chung Yuan Christian University, Taiwan. In this essay, Chia turns to the book of Jonah to discuss issues of populism and nationalism, of which the former concerns *the people* while the latter pertains to the attitude and actions of *the people* who shared a common national

identity, culture, and values. In Chia's reading of the book, Yahweh's concern is for the people stands in stark contrast to Jonah's subscription to a narrow religious nationalism, a "Hebrew" first mentality. Chia opines that such a reading has implications for the populist movement, *Bersih* ("clean" in *Bahasa Malaysia*), that began in 2007 in Malaysia and that helped bring down the ruling coalition after 60 years in power, which advocated for a simple human moral ethical consciousness of "cleanliness." Ultimately, at the heart of God's concern is that "the people's lives" matter.

Kar Yong Lim's essay, "For All of You are One in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28): Paul's Social Vision Beyond Inclusivity and Diversity," rounds out this section on Biblical Interpretation. Lim, who teaches New Testament at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, looks to Galatians 3:28 and other Pauline texts for Paul's understanding of ethnic, gender, and social relations in the Greco-Roman world to address the issue of equality. Lim suggests that scholarly research on Gal 3:28 have long overlooked two critical issues, namely, that (1) the triads of Jew/Greek, slave/free, and male/female must be taken as a unified statement and (2) that the Jerusalem and Antioch incidents foreground the statement. Analyzing these two issues in detail, Lim concludes that Paul's social vision goes beyond inclusivity and diversity toward the elimination of any form of discrimination based on ethnicity, social status, and gender. Such a vision can help guide the church in Malaysia to work toward challenging all forms of discrimination in the process of nation building.

Edmund Kee-Fook Chia's essay, "*Wawasan* 2020 and Christianity in Religiously Plural Malaysia," begins this section of Theology and Ethics. Chia, who serves on the faculty of Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, examines why the problem of interracial and interreligious relations persists even in what is supposed to be the New Malaysia. Chia begins by introducing *Wawasan 2020*, a vision introduced in 1991 for Malaysia to be an economically developed nation, with a call for a united and ethical citizenry. He then reviews the Malaysia's history, focusing on the impact of European colonialism and the migrations of peoples to the Malaysian Archipelago. Within that geohistorical context, Chia proceeds to reflect on how race and religion intersect within the socio-political structures of the country's development as a new independent nation-state and, finally, turning his attention to discuss the place of Christianity in the Malaysia's religiously plural society, its involvement in interreligious dialogue and cooperation,

and how it has learned to live with grace as a minority religion.

The second essay by Alwyn Lau, who teaches in UCSI University's Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, is entitled, "From Fetish to Forgiveness: A Žižekian Intrusion on How the Church 'Enjoys' Herself for the Sake of the World." Grounding his work on Slavoj Žižek's theory of fetish and perversion, Lau contends that Malaysia continues its fascination with political fetishes, whereby self-deluding narratives are used to create an alternative reality to cover up a traumatic void. With much injustice and oppression remaining unaddressed, including the forced disappearance of individuals, there is an implicit national refusal to repair traumatic voids. In such a context, and subjected to injustice and oppression, Lau suggests that the Malaysian church can move forward by embracing such trauma of pain and forgiveness by means of the Lacanian concepts of *sinthome* and singularity, whereby the Church can remain authentic, prayerful, compassionate and resilient in the face of on-going challenges in the socio-political arena.

The final essay in the theology and ethics section, "Christian-Muslim Relations in New Malaysia: Overcoming Barriers, Building Bridges," is by Albert Sundararaj Walters, an ordained clergy of the Anglican Diocese of West Malaysia and formerly Vicar-General of the Anglican Diocese of Iran. Walters's essay seeks to examine Christian-Muslim relations in Malaysia to ascertain whether the political manipulations of religion in recent decades have engendered a real threat to harmonious interfaith relations in the country. Beginning with a brief historical overview that led to a pluralistic country, Walters situates his readers within the contextual realities of pivotal events, like the May 13, 1969 racial riots and the Islamization policy, to discuss significant issues and challenges that have impacted Christian-Muslim relations, for example, the question of whether or not Malaysia is an Islamic state, the rise of political Islam, the privileging of *Bumiputera* in economic policies, the *Allah* controversy and the seizing of Bibles. Nonetheless, Walters points out that there have also been many attempts at building bridges in interfaith encounters. These encounters, for Walters, must go beyond tolerance toward seeking mutual understanding across differences and the common good.

John Cheong's essay, "Hybrid and Hybridising: Malaysian Identity, Presence and Mode in Theology, Theologising and Mission," leads off the final section on missiology, practical theology

and Christian education. Cheong, who teaches missiology in various colleges in Asia, uses anthropological-sociological frameworks to examine the hybridity of the Malaysian Christian identity, which is very much the product of their locatedness geographically between West and East Asia. He interviewed some Malaysian writers to understand their life stories, particularly socio-religious and cultural elements that influenced their identity, mode of theologizing, writings and/or leadership directions today. He then discusses the educational, social, and religious factors that shaped their double minority Christian migrant/diasporic status. The writers' hybrid identity in turn enables them to develop interreligious, intercultural, interethnic and/or international sensitivities that grounds their theologizing and missionizing as contributions to world Christianity.

The next essay is by Arch Chee-Keen Wong, who teaches at Ambrose Seminary of Ambrose University, Canada. In his essay, "What Might A Practical Theological Reflection on Religious Freedom and Social Engagement Look Like in Light of a Resurgence of Islamization in Malaysia?," Wong uses Richard Osmer's four core tasks of practical theological interpretation as a method to engage in theological reflection on the religious freedom and social engagement of the church in Malaysia as it relates to the resurgence and impact of Islamization. Using the lenses of the descriptive-empirical and the interpretive tasks, Wong examines the literature in the resurgence of Islamization in many sectors of Malaysian culture, referencing the historical antecedents and addressing the limits of religious freedom. He uses the normative task to engage theological concepts of justice and righteousness and to discuss proposed responses to Islamization's limits on religious freedom in light of political involvement and the *Allah* controversy. Finally, using the pragmatic task, Wong explores how the church might respond using the concept of trauma as a theological basis to move forward.

The final essay in this last section of the book is co-written by Joy Oy-Mooi Saik, who teaches at Sabah Theological Seminary, Malaysia, and Siaw Fung Chong, who teaches at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia. Entitled, "Does Learning Style Matter? Primary Lessons for Asian Theological Education from a Case Study of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Seminary Students in Malaysian Borneo Using the Felder-Soloman Index of Learning Styles," Saik and Chong begin this essay lamenting the fact that theological education in Asia has

generally not paid much attention to the issue of students' learning styles, especially of people groups in multicultural settings. To address this lack of attention, the authors conducted a preliminary investigation of the learning styles of indigenous and non-indigenous students through a survey administered at their seminary in Sabah, using the Index of Learning Styles (ILS) questionnaire developed by Richard Felder and Barbara Soloman. In addition, through the use of Pearson's Chi-Squared test, Saik and Chong, discovered that participants with similar learning styles from different ethnic backgrounds (indigenous or non-indigenous) may opt for different instructional or study strategies.

The volume ends with co-editor Amos Wai-Ming Yong's more overarching methodological considerations. His "Concluding Malaysian Diasporic Reflections from the Ends of the Earth: Contextuality and Marginality in Hermeneutical and Theological Method for the Third Millennium," considers how the book illuminates the changing landscape of biblical and theological studies in the twenty-first century when refracted through the lenses of Malaysian experiences and Malaysian diaspora perspectives. The dynamic and fluid character of contextuality and marginality describe not just Malaysian contributions but the ways in which they interact with the broader biblical and theological studies discourses.

On the one hand, of course, these wider discussions have impacted the essays in this volume; on the other hand, it is also our hope that our collaborative efforts will make a difference in the ongoing conversations. You, our readers, get to render the verdicts on these matters.

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PART I

Biblical Interpretation

Treatment of Gēr as a Guide to Interreligious Dialogue

Fook Kong Wong

Ancient Israel was not a hermetically sealed society. Many sojourners, who worshipped foreign gods, lived among them. While modern interreligious dialogues did not exist, their relationship with sojourners was not necessarily hostile. Even those who were staunchly monotheistic were not always antagonistic towards foreigners. A form of tolerant exclusivism was evident in the Mosaic Laws. It was when they felt the danger of being assimilated that hostility flared up. This essay is a study of the treatment of sojourners in the Mosaic Laws and other relevant Old Testament passages with a view of gleaning some guidelines for interreligious dialogue from them. The argument is that pluralism is not required and, indeed, may be a hindrance to interreligious dialogue in a context like Malaysia. Tolerant exclusivism or inclusivism, both evinced in the Old Testament to different degrees, is a better option.

Introduction

Malaysia is a multiethnic, multireligious nation. According to official figures, it has a total population of 28.3 million people, of which 67.4% are Malays, 24.6% are Chinese, 7.3% are Indians and 0.7% are others. In terms of religions, 61.3% are Muslims, 19.8% are Buddhists, 9.2% are Christians, 6.3% are Hindus, 1.3% are adherents of various Chinese religions, 0.4% belong to other religions, 0.7% say they have no religion, while the beliefs of the remaining 1% are unknown.[1] From these figures we can see that there is a great need for cross cultural understanding and interreligious dialogue.

Obviously, I cannot speak for other religions about how this should be done. In this essay I am speaking from the perspective of a Christian who accepts the Bible as Scripture and look to it for guidance. Furthermore, to make it manageable, I will limit my

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[1] From Department of Statistics Malaysia, Official Portal (July 29, 2011), accessed March 26, 2020, https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r= column/cthemeByCat&cat=117&bul_id=MDMxdHZjWTk1SjFzTzNkRXYzcVZjdz 09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09.

discussions mainly to the Pentateuch with a few references from elsewhere for additional insights or support. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of a deliberate effort at understanding foreign religions in the Old Testament and consequently no direct teaching on interreligious dialogue. However, all is not lost. Ancient Israel was not a hermetically sealed society. There was a large population of foreigners living among them at any given time and their relationship with these foreigners, many of whom worshipped other gods, was not necessarily antagonistic. My proposition is that the laws governing foreigners offer some guidance for interreligious dialogue today.

The *Gēr* in the Pentateuch

Three of the most common terms used for outsiders in the Old Testament are *zār* (stranger), *nokrî* (foreigner), and *gēr* (foreign resident). The first word has a more or less neutral connotation. The second word, on the other hand, has a largely negative connotation; the person is somehow dangerous because of his or her strange gods and/or strange ways of living.[2] The third term is the most common of the three and has a positive connotation.[3] Another term which can be added to the list is *tôšāb* (resident). Both *gēr* and *tôšāb* refer to a person who came from somewhere else and presently lives in a surrounding that is not his or her own.[4] Since *gēr* is the most common word for outsiders in the Old Testament and many articles and books have been written on it, we will concentrate on this word in this essay.[5]

The word *gēr* (plural: *gērîm*) can be defined as "a man who, either alone or with his family, leaves his village and tribe, because of war, famine, pestilence, blood-guilt, and seeks shelter and sojourn elsewhere, where his right to own land, to marry, and to participate

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[2] E.g., Deut 17:15; Judg 19:12; Job 19:15; Prov 5:10, 20; 6:24; 23:27; 27:13; Eccl 6:2; Isa 28:21; Jer 2:21. Interestingly, it appears in Ruth 2:10 to designate Ruth. Although the referent is positive in this case the connotation of the word is still negative. Ruth is saying that they should be wary of her instead of showing her grace.

[3] Hans-Georg Wuench, "The Stranger in God's Land—Foreigner, Stranger, Guest: What Can We Learn from Israel's Attitude Towards Strangers?," *Old Testament Essays* 27, no. 3 (2014): 1134.

[4] Rolf Rendtorff, "The *GĒR* in the Priestly Laws of the Pentateuch," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 78–79.

[5] The reason for using the transliteration instead of a translation (e.g., foreign resident, resident alien, sojourner) is that the meaning of this term is debatable. Furthermore, it may refer to different groups of people in different texts.

in the administration of justice, in the cult, and in war is curtailed."[6] Since the laws of the Pentateuch do not all belong to the same period it is possible that the word has different meanings at different times.[7] Indeed, it has been argued that in Deuteronomy it refers to refugees fleeing the destruction of Samaria in 721 BCE or to a subclass of free, landless people of Judah. Furthermore, the meaning of the term in the priestly writings has also been variously understood as referring to Israelite exiles after their return to Palestine, Israelites who remained in the land and joined the community of the returnees, outsiders who wanted to become a part of the religious community, members of the Samaritan leading classes, or foreigners who have settled in the land of Israel and who have been assimilated culturally and religiously.[8]

A detailed discussion of whom the word refers to in different passages is beyond the scope of this essay. What is clear is that the *gēr* was considered an outsider by the intended readers in each instance. This can be seen from the juxtaposition of *'ezrāḥ* (native) with *gēr* in quite a number of laws (Lev 24:16, 22; Num 15:30; 35:15). To say that certain laws were applicable to both *'ezrāḥ* and *gēr* was to acknowledge that these were two separate groups in the eyes of the law. Exodus 23:9 says, "Do not oppress a *gēr* for you yourselves know the life/feeling of the *gēr* since you were *gērîm* in the land of Egypt." Since the Israelites' ancestors were foreigners in Egypt, the *gērîm* mentioned here also refer to foreigners dwelling in their midst. Phrases like "*gēr* who is within your gates" (Exod 20:10; Deut 5:14), "*gēr* who is within your towns" (Deut 14:21), and "*gēr* who is among you" (Deut 26:11) highlight the fact that the *gērîm* came from elsewhere and were not originally a part of the local community.

In the prophetic literature this group is usually mentioned along with the fatherless and widow (Jer 7:6; Ezek 22:7; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5) or with the poor and needy (Ezek 22:29). This is also evident in the Pentateuch (Lev 23:22; 25:6; Deut 10:18), indicating that many of these people belonged to the marginalized, vulnerable segments of society. That this was not necessarily so can be seen from the examples of Abraham (Gen 23:4) and Lot (Gen 13:6; 19:9), who were wealthy foreign residents. Furthermore, the Israelites must have

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[6] *Holladay Hebrew Lexicon*, BibleWorks 8, s.v. "*Gēr*."

[7] Theophile Meek, "The Translation of *GĒR* in the Hexateuch and Its Bearing on the Documentary Hypothesis," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 49, no. 2 (1930): 172.

[8] José E. Ramírez Kidd, *Alterity and Identity in Israel: The* גר *in the Old Testament* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1999), 5–7.

been sufficiently wealthy and powerful for the Pharaoh to feel threatened by their presence (Exod 1:9). Leviticus 25:47 even envisioned a scenario in which the *gērîm* were so rich that they could buy Israelite slaves.

In summary, regardless of who the *gērîm* were in various passages, it is clear that they were considered outsiders by the natives. These people (who may be different groups at different times) maintained a separate, distinctive identity from the local population.

Treatment of *Gēr* and Interreligious Dialogue

The term *gēr* was equated with the Greek word προσήλυτος (originally meaning, "one who has come near, immigrant") and came to designate a proselyte both in the Greek speaking Jewish communities and the Rabbinical literature.[9] Nevertheless, the word does not have this meaning in the Old Testament.[10] Conversion was unknown in the ancient world. Ethnicity was the only criterion for membership in a group and outsider could only join through marriage (e.g., Ruth). The designation of *gēr* as a convert likely began in the third century BCE.[11] Thus, although it could be argued that the "central impulse of Deuteronomy's vision…is to foster the incorporation of the *gēr* as kindred, specifically within the household, within the clan, and within the nation,"[12] this was not religious conversion as we know it from later times.

Deuteronomy 31:12 states that everyone, including *gērîm,* is to gather before the LORD to hear the reading of the law once every seven years so that they may learn to fear the LORD and obey all the words of his laws. Since no such regularly scheduled gathering is reported elsewhere, Nelson thinks that this was a purely utopian provision.[13] What concerns us here is not whether the injunction was ever carried out but what it means. I think it should not be taken to mean that *gērîm* were required to obey all the commandments since

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[9] Ramírez, *Alterity and Identity in Israel*, 119, 133.

[10] Stuart Krauss, "The Word '*Ger*' in the Bible and Its Implications," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2006): 264–270.

[11] Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 401–2.

[12] Mark Glanville, "The *Gēr* (Stranger) in Deuteronomy: Family for the Displaced," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137, no. 3 (2018): 599.

[13] Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 359.

this was obviously not the case elsewhere. Rather what it means is that *gērîm* must know the laws so that they would know which laws they were required to keep. Just because they did not have to become proselytes did not mean that they did not have to observe any biblical injunctions. These people were not passing through but living at length in Israel, so they were required to follow some of the laws and, in return, enjoyed some of the benefits of the laws as well.[14]

According to Milgrom, although *gērîm* enjoyed equal protection with the Israelites under the law, they were not of the same legal status; they neither enjoyed the same privileges nor were bound by the same obligations. Basically, they were bound by the prohibitive commandments but not the performative commandments. The injunction that "there shall be one law for you and for the *gēr*" (e.g., Num 15:15) should be understood in the context in which it appears rather than generalized for all instances. For example, *gērîm* were not required to offer the paschal sacrifice although it was mandatory for the Israelites. However, if *gērîm* wished to offer sacrifices they have to be circumcised (Exod 12:47–48). Similarly, they may offer other sacrifices just like an Israelite but they have to follow the same prescriptions as the Israelites in doing so (Num 15:14–16; Lev 22:17–25). On the other hand, violation of any prohibitive commandments created impurity that polluted the sanctuary and the land. This included, for example, sexual offenses, homicide, and Molech worship. In these instances, it made no difference whether the polluter was Israelite or not. Anyone residing in the land was capable of polluting it and God's sanctuary. One question that arises from this is whether *gērîm* were required to observe the minutiae of ritual and ethical prohibitions, e.g., prohibition against wearing garments of mixed seed (Lev 19:19) or not spreading gossip (Lev 19:16). Milgrom thinks that it is not certain but most likely *gērîm* were obligated to only refrain from those violations that engendered ritual impurity (e.g., Lev 17:15).[15]

Milgrom offers a theological reason why *gērîm* were required to observe the prohibitive but not the performative commandments.

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[14] The common distinction between civil, ritual and moral laws advocated by many Christians is not found in the Old Testament itself. Michael Wyschogrod, for example, says, "And divine commandments are what they are because they are divine, whatever subject they deal with—whether they deal with love of your neighbor or whether they deal with which fish you may eat." In his "Christianity and Mosaic Law," *Pro Ecclesia* 2, no. 4 (1993): 453.

[15] Milgrom, *Numbers*, 399–400.

I think the practical aspect should not be ignored either. Leviticus 24:22 states, "There shall be one rule/standard for you, for the *gēr* as well as the *'ezrāḥ* (native), for I am the LORD, your God." In its context, the same rule/standard referred to prohibition against blaspheming the name of the LORD (v. 16) and prohibitions that resulted in the *lex talionis* (vv. 17–21). It obviously made sense for foreign residents not to blaspheme the God of the local population in which they resided. As for the *lex talionis*, it has acquired a notorious reputation in some circles. A Jewish rabbi once remarked in exasperation:

> Along with such old standbys as Pharisee, Justice, Fire and Brimstone, Old Testament Prophet, Pound of Flesh, Talmudic Casuistry — Eye for an Eye stands out in the long list of stereotypical hackneyed phrases and words that represent, or misrepresent, Jews, Judaism and the Hebrew Bible in the mind of Western man and his culture.[16]

Actually, as a law, its principle is still followed today, i.e., that "the punishment should fit the crime."[17] Here it referred to the taking of life (human or animal) and injury inflicted on another person. In each case, the punishment meted out was supposed to correlate with the crime being committed. Again, it was a reasonable, common sense demand.

Deuteronomy 5:14 states that everyone, including *gērîm*, must rest on the Sabbath day. A historical context for this prohibition is found in Nehemiah 13. Verse 15 states that Nehemiah saw some people treading wine-presses and bringing their produce into Jerusalem to do business on the Sabbath. It is unclear who these people were. They could be Judeans or foreigners. In the next verse, it clearly states that Tyrians were bringing fish and all kinds of goods into Jerusalem to sell them on the Sabbath. This time it is clear that these were foreigners living in their midst. Later (vv. 20–21), Nehemiah confronted merchants and sellers who were lodging outside of Jerusalem on the Sabbath, perhaps because they were trying to attract some citizens out of the city.[18] Although it is not

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[16] Jacob Chinitz, "Eye for an Eye: An Old Canard," *Jewish Biblical Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1995), 79.

[17] Jonathan Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society: Aspects of Law and Legality in the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 275.

[18] Hugh G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary 16 (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 396.

entirely clear, the fact that they stopped going to Jerusalem when the possibility of trade was denied suggests that they were foreigners. It is also possible that a mixed group, consisting of both Jews and foreigners, is meant in these verses. In view of these, it is understandable why the law prohibits everyone, including foreign residents, from working on the Sabbath.

It is valid to use the *gēr* laws as guides for interreligious dialogue because they were formulated to facilitate relationships with foreign residents who might have different religious beliefs from the local population. If, as has been argued, some of these *gērîm* were actually displaced Israelites from another area, they might have similar religious traditions as the local Israelites. However, this, too, is not a given since the Old Testament tells us that many Israelites and Judahites worshipped foreign gods (1 Kgs 18:21; 2 Kgs 18:4). Their penchant for foreign gods and goddesses is also archaeologically attested.[19] Moreover, the "The LORD and his Asherah" inscription from Kuntillet ʻAjrud shows that not all who worshipped the LORD followed the official view presented in the Pentateuch either.[20] The laws did not take any chance; all *gērîm* were required to follow certain rules if they wished to live among the local population. The modern phrase "welcoming but not affirming" is a fair description of the approach taken in these laws.[21]

In summary, despite its translation in Greek, *gēr* does not refer to a proselyte in the Old Testament. Worshipping the LORD was not a requirement for foreigners residing among the Israelites. Nevertheless, foreign residents were forbidden to blaspheme the name of the LORD and they were required to keep the prohibitive laws. They were allowed to join in the worship as long as they were circumcised like the Israelites and did so according to the stipulations governing the worship. In return, they were granted justice and protection under the law (Exod 23:9; Num 35:15; Deut 24:17; 27:19). Should they fall into poverty they were also offered aid

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[19] William Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 190–93; and Patrick Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 63.

[20] Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 283–89.

[21] Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 157. As the subtitle indicates, it describes his position with regard to homosexuality, another highly contentious topic.

similar to those shown to orphans and widows (Lev 19:10; 23:22; Deut 14:29; 24:21).

Using *gēr* laws as guides to interreligious dialogue means that participants of the dialogue treat each other as *gērîm*. Believers of each religious tradition are "native inhabitants" of their own religions welcoming "foreign residents" into their midst. Conversely, it also means that all participants are "foreign residents" to other religious traditions and should behave accordingly. The dialogue itself has no "native inhabitants." According to this approach, abandoning the truth claims of one's religion is not a prerequisite for relationship and dialogue. This means that our attitude should be welcoming but not necessarily affirming (i.e., of other people's beliefs or values). They should be granted justice and protection. For example, they should not be demonized nor should their views be misrepresented. To minimize friction or conflicts, certain rules of interactions should be followed. In particular, words or actions that offend or harm the "natives" of any religion should be avoided. Welcoming the *gērîm* also includes welcoming them to join our worship service as long as they follow the rules governing the rituals. This may mean that they cannot join certain parts of the worship (e.g., the Lord's Supper). Finally, getting to know someone who has just moved into our neighborhood takes time and patience. It must be done through shared interests and goals.

Michael Wyschogrod and Interreligious Dialogue

A good example of this approach to interreligious dialogue is Michael Wyschogrod (1928–2015). He was an Orthodox Jew and a student of the great Talmudic scholar Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, who forbade theological dialogue between Orthodox Jews and Christians.[22] Wyschogrod disagreed with his teacher in this regard and he was active in national as well as international Jewish-Christian dialogue, serving as Senior Consultant on Interreligious Affairs of the Synagogue Council of America and Director of the Institute for Jewish-Christian Relations of the American Jewish Congress. He worked closely with the Vatican, the World Council of Churches, and various Christian bodies in the U.S. and Europe.[23]

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[22] Michael Wyschogrod, "The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scripture in the Christian Bible, by the Pontifical Biblical Commission (Rome, 2001)," in *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach and Jacob J. Schacter (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2011), 522.

[23] R. Kendall Soulen, "A Biographical Sketch of Michael Wyschogrod," in

Despite his openness to dialogue with Christian traditions, he was firm in his Jewish beliefs.

According to Wyschogrod, the most difficult problem Jews face when viewing Christianity is the topic of Christology (including the doctrines of the incarnation and Trinity). The second is Christianity's view of the Torah.[24] In Judaism (as in Islam), the highest level a human being can reach is that of a prophet. To claim that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine blurs the difference between God and humans and raises the possibility of idolatry. One way of dealing with this is to accept the reality of the disagreement and to leave it at that. Wyschogrod disagrees with this approach for two reasons. Firstly, issues such as the Trinity and the incarnation are rooted in religious reality. A Jew who believes that these are false doctrines has the duty to persuade Christians to abandon these teachings. Secondly, not talking about them will only lead to greater estrangement and polarization. A better way forward is to continue the dialogue by identifying elements of continuity and discontinuity in these areas.

Wyschogrod presents his view on the incarnation in various articles.[25] He rejects this doctrine in no uncertain terms:

> For Jews, once this issue is raised, it is no longer necessary to examine seriously any teachings of Jesus. A human being who is also God loses all Jewish legitimacy from the outset. No sharper break with Jewish theological sensibility can be imagined.[26]

Nevertheless, as stated above, he wishes to continue the conversation. Therefore, his next question is whether there is any element of continuity between this "most non-Jewish article of Christian faith" and the Hebrew Bible. He finds the continuity in the indwelling of God in the tabernacle, in the temple of Jerusalem, and in the Jewish people. In Jewish tradition, although the Jerusalem temple was destroyed God, it is present wherever a community of

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Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. R. Kendall Soulen (Norfolk: SCM Press, 2006), xiii. Most of the chapters in this book were articles that he had written over the years and collected into one volume by R. Kendall Soulen. For information on the original publications see pages ix–x of the book.

[24] Whyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, 157, 160.

[25] See Whyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, 165, for a short bibliography. The following is taken from pages 165–78 of the book.

[26] Whyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, 166.

ten Jews are gathered together. According to Wyschogrod, this is not a philological or philosophical issue; rather it is a spiritual issue. God created humans in his image and chose a segment of that family for a special measure of love. As this love intensifies, a certain indwelling of God in his people results. Nevertheless, although God can dwell in the temple, God does not become one with the temple. Similarly, God's dwelling in the midst of his people does not mean that he has become one with them. Therefore, God becoming flesh is not acceptable in Judaism. This represents the discontinuity between Judaism and Christianity.

The problem with the Torah is that for Jews, it is the expression of God's will for their conduct. It constitutes the history and self-understanding of the Jewish people and is taken very seriously. For Christians—or what many consider the Christian view—the Torah is the law of death. As long as the Christian view of the law as a law of death remains, the estrangement between Christianity and Judaism will prevail. Wyschogrod dealt with this issue of law and grace in an earlier article but it is much more fully developed in a new article published in the book.[27] His view is similar to (but not the same as) a branch of Reformed theology commonly called "New Perspective on Paul."[28] He argues that Paul must have been aware that the Torah was never thought of as being obligatory for non-Jews. In that period, Gentiles were thought of as being responsible only for the Noachide commandments (e.g., prohibitions against incest, murder, robbery). A Gentile who obeyed these commandments were called *gēr tôšāb* ("indwelling stranger") while a Gentile who had fully converted to Judaism was called *gēr ṣedeq* ("righteous stranger").[29] What Paul taught was that with the coming of Christ a gentile no longer has to be fully converted to Judaism to become a Jew. This new category was the status of adopted children. This was different from before in that, before, becoming members of the household of Israel was only achieved through full conversion to Judaism. Paul was not telling Jews not to obey the Torah, he was

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[27] Whyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, 188–201. The earlier, less developed view is found in pages 160–64.

[28] N.T. Wright, in describing this view, says, "In terms of historical theology, the 'New Perspective' contained elements of a Reformed protest (Judaism and the law as positive and God-given) against a Lutheran theology (Judaism as the wrong sort of religion, the law as negative)." In his *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 477.

[29] His translations.

only telling Gentiles they did not have to convert to Judaism in order to join the household of Israel. Wyschogrod's interpretation of Paul's teaching evinces both continuity (for Jews) and discontinuity (for Gentiles).

Citing Wyschogrod as an example may seem like a cop-out since Judaism and Christianity are both from the so-called Abrahamic religious tradition. Actually this is a good example because the dominant religion in Malaysia is Islam, the third member of the Abrahamic traditions. Some of the problems between Christianity and Judaism (e.g., incarnation, Trinity) are similar to those between Christianity and Islam. Since all three traditions share the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, some conflicts cannot be sidestepped. Whether one accepts Wyshcogrod's view or not, a way of handling the differences must be formulated. Moreover, Wyschogrod's theological conservatism is common in Malaysia and, thus, his perspective on interreligious dialogue may be helpful to conservative believers.

According to my understanding, Wyschogrod is an inclusivist. He is open to interreligious dialogue and is generous about the strengths and truth claims of Christianity. However, he does not necessarily affirm Christian doctrines; in many instances he draws a firm line between Judaism and Christianity. He could even be branded as a tolerant exclusivist in that he advocates a duty to correct the theological errors of his Christian friends. I think this "evangelical" zeal is found in all types of approaches and is not something unique to exclusivists. It simply means that the person is confident of the truths he believes in, regardless of what they are.

Interreligious Dialogue in a Malaysian Context

There are three major approaches to interreligious dialogue today. Each has its own view of truth claims and other religions. Pluralism states that all religions are equally salvific paths (however defined) to God (however defined). Exclusivism states that other religions are marked by humankind's fundamental sinfulness and are, consequently, erroneous. Christ offers the only path to salvation. Finally, inclusivism states that the salvific presence of God is also found in non-Christian religions. However, the definitive and authoritative revelation of God is to be found in Christianity.[30] The

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[30] Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 22, 52, 80.

validity of these paradigms has been challenged in recent years.[31] I will continue using them as they are still helpful for our purpose here. I think that inclusivism, or even a form of tolerant exclusivism, is more compatible with the Malaysian context than pluralism. This is based on my understanding of the Bible and the situation in Malaysia.

With regard to the Bible, the *gēr* laws mentioned above are based on an inclusivist view of other religions. Jon Levenson observes that, "Idolatry…is not intrinsic to human beings, and in the Hebrew Bible a gentile is not generally assumed to be idolatrous. It is possible to be a faithful and responsible worshiper of YHWH…without being an Israelite."[32] He notes that the primeval history (Genesis 1–11) presents humankind as primordially monotheistic; in fact, based on Gen 4:26, they worshipped the LORD. In other words, Abraham and his descendants were not the only people who knew and worshipped the LORD. According to the genealogy in Gen 11:10–32, Shem was still alive when Jacob and Esau were born! Abraham was certainly not the only one worshipping the LORD in his days. Furthermore, Ham and Japheth should also be counted among those who worshipped the LORD. According to Josh 24:2, Terah worshipped other gods. Therefore, not everyone in the line of Shem worshipped the LORD. The same could be said of the descendants of Ham and Japheth. Not all of Noah's descendants worshipped the LORD but the implication must be that some did. Incidentally, this applies to the pre-Flood world as well. It is reasonable to believe that at least the line presented in Genesis 5 indicates not only those who descended from Adam but those who worshipped the LORD. This was certainly the case with Enoch (Gen 5:23–24). We can also add Melchizedek to the list of Gentiles who worshipped the LORD (Gen 14:18). This is because the "Most High God" of whom Melchizedek was a priest is identified as the LORD in verse 22.

I am not saying we should take the genealogies literally and, for example, calculate the age of the world from them. In his study

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[31] E.g., Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religious and the Trinity* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), 19–52. See Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology—Clarified and Reaffirmed," in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Paul Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 13–27, for bibliography and a defense of the typology.

[32] Jon D. Levenson, "The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark Brett (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 148.

of the genealogies in Chronicles, James Sparks argues that ancient genealogies were not primarily historical document, although they may contain genuine historical information. Ancient genealogies were created to govern and express social relationships. They were meant to sanction the social order of the tribe, help resolve domestic disputes and regulate an individual's daily behavior and other areas of his domestic life.[33] However, regardless of the actual historical situation, the genealogies of Genesis formed a chronological structure within which the author/redactor presented his materials. Therefore, they are useful in helping us understand the world presented by him. My point is that the author/redactor of the Pentateuch acknowledged that people other than the Israelites knew and worshipped the LORD. While Israel has an exclusive relationship with the LORD by virtue of their status as the elect, they were not the only ones who have true knowledge of the LORD. Furthermore, the Torah was given personally by the LORD, so it is the best and most accurate revelation of all. However, some other people also knew the LORD, no matter how imperfectly.

Making a distinction between pluralistic attitude and pluralistic theology may be helpful here. A pluralistic attitude is an open and tolerant attitude toward different truth claims. This stance can be adopted by anyone, even a staunch exclusivist, because it does not require affirmation of an opposing view. All that is required is tolerance of the view. A pluralistic theology, on the other hand, is itself a competitor of truth claim along with other religions. While a pluralistic attitude is needed, a pluralistic theology is not and it may even be a stumbling block to interreligious dialogue. Moreover, if peaceful co-existence is the goal of interreligious dialogue, I query the need for all participants to accept the validity of yet another truth claim, one outside of and possibly challenging to their traditional beliefs, as the foundation of the dialogue. Does it not make more sense for all to begin as they are, i.e., believing in the absolute truthfulness of their own beliefs?

The fact is that taking a pluralistic worldview is nothing less than conversion to another religion in many societies. The case of the Danish cartoons makes plain how serious these matters could be. The case of Basuki T. Purnama (nicknamed Ahok), who was accused of blasphemy and sentenced to two years in prison for allegedly

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[33] James Sparks, *The Chronicler's Genealogies: Towards and Understanding of 1 Chronicles 1–9* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 10–11.

insulting the Quran, is another example. The Court of Appeal's judgment upholding the government's prohibition of a Catholic publication from using the word *Allah* is an example from the Malaysian context. These examples show that giving up the claim to absolute truth is a non-starter in interreligious dialogue in some contexts and Malaysia is one such context.

One organization that promotes interreligious dialogues and cooperation among different religions in Malaysia is the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST). It was formed in 1983 to promote goodwill, harmony and unity among Malaysians irrespective of creed, religion, race, culture or gender. It holds round-table dialogues as its principal and preferred means of resolving potential conflicts between different religious groups. It also has a publication agenda to promote its goals and objectives.[34] The Christian component of this organization is the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM), which itself is comprised of representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Council of Churches of Malaysia and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship. One of its goals is to foster unity among Christians. Another is to promote understanding and harmony among religious adherents. This organization is recognized by the Federal and State governments as the official representative of Christians in Malaysia. According to the 2010 Census report, CFM represents more than 2.62 million Christians (9.2%) within the Malaysian population. Significant in a Malaysian context is the fact that more than 60% are Christians from Malay speaking communities located mainly in East Malaysia.[35]

Conclusion

One of the greatest impetuses for interreligious dialogues today is the need to live peaceably with those who have different beliefs from us. Although religion is not the sole cause of violence, passionate religious identities and commitments have often served to exacerbate tensions and promote bloodshed.[36] This is also true of

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[34] Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST), accessed April 5, 2020, https://www.hati.my/malaysian-consultative-council-of-buddhism-christianity-hinduism-sikhism-and-taoism-mccbchst/.

[35] Christian Federation of Malaysia: https://cfmsia.org/, accessed April 9, 2020.

[36] Thomas Banchoff, "Introduction: Religious Pluralism in World Affairs," *Religious Pluralism, Globalization, and World Politics*, ed. Thomas Banchoff (Oxford:

Malaysia. In the final analysis, we are all foreign residents of this world. We do not own it and we have to leave when the time comes. Therefore, treating each other properly as a fellow *gēr* is not strange at all; it is the natural and right thing to do.

Oxford, 2008), 3.

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"Even If (God Does) Not, We Will Not"
A Christian Reflection from Daniel 3

Elaine Wei-Fun Goh

This essay examines Daniel 3 in the light of a few disquieting concerns which happened in the Malaysian state and society. The concerns include, among others, an infamous enforced disappearance, a Court of Appeal judgment upholding the government's prohibition of Christian publication from using the word Allah, and provocative remarks against the ethnic Chinese and the Christian minorities. I propose that one can situate and comprehend the concerns as challenges of Christian witness under only a handful of radicals who aim to gain majority support. I illustrate how this perspective has been put forward as racially and politically intended intimidation, which disguises as religious piety, like the situation faced by the three friends in Daniel 3. Lastly, I highlight a suggestion in which persistence and audacity can be lived out among Christians and others in similar contexts, in order to go on with hope nonetheless.

Malaysia Contexts: At a Glance

The past and the present of Malaysia after the 14th General Election on May 9, 2018 are still in constant public scrutiny. Because of the change of political parties that has formed the new government, some theological reflections are also adjusting to the supposedly new era of government leadership. Those who had written something for the past, now find themselves writing again for something which is still happening at present, and looking forward to what future lies ahead.

Malaysians are generally peace-loving nationals who cherish law and order. Most of the Malaysian citizens embrace harmony despite living in a multireligious and multiethnic society. Honestly speaking, the minority Christians in Malaysia are in no place near the scenario of the exiled people in Babylon. The challenges in Malaysia are also far less disturbing if compared to Christian minority in the Middle East, Pakistan, Egypt, Myanmar and some parts of China. However, if one postulates that a government, which

had been in power for over 60 years, can be understood as an "empire," then the National Front (in Bahasa Malaysia, *Barisan Nasional*) government of Malaysia might be considered as the most powerful regime until May 9, 2018. Christian witness during those times was not without problems. As time goes by, the situation does not seem to get easier even now.

The case and the controversies with regards to the enforced disappearance of Pastor Raymond Koh that happened in Malaysia had reached its 1,000 days at the point of this writing.[1] Raymond Koh was abducted from his car in broad daylight on February 13, 2017 by a group of men in three black vehicles, and his whereabouts are still unknown.[2] Victims of enforced disappearance that had since caught public attention, besides Raymond Koh, include also indigenous Pastor Joshua Hilmy and his wife Ruth Sitepu, and Perlis welfare activist Amri Che Mat. According to a former Malaysia ambassador, Dennis Ignatius, in his article, "Pastor Raymond Koh and the Great Cover-up" in *Free Malaysia Today*, "All four missing persons had one thing in common: they had all run afoul of the religious authorities."[3] The "religious" meant here is not just anti-Christianity sentiment, as the victims include a Muslim and a social activist. Therefore, it is not a situation of the Muslim majority against the Christian minority; rather, it is a situation of powerful government authorities against the civilian of certain faith. One may ponder to ask: Is it safe to practice what one believes—kindness, fairness and justice—in Malaysia? Practicing one's belief, it appears, does have risk. "How should Christians live out the biblical values of kindness, fairness and justice with confidence and hope nevertheless?" This may be a nagging question which some

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[1] Annabelle Lee, "Raymond Koh: 1,000 Days of Unanswered Questions," *Malaysiakini*, November 17, 2019, accessed November 17, 2019, https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/500115.

[2] Stephen Ng and Lee Hwa Beng, *Where is Pastor Raymond Koh?* (Selangor: Semai Maju Sdn Bhd, 2019) narrates the shocking incident of the enforced disappearance of Pastor Raymond Koh on 13 Feb 2017 in Malaysia. The book reports the incident, the public inquiry of The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), numerous interviews and analysis, and points to possible involvement of the law reinforcement in this perhaps most high profiled abduction in Malaysia history.

[3] Dennis Ignatius, "Pastor Raymond Koh and the Great Cover-up," *Free Malaysia Today*, July 8, 2019, accessed July 11, 2019, https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com /category/opinion/2019/07/08/pastor-raymond-koh-and-the-great-cover-up/. It is mentioned in this article that some powerful forces within the religious establishment were at play in the conspiracy with the government.

Malaysian Christians grapple with. I suggest a look at Daniel 3 as a conversation partner on Christian witness in Malaysia.

Daniel Chapter Three: At a Glance

Norman W. Porteous points out one of the ways of reading Daniel 3, besides treating it as a martyr story, is to see it as a familiar type in every age, as acquiring a particular meaning and made relevant to a particular situation through the setting in which one finds it.[4] While it is possible that the narrative recalls the memory of faithful people of God in the past, it may be well that one appropriates the story in the narratives of today's Malaysian state and society. In this essay, at the outset I seek to draw attention to the text in Daniel 3 on the one hand, and then dialogue with Malaysian contexts on the other.

The story in Daniel 3 is brilliantly crafted. I propose that it reflects the following flow of thought of a chiastic structure.

A	Dan 3:1–7	Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden statue
B	Dan 3:8–15	Nebuchadnezzar questioned their God
C	Dan 3:16–18	They were not afraid
D	Dan 3:19–23	Nebuchadnezzar threw them into the furnace
E	Dan 3:24–25	Nebuchadnezzar saw the God of the three friends
D′	Dan 3:26	Nebuchadnezzar called them out from the furnace
C′	Dan 3:27	They were not hurt
B′	Dan 3:28–29	Nebuchadnezzar praised their God
A′	Dan 3:30	Nebuchadnezzar elevated the three friends

Daniel 3 opens and ends with Nebuchadnezzar elevating someone: he erects a golden statue in verse 1, and he promotes Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in verse 30. This *inclusion* of an elevating act, though appears to be a similar act, conveys a sharp reversal of motive. It also communicates an irony: in the beginning Nebuchadnezzar wanted everyone to bow down to the golden statue he had erected, in the end he promoted the three Jews who did not bow down to it.

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[4] Norman W. Porteous, *Daniel*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1965), 55–56.

From the chiastic structure, one observes the center point is set at 3:24–25. Nebuchadnezzar saw the fourth person in the furnace of fire, the one who "has the appearance of a god." Nebuchadnezzar had actually seen the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (hereafter "the three friends"). This main point in the middle of the chiastic structure relates closely with the opening and closing verses. Assuming the golden statue was a statue of a Babylonian god, by erecting this religious statue, Nebuchadnezzar intended for everyone to see this god, and to worship this god. Yet, at the heart of the passage, Nebuchadnezzar himself saw another god—the God of the three Jewish subjects, and he praised this God at the end of the narrative. Here is another irony at play.

Could the trials which God's people endure under the hand of the powerful turn out to be an opportunity to witness eventually? There is a powerful message, that it was Nebuchadnezzar—the most powerful person in the Babylonian establishment and the very person who questioned the existence of God—who actually saw God. The powerful ones ironically have a glimpse of the truth about God when they actually intended to deny it. The fiery ordeal was aimed for God's people who were the minority in the country. There seems to be a prompt for Malaysian Christians in Daniel 3, that a threatening crisis could turn out to be an opportunity for robust witnesses. And, the powerful establishment will ironically "see" that God is present with the faithful people in the fiery ordeal, and the credence of the people may be uplifted.

I hope to illustrate this point by walking through Daniel 3 in three main points: the challenge (3:1–7), the persistence (3:8–18), and the hope (3:19–20).

The Challenge (3:1–7)
Political Jealousy

When the exilic people of Judah were under the Babylonian empire, their practice of faith put them in danger. The Book of Daniel narrates in general, how the people of God were found in a dilemma: they persisted to live out their faith under unfriendly environment on the one hand, and to face constant threats of survival on the other. The challenges appear to be related to religious matters, but in essence it is politically inclined. The "image of gold," literally, is not explicitly a statue of any god or goddess. But the word "image" or "statue" in Dan 3:1 (*ṣĕlēm*) also appears in Daniel 2 (2:31, 32, 34, 35), in the king's dream. Daniel had interpreted the dream concerning

the statue, which was made of gold (its head), silver (its chest and arms), bronze (its middle part and thigh), iron (its legs), and clay (its feet). Daniel's interpretation of this statue in 2:36–45 is obviously one that is political. It is in this political sense that one should continue to interpret the motif behind the golden statue in Daniel 3.

Further, every time when the golden statue is mentioned in Daniel 3, the king is directly connected with it (Dan 3:1–3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 14–15, 18).[5] The image is either made or is set up by Nebuchadnezzar (3:1–3, 5, 7, 12, 14–15, 18), or is to be worshiped under the king's decree (3:10). In short, even if the statue is an image of a god, it is by the king's order that it is set up and be worshipped by all. It is, therefore, a political power on display, by the command of the king. Who dares to defy this political power?

Furthermore, the target are the Jews whom the king has "appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon" (3:12). There must be a reason why the appointment of provincial affair is mentioned from the talk of the accusers, the Chaldeans. One recalls Daniel's ability to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Chapter 2 besides the inability of the Chaldeans' astrologers. Here in Chapter 3, Daniel's friends hold some kind of position in the Babylonian establishment. The chapter opening scene sets the stage for ethnic prejudice as well as political jealousy.[6] A political motif also sets the scenarios in Daniel 3. The prelude, accusations, and the persecutions are politically driven. Even the main characters are briskly involved in the world of politics.[7]

Ethnic Hostility

The names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are repeated 13 times in Daniel 3, with the exact order each time (in each of the verses of 12–14, 16, 19–20, 22–23, 26 [twice], 28–30). The names are all Babylonian names. In Daniel 1, by contrast, the names of the three friends mentioned in the text were Hebrew names: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Dan 1:6). It was their Hebrew identity that was being stressed in Daniel 1, that they were Jews coping with survival in the foreign Babylonian court. So in Daniel 3, why were Babylonian names referred to and repeated instead?

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[5] Choon-Leong Seow, *Daniel*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 53.

[6] Bob Fyall, *Daniel: A Tale of Two Cities*, Focus on the Bible Commentary Series (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 1998), 49.

[7] Fyall, *Daniel: A Tale of Two Cities*, 57.

Choon-Leong Seow opines that the term "Chaldeans" may include the ethnic sense for the Babylonians, and the juxtaposition of "Chaldeans" with the Jews suggests xenophobia, which is a sheer hatred of foreigners.[8] Daniel 3 stages an accusation from the Babylonians, "certain Chaldeans came forward and denounced the Jews" (3:8). The Babylonian names of the three friends were being referred to up front (3:12). When Nebuchadnezzar summoned them to appear before him, he addressed them with their Babylonian names too (3:14). Therefore, it was their identity in captivity that is being stressed here in Daniel 3—they are foreigners who were now facing accusation and public confrontation in the Babylonian square.

The word *pendatang*, literally, "newcomers," i.e., "non-natives" or "immigrants" in Bahasa Malaysia, has sometimes been used by some malicious parties to label the minority Chinese and Indian ethnic groups in Malaysia. This was done despite the fact that the minority Chinese and Indian ethnic groups were born and raised in Malaysia and possessed Malaysian citizenship. Some Malaysian born Chinese can even trace back to three or four generations of their clans that speak different dialects such as Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, Fuzhou, and the like, that had lived in Malaysia as their home for more than a hundred years. The label *pendatang* was brought up when a small group of people intend to exemplify the Malay supremacy in this land. It is a similar sentiment like that of the three friends in Daniel 3; their very names mentioned were names of *pendatang*. They are "certain Jews," and their names "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego" (3:12) are Babylonian names from the mouth of the Chaldeans. Similarly, in Malaysia the label *pendatang* is intentionally used—and is abused—to tarnish the identity of Malaysian born Chinese and Indians, that they are not the legitimate citizens in this land.

Further in Daniel 3, we can deduce that the reason for such accusation and public confrontation is one of ethnic hostility. Reason being, the Jews are colonized people of Babylon and they should be submissive to the Babylonian supreme power. By not bowing down to the golden statue like everyone does, the three friends defy the king's order, and hence disrespect his supremacy. The enemy uses the king's honor as a leverage (3:12) to have effectively provoked the king's anger (3:19). In the case of Malaysia, the parties that heighten the thoughts of *pendatang* actually intend to direct at the supremacy

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[8] Seow, *Daniel*, 54.

of Malay majority, aiming to provoke racial hostility and tribal loyalty. This inevitably entails a defense of dominance from the majority.

Daniel 3 begins with a display of power and authority in public. The lists of officials and musical instruments, and the mention of various ethnic groups and people, are elaborate. The captive names were called and summoned. These are showcases of high-handed political power. Underneath such a showcase are suppressions of the minority group of people in a nation.

Therefore, in real life who dares to challenge the spokespersons from the mainstream who try to influence the society? The religious and ethnic minorities are expected to fawn to the majority. Even though there are substantial voices of moderation among the ethnic Malays and Muslims, Christians in Malaysia are generally affected with the provocations by the mere handful. A case in point is the judicial ban on the use of *Allah*, the word for God in the Bible, in all Bahasa Malaysia publications.[9] Several shipments of the *Alkitab*, the Holy Bible in Bahasa Malaysia, were detained at different ports of entry because they contain the word *Allah*.[10] An attempt by a church in Sabah to seek clarification for the judicial ban was in vain, as the Kuala Lumpur High Court rejected the church's effort to find out the reason the word *Allah* is banned in non-Muslims' publications, stating such information is classified under

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[9] Although going against linguistic evidences, religious right and constitutional justification, the judicial prohibition of Christian publication in Malaysia to use the word *Allah* is now final. The *Allah* controversies in Malaysia involved several incidents over the years. First, the threat by the Home Ministry for *the Herald's* publication not to use *Allah* on January 7, 2009; then the Home Ministry's appeals; and then the Court of Appeal's ban on October 14, 2013. Then, the Selangor Islamic Religious Council forcefully raided the premises of the Bible Society of Malaysia on January 2, 2014. For useful information with detailed analysis, read Jaclyn L. Neo, "What's in a Name? Malaysia's 'Allah' Controversy and the Judicial Intertwining of Islam with Ethnic Identity," *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 12, no. 3 (July 2014): 751–68, November 8, 2014, accessed November 11, 2019, https://academic.oup.com/icon/article/12/3/751/763782.

[10] Bishop Ng Moon Hing, then the chairman of the executive committee of the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM), in his media statement on March 10, 2011, stated, "It would appear as if the authorities are waging a continuous, surreptitious and systematic program against Christians in Malaysia to deny them access to the Bible in Bahasa Malaysia." See Ng Moon Hing, "Detention of Bahasa Malaysia Bibles Yet Again," Christian Federation of Malaysia Media Statement, March 10, 2011, accessed November 16, 2019, https://cfmsia.org/2011/03/10/detention-of-bahasa-malaysia-bibles-yet-again. See more of the related CFM media statements from https://cfmsia.org/category/alkitab-allah/.

the Official Secrets Act (OSA).[11] As a result, the distribution of the *Alkitab* in Malaysia, too, was controlled. Once in a while, this has resulted in related hateful remarks of some religious extremists, to say the least.[12]

Jaclyn Neo opines that the *Allah* controversies and the ensuing incidents demonstrates the "legal, social, and political implications intertwining ethnic nationalism with religious identity."[13] The historical and cultural factors have motivated the hostilities against other religious groups, whereby, the real motivation is not so much of religious piety, but "tribal instinct." [14] Living as a minority ethnic Chinese and Christian, as a result, has clear and present challenges in Malaysia.

The Persistence (3:8–18)

Daniel 3:8–18 paints a vivid picture of how God's people as a community, represented by the three friends, were not willing to follow the political decree blindly. "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us" (3:18), they said at first. It is natural to think of God's deliverance in times of trouble. When troubles come, the first thing that gets into the mind of a believer is most probably the need to pray for God's deliverance. From the bottom of the heart, Christians believe that the LORD is a God who delivers. God coming as a heroic deliverer is attested throughout the Bible. God rescued Noah from the great flood. God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. God raised up the judges to deliver people from the hands of enemies. Therefore, the people of God are biblically conditioned to turn to God for rescue. Children at the Sunday School are taught

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[11] "Reasons for 'Allah' ban on non-Muslim publications classified under OSA, says KL high court," *Today Online*, October 16, 2017, accessed November 17, 2019, https://www.todayonline.com/world/asia/malaysias-reasons-allah-ban-non-muslim-publications-classified-under-osa-says-kl-high.

[12] For example, on April 20, 2015, about 50 residents of Taman Medan in Petaling Jaya staged a protest against a new church as the church had put up a cross on the building frontage. It was claimed that putting up the cross in a Muslim-majority area "challenged Islam." The church agreed to take down the cross the same day. Later, however, some Muslim leaders, NGOs and moderate Malaysians had criticized the protest itself. See more report at *The Star Online*, April 20, 2015, accessed November 11, 2019, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2015/04/20/50-stage-protest-against-cross-on-new-church.

[13] Neo, "What's in a name? Malaysia's 'Allah' Controversy," accessed November 15, 2019.

[14] Neo, "What's in a name? Malaysia's 'Allah' Controversy," accessed November 15, 2019.

intrinsically to call on God for help when in trouble. Sometimes this is called simple faith. However, what if things are not that simple?

The three friends exceed the otherwise "naïve optimism."[15] They continue, "Even if not," meaning, "Even if God does not deliver us," they will nevertheless face the furnace of fire squarely (3:17–18). The response of the three friends is "a theological high point" in the passage, and they do not seem to be obliged to respond to the king's ridicule at all.[16] Rather, they readdress the perspective of Nebuchadnezzar that was directed at them, "If you (the three friends) are…" (3:15) to God, "If our God is able…." (3:17) and "Even if God does not…" (3:18).[17] They know their defiance would cause them death in the furnace of blazing fire; yet their focus is on who God is. There is a willingness "to embrace the terrible possibility of divine inaction or even divine failure,"[18] because they are actually not sure that God can save them from such a desperate situation.

The conviction of the three friends is inspiring. It may imply that some people had abandoned their principle under the Babylonian regime, one that is arrogant, provocative and threatening. Some may have renounced their faith and turned to the other gods. Some may be keeping quiet so that they do not offend the Babylonian power in order to survive. The persistence that is seen in the three friends is, therefore, a contrast and a pointer. "Even if God does not save us, we will not compromise" is their persistence. To them, death has a different meaning: it is a refusal to violate their conviction, and "an unwillingness to be perjured or preempted."[19] This is a kind of faith that turns one's focus to God, and perseveres even if that comes with a cost.

Perhaps God's people in Malaysia can genuinely consider this expression of deeper faith—"Even if God does not spare us troubles." It points to the preparedness and willingness of faithful believers to bear the cost of discipleship. Decently speaking, the cost of discipleship for Malaysian Christians is nothing like the burning furnace or even shedding blood, literally. It does include, however, the boldness and courage to stand up against religious harassment and racial aggravation, and place God in a proper viewpoint,

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[15] W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 52.

[16] Seow, *Daniel*, 55–56.

[17] Seow, *Daniel*, 56.

[18] Towner, *Daniel*, 52.

[19] Towner, *Daniel*, 53.

whether or not God will deliver them from troubles.

"Who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?" The arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3:15 resonates with the threats that Christians had received. For instance, a fundamentalist non-government organization in Malaysia had openly called for Muslims to burn the Bahasa Malaysia Bibles as they contain the word *Allah*.[20] This appeared to be done with the intention to provoke Christians' retaliation, yet it might be read as an attempt to gain majority support. The largest group of Christians in Malaysia actually comprises the indigenous Christians from East Malaysia, and they have been using Bahasa Malaysia Bible which contain the word *Allah* since hundreds of years ago. To them, the Bible in the national language is the foundation of their faith, the source of Christian doctrines, the basis of worship life and spiritual formation. Under the pressure of judicial ban as well as threats from the aggressors, the indigenous Christians are to look to Daniel's three friends as models of audacity. Defying retaliation, they should persistently use the Bahasa Malaysia Bible daily, and fearlessly. Will there be awful consequences? Most probably. There is a cost of discipleship in Malaysia.

The Hope (3:19–30)

The material that had been used to make the statue in Daniel 3 is of gold, and its size is tall. There is also an imperative for everyone to bow down before it. Obviously, Nebuchadnezzar prized heavily on the golden statue. If the golden statue is an image of a Babylonian god, Nebuchadnezzar valued this god and hence, despised the God of the three friends. He threatened to send the three friends to the furnace of fire, and said in contempt, "Who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?" (3:15).[21] Yet, after the miracle of

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[20] A call by Perkasa, an ethnic Malay non-governmental organization (NGO) which was led by its president Ibrahim Ali. This NGO has created several racially and religiously charged national headlines. On 21 January 2013, Perkasa called on Muslims to burn Christian Bibles printed in Bahasa Malaysia which use the term "Allah." Its president was being investigated under the Sedition Act by the Malaysian police after several police reports lodged against him. The government released him without any prosecution nevertheless, believably to fortify the majority Muslims' vote.

[21] Jeremiah 29:22 records another incident that had associated the punishment by burning of two Jews, Zedekiah and Ahab, with the command of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. Porteous pointed out similar documented punishment by burning in Egypt, and during the Maccabean period. See Porteous, *Daniel*, 58.

survival of the three in the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar changed his attitude completely in 3:28, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him."

This change of attitude is dramatic, and also conveys irony on three counts. First, the very God whom Nebuchadnezzar despised earlier is now praised by him. Secondly, it is mentioned that all peoples are commanded to fall down and worship the golden statue (3:4–5); if not, they will face death (3:15). Later in 3:29, however, it is decreed that anyone who blasphemes against the God of the three friends shall face death. Thirdly, the contempt of Nebuchadnezzar, "who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?" (3:15), has turned into an approval, "there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way" (3:29). The pagan king now has a glimpse of the truth about God.

The reversal is repeated, and is intended, to communicate hope. It is the type of hope that, ironically, God's name be praised eventually, the perpetrators be held responsible, and public contempt will turn into public acceptance. It is not the type of hope that "everything will be better," or "we will face no evil," or "God will surely deliver us from trouble." None of these reflects the message stated in Daniel 3. It is but the type of hope that "God is with us in our trouble." The ultimate vindication of such a witness, as in Daniel 3, is the king's recognition of their God.

The God of the three friends *did not* deliver them out from the furnace. On the contrary, it is Nebuchadnezzar who had delivered them out from the furnace (3:26)! Why do we like to think that God should deliver us out of our troubles? It is probably because people usually applaud the idea of divine superhero, and they like to propagate that God is the One who saves the day. However, God does not always work this way. The next question one grapples with is the question, "Where is God when his people hurt?" The text says, there is a fourth person in the furnace, and the fourth person has the appearance of a god (3:25). Therefore, the text says, God is in the furnace *with* his people. Another way of putting it, God is in the trouble wherein God's people is dealing with.

There is a message of hope that the narrator of Daniel 3 tries to convey. The three friends may be afraid of the danger they face. Nevertheless, they do not only survive the ordeal; they encounter

divine presence in the fire ordeal.[22] Their survival without a trace of burning in the fire is not presented as a direct reward for their faithfulness; it is an act of God's faithfulness.[23] In Daniel 3, God did not remove the "furnace of blazing fire" from the faithful people. God let them walk into it. It was in the furnace of fire that they can experience God's presence. In short, the message of Daniel 3 is not on "being delivered from the furnace," but "experiencing God in the furnace." Such a conviction may miraculously result in reversals of consequences. How that may happen is left entirely in God's hands. If one insists that God does deliver them out from the furnace, then the intention—to encourage perseverance among God's people in the face of trials—is regrettably compromised.

Malaysian Context: A Christian Reflection on Daniel 3

One of the disturbing prayer items among Malaysian Christians includes the missing pastors who vanished without a trace these recent years. Their disappearance had been suggested by some to be linked to their outreach ministry of converting people from the dominant religion to Christianity.[24] Whether or not their disappearance is connected to religious motive is unknown, but the alleged connection does suggest an uneasiness among different ethnic groups toward one another, especially when conversions take place. The conversions are often found to be offensive for some with compelling tribal instinct. In defense, some outspoken ones had lashed out hateful comments and offensive remarks to the minority groups in the nation. One of the frequent offensive remarks include denouncing public Christmas celebration and calling for the ethnic Chinese Malaysians to return to mainland China.

For Malaysian Christians, "the golden statue" is the political power that could be depended upon by some radicals to intimidate and to command the compliance from the minorities. Yet, the real enemy is only a handful of aggressors who has a misplaced tribal loyalty and who had claimed to represent the Muslim majority. They are "the Chaldeans," who are the socio-political influencers, and who are hostile to and harassing the minority believers in the state.

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22 Seow, *Daniel*, 60.

23 Towner, *Daniel*, 58.

24 Ng and Lee, *Where is Pastor Raymond Koh?*, 122–24, wrote about Koh's involvement in social work especially among the *Harapan Kommuniti* (Community of Hope) in Kedah, mainly to reach out in kindness and to improve the living condition of the marginalized.

The three friends—a community of faith—are Malaysian Christians who, being a minority, are living under a domineering mainstream. The community of faith includes also the marginalized ethnic groups, like the Indians, the Indigenous and the Chinese in the country. Their expression of faith makes them easy targets of hostility.

"Who is the god that can deliver you from my hand?" The word "hand" has the meaning of power, and is often associated with Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:38, 3:15, 17; Ezra 5:12). Words of Nebuchadnezzar finds its resonance in the arrogance and high-handed political die-hards in Malaysia who have support from the powerful hands. The message from Daniel 3, therefore, points us to the reality of dangers and the threats to their faith. There is a "furnace" that one has to go into and it may be dangerous, or deadly. The "furnace" could be continual intimidations, direct confrontations, clashes and riots, even death threats. "Even if God does not" spare us from these, "we will not" move away. We can make these experiences meaningful, nevertheless, by facing the challenges courageously, and by denying the claim of the powerful ones to distract us from the ways of justice and fairness. "Even if God…we will not" is a type of witness at a cost. As a result, all others, including the powerful and the influencers in the state and society, at least have a glimpse of the truth about God.

Malaysians had undergone political twist-and-turn after May 9, 2018 in the 14th General Election where a new government was formed by the opposition, and then the fateful change of government again following a sudden resignation of Prime Minister Dr. Tun Mahathir on Feb 24, 2020. The *Rakyat* (citizen) across religions and ethnic identities have thought that they have had witnessed a new turn in Malaysia political history after joining hands to vote for a better government, only to find a poignant downturn bringing Malaysia back to a political scenario that favors the past regime for over 60 years, one that was tainted with financial scandals and multiple power abuses. The efforts of the *Rakyat* in participating in *Bersih* (a march toward a clean election movement) have seemed to achieve nothing, as the national agenda is now set by only a handful of power crazed and selfish individuals. So, are justice and reckoning still possible? Needless to say, under the present regime, some national scandals, power abuses and notorious financial frauds involving some high-ranking officials shall not be re-investigated. Many other nagging problems will unlikely be

solved so soon for sure. This nevertheless sets the continuing platform where Malaysian Christians living out their conviction and carrying on effective witness. Once again, "Even if God…we will not" is a type of witness at a cost. The *Rakyat* especially the people of faith should deny the claim of the powerful political hands to distract us from the ways of justice and fairness.

Conclusion

I trust that I have related the social dynamic within Daniel 3 with that of the Malaysian context in this essay. Daniel 3 is a reflection of some of the threats and challenges that are still confronting the minority ethnic group and the minority Christians, not only in Malaysia but also in similar contexts around the world. I yearn to emphasize that more often than not, the pressures and possible ordeals come from a small group of aggressors who subscribe to racial intolerance. I, therefore, propose that Daniel 3 is a pointer of hope nevertheless, if the people of God do not succumb to the threatening reality of merely a handful of aggressors who claim to represent the majority. Challenges entail effective witnesses if one sets the perspective rightly on God. Christians as Jesus' disciples need to persevere and pray more than ever, with hope nonetheless!

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Populism and Nationalism
A Yahwistic Critique of Jonah's Religious Nationalism

Philip P. Chia

What has populism and nationalism to do with the biblical book of Jonah? Jonah, as will be explored in the following, is a book about the people (אָדָם), about the place and priority of the people in Yahweh's everyday concern. The themes of the book of Jonah have been many—salvation, delivery, compassion, (foreign) missions, Jonah the escapee, great whale/fish miracle, but very seldom "the people," as the central theme of the book has caught scholars' attention, since the focus has often been on either Yahweh or Jonah. The argument from Yahweh is that "the people's lives" matter (PLM) and that Yahweh has concerns for the people; while Jonah's key argument, based on his narrowly accustomed "religious nationalism" as a Yahweh worshipper, is that of the "Hebrew" first and that of a selfish and ethnic religious chauvinist.

Introduction: We, The People that Yahweh Cares (PYC)!

Populism is a phenomenon about *the people*.[1] Nationalism concerns the attitude and actions of *the people* who shared a common national identity, culture, value, enemy or even fate. "National populists prioritize the culture and interests of the nation, and

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[1] Benjamin Moffitt rightly sums up that "populism has been a contested concept throughout its history," and that "it is useful to acknowledge that there is no single definition of populism waiting to be 'discovered' if the 'right words' can simply be found to describe it." In his *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 12, 27. The key referent of populism is, however, "the people" as pointed out clearly by Margaret Canovan, cf., *The People* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005); cf., s.v. "The People," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, ed. John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig and Anne Phillips (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006): 349–62; John B. Judis, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics* (New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016); Jiro Mizushiwa, *Populism towa nanika: Minsyusyugi no Teki ka Kaikaku no Kibou ka* (Japan: Chuokoron-Shinsha, Inc, 2016); Chinese translation 水島治郎 著 林詠純 譯 《民粹時代: 是邪惡的存在, 還是改革的希望?》(台北: 先覺出版股份有限公司, 2018) (Taipei: Bardon Chinese Media Agency, 2018).

promise to give voice to a people who feel that they have been neglected, even held in contempt, by distant and often corrupt elites," as Eatwell and Goodwin pointed out.[2] National populism "emerged long before the financial crisis that erupted in 2008 and the Great Recession that followed, is a twenty-first century movement that challenges mainstream politics… and it is here to stay."[3]

What has populism and nationalism to do with the biblical book of Jonah? Jonah, as will be explored in the following, is a book about *the people* (אָדָם), about the *place* and *priority* of *the people* in Yahweh's everyday concern (Jonah 4:11). The themes of the book of Jonah have been many—salvation, delivery, compassion (foreign) missions, Jonah the escapee, great whale/fish miracle, and symbol of death, burial and resurrection with three days in the fish belly (Matt 12:39–42; Luke 11:29–32)—but very seldom has "*the people*" as the central theme of the book caught scholars' attention, since the focus has often been on either Yahweh or Jonah. The very last verse that closes the book of Jonah has puzzled many who see it as an open-ended story, with no conclusion, while awaiting the reader to ponder over what could be the reader's or Jonah's response to such a rhetorical question (4:11), blatantly stated by Yahweh as the answer and purpose for the entire story of Jonah. The only reason given by Yahweh as a motive for the act of calling Jonah urgently to go immediately to Nineveh was attested, however, in the very last verse of the book in 4:11, that Yahweh cares about *the people* (אָדָם), besides the factual reason given in 1:2 that "their evil" (רָעָתֶם) have reached Yahweh being the immediate cause for action. Yes, "*the people*" is the focus and every purpose of the book of Jonah, just as it resonates in Micah 6:8, that "He has told you, *Oh, people*, what is good," and also the familiar verse from the Gospel of John 3:16, "For God so Love the world (κόσμον)." The world, *the people*, is God's business, even when rulers of the earth are not for *the people* of the world.

Closely associated with the concern for *the people* is the idea of "evil" (רָעָה) in the book of Jonah, which reveals paradoxical accusations that lead ultimately to a Yahwistic critique of Jonah's traditional nationalistic religious ideology (2:3–10) throughout the

entire argument of the book. It first begins with Yahweh's accusation on the "evil" state of Nineveh, the great city's national moral condition (1:2), which inevitably demands a divine action in the form of a command given to Jonah to act imperatively for Yahweh's concern. But the story ended up unexpectedly, with Jonah's accusation on the act of Yahweh as "great evil" in 4:1, for not imposing the "evil" on the great city of Nineveh that was supposed to happen as stated in 3:10 ("because they turned from their evil way, and God relented of the evil"). Yahweh the accuser became the accused, while Jonah the disobedient Yahweh worshipper became the religious accuser. Their acts, Yahweh's and Jonah's, throughout the story formed their arguments in defense of their theological stands and offenses to their opposites, demonstrated various understanding of religious tradition, national ideology, the elite and the populist, local and foreigner, with respect to the idea of administering justice, especially as represented by the great city of Nineveh, according to Yahweh. Yahweh's acts of responses were initiated by the changing conditions of this great city of Nineveh, while Jonah's acts of resistance were based on his loyalty to his national ideology and appeals to his Yahwistic religious tradition. It was in their acts and non-acts that this essay proposed to expose the ideas of populism and nationalism hidden within the text that invites, in dialogue with Malaysian diaspora perspectives, Yahwistic critiques of the traditional ideology of Jonah's religious nationalism. It is this very idea about Yahweh's great concerns for "*the people*" that warrants a fresh study on the book of Jonah, with populism and nationalism in perspective, and in dialogue with the phenomenon of national populism in Malaysia as revealed through the *Bersih* (clean) movement.[4]

The 'Evil' *Ra'ah* (רָעָה) Accusations

The word "evil" (רָעָה)[5] occurs 7 times (1:2, 7, 8; 3:10; 4:1, 2, 6) in Jonah, with only 1:2 and 4:1 significantly related to this study, whereas in 1:7–8, it refers to a disaster situation whereby a potential

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[4] Cf., Khoo, Boo Teik, "The Ends of Populism: Mahathir's Departure and Thaksin's Overthrow," in *Populism in Asia*, ed. Kosuke Mizuno and Pasuk Phongpaichit (Singapore: NUS Press. 2009), 127–43. On *Bersih*, please refer to the official web-site, https://www.bersih.org.

[5] The feminine noun רָעָה commonly means "evil" occurred 315 times in the MT, cf., David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press; Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011), 521.

ship-wreck crisis is in view; 3:10 referring to the "judgment" that Yahweh said would do to the city but did not do, and 4:2 is used similar to 3:10; while 4:6 refers to the 'misery' that Jonah suffered from the sun heat. It is the "evil" of Nineveh in 1:2 and the accusation of Jonah on the act of Yahweh in 4:1 that strike the interest of this study. This section examines Yahweh's treatment of Nineveh (1:2), Jonah's response to Yahweh's act on Nineveh (4:1), and Yahweh's response to Jonah's reaction (4:6–11).

Yahweh on Nineveh

The story begins with a command from Yahweh to Jonah, urging him to go and "cry out" to the great city, Nineveh (1:1–2). The urgency is caused by the ascending of their "evil" (רָעָה) to the face of Yahweh. Given the urgency and imperative of the situation that Jonah is to go immediately, there is no reason that the details of the accusation remain an abstract "evil," either as a noun, calling their acts as evil, or as an adjective, describing their acts being evil. The simple fact is that Yahweh has considered Nineveh, this great city, "evil."

The "evil" verdict (1:2)

The "evilness" of this great city must be extremely serious and burdensome that it causes a deep concern for Yahweh to act swiftly. The common expression, however, in the Hebrew Bible is for "the cry of the oppressed people" to ascend and present itself in front of Yahweh" (Exod 2:23–25; Judg 2:18), and that injustice has often been the case and considered as evil (Eccl 4:3). Thus, it is possible that injustice abound in this great city of Nineveh, and deemed as evil in the eyes of Yahweh.

The "great city" (1:2; 3:2, 3; 4:11)

The city of Nineveh is described as "great." The word "great" (גָּדוֹל) occurs 14 times in the book of Jonah. Almost all occurrences are qualitative usage referring to the essence or nature of the subject matter. The "big fish" (2:1), "huge sea-wave" (1:4, 12), "great fear" (1:10, 16), "noble person" (3:5, 7), "great evil" (4:1), and "great delight" (4:6) are all qualitative usage of the term. Nineveh, the "great city" is often taken to mean the enormous "size" of the city, just like the "big fish," or even the severeness of the "huge storm." It is more likely, however, that the "greatness" of the city lays not just on the huge number of the population, but the importance of the

city with regards to its religious, financial, political, ideological and military power. Perhaps, it is the system of government or the moral and ethical system on how daily business are being conducted in this great city of Nineveh that creates great injustice and oppression within the city, and that such an evil system of daily practice this "great" city of Nineveh promotes and being followed as exemplary by others in the era that warrants immediate action from Yahweh. Perhaps, at this juncture, we could assume that the injustice suffered by the people in Nineveh is inflicted upon them by the very own evil way of Nineveh, and that the cry of agony from the oppressed people has arisen and caught Yahweh's serious attention. It is *the people* (אָדָם), that Yahweh is truly concerned as the book closed with the reason of Yahweh's action.

The "evil way" (3:8–10)

The people of Nineveh are commanded that they "must turn from their evil way and from the violence that is in their hands/palms" (3:8). The phrase could be taken as an idiomatic metaphorical expression for the habitual behaviors of unfair acts that serve only the interest of oneself, often ended up in violence due to "injustice." Such state of "evil" inevitably creates enormous oppressive behaviors in the society, especially when this is the norm of conducting oneself in daily living. It is a total collapse of justice and lawfulness in the city of Nineveh whose "greatness" is exemplary. Thus, a repentance of a national scale is required as the decree indicated (3:6–9). "Lawlessness" could very well be the correct description of the condition of the city's "greatness," which means oppressive power is everywhere and painful suffering cry of agony shall gather to ascend, presenting the "evil" of the great city Nineveh to the face of Yahweh.

Jonah on Yahweh (4:1)

Jonah is extremely displeased with the act of Yahweh, literary, with "burning anger."[6] The emotional outcry of Jonah as expressed in 4:1 could only have one explanation: the "relenting" act of Yahweh to punish Nineveh caught Jonah by a total surprise,

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[6] "The cognate accusative construction רוַיֵּרַע … רָעָה (*vayyera' … ra'ah*) emphasizes the great magnitude of his displeasure (e.g., Neh 2:10 for the identical construction; see *IBHS* 167 §10.2.1g). The verb רָעַע (*ra'a'*) means 'to be displeasing'," *The NET Bible First Edition* (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).

possibly due to his overconfidence in his faith and belief in understanding the national God, Yahweh, as expressed in 1:9 and 2:3–10. It is precisely this religious nationalism that warrants a severe critique by Yahweh in 4:11. Jonah's great displeasure as expressed in 4:1, however, leads him to act as a bystander, taking a seat on the east side of Nineveh, awaiting the result of either his pronouncement in 3:4 to come true, or the effect of Yahweh's relenting act in 3:10 to install peace and justice in Nineveh. It is this gesture of Jonah that invited Yahweh's act of "object lesson" critiquing on Jonah's narrow religious nationalism.

Yahweh on Jonah (4:4, 6–11)

The exchange of question and answer between Yahweh and Jonah in 4:9 provides the setting for the true meaning explained in 4:10–11. The choice of the term concern/pity (חוס) is crucial for understanding Yahweh's point of view in teaching Jonah the crucial lesson that which is missing in Jonah's religious nationalism. In other words, Yahweh is asking Jonah what exactly is Jonah's concern? The plant that comes and goes in one day? The people of Nineveh? Or the traditional Yahwistic ideology or nationalism that Jonah prioritized? And Yahweh followed to lay it all out to Jonah in the next phrase, "how could I not concern/pity (חוס) Nineveh the great city?" (4:11a).[7] The lesson for Jonah to learn is his inability to perceive, understand and choose which is more valuable to Yahweh and him, the plant or the enormous people in Nineveh? Jonah obviously is blinded by his traditional religious nationalism. His national God is privately owned by him and should, therefore, work within the parameter set by the tradition and only for the interest of the nation. Jonah's view of Yahwism is under serious critique by Yahweh based on the concept of "concern/pity/care" (חוס) as elaborated through the object lesson of a plant's life and death.

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[7] Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary 31 (Dallas: Word, 2002), 507, puts it nicely, that "Yahweh's speech focuses on concern (חוס). Jonah's delight, anger, disappointment, frustration, and the other emotions he may have experienced in connection with the gourd are all aspects of concern. Likewise, the various 'emotions' Yahweh may have felt toward Nineveh can be summarized by the statement that he had concern for it. The verb חוס can mean both to be worried about, to be concerned about, and also to show active concern for, i.e., even 'to spare' (usually with על) as in 1 Sam 24:11 and Ezek 24:14."

The People (אָדָם) in Jonah (1:3–16; 3:5–9; 4:11)

There are two terms used to designate "the people" in the book of Jonah, "man" or "men" and "person," "human" or "*the people.*" There are three groups of people in view, the sailor in Jonah 1, the people of Nineveh in Jonah 3 and the one hundred and twenty thousand people in Jonah 4:11. The following will analyze their relations to the act of Yahweh and Jonah's perception of them.

The Sailors as the people (1:3–16)

With "*the people*" as the focus of the book, the first group of people Jonah encounters is the sailors and those on board the ship to Tarshish. On the attitude towards his own life in such a crisis moment, his ability to sleep reflects his confidence in his national God, one who is of abundant grace and mercy, and slow to anger, as he confesses in 4:2. Such privatized Yahwism of Jonah's religious nationalism excludes all non-Israelites from the concerns of Yahweh and himself. Yet, at the turn of the story, after his confession in 1:9 that he is a Hebrew who fear the God who created heaven and earth, sea and land, he is willing to offer himself as the solution to solve the crisis of potential ship-wreck by asking the sailors to throw him into the raging sea in order to save the ship and all on board. What is in the mind of Jonah, given the fact that he cares for no others on the ship? It is not convincing that Jonah's offer is a self-sacrificial act because of his compassion for those on board the ship. It is more consistent with Jonah throughout the book that he is confident of his faith in Yahweh for whatever outcome it may be by offering the solution of self-sacrifice to those on board the ship.

The People/Men of Nineveh (3:5–9)

The people of Nineveh take on a repentant mode immediately upon getting the message of Jonah in 3:4 that "forty days more, Nineveh will be overthrown." There is no certainty for the entire city in their act of fasting and repentance, which forms a sharp contrast against Jonah's prayer in the "fish belly" with not a single sense of repentance. This is a sharp critique on Jonah's narrow religious nationalism, on the part of the narrator, comparing the people of Nineveh who is extremely sensitive to religious utterance of warning, came out directly from the unrepentant Jonah. What a sarcastic insult to Jonah! Even the king and nobles of the great city is sensitive to Jonah's "death" sentencing message. The ability to initiate a critical self-examination of one's inner soul-searching

reflection is exactly what the narrator is driving home as a severe critique of Jonah's "die-hard" religious national ideology. The people of Nineveh (3:5) as populist, joint with the elites, the king and nobles (3:6–7), all take heed of the message uttered by Jonah, out of his nationalistic anger that pronounced doom shall fall on the city (3:4).

The One hundred twenty thousand 'adam (אָדָם) (4:11)

The only verse that provides a glimpse into *the people* of Nineveh is in 4:11. The verse which characterized as אָדָם, *'adam*, "people" has been suggested, though not very likely, to refer to "small children" of Nineveh. If the numeric number of one hundred and twenty thousand does not refer to innocent children, then an ancient city of this number of adult population is sizable, and might even be representative of the city's majority. If the figure is a round number, then it presents an exemplary city representative of the ideology of the empire. This definitely demands a divine action to intervene. *The people*, as the main focus of the book, gains prominent attention as the story flows, with two contesting views on what exactly does Yahweh concern most!

Jonah the Religious Nationalist (2:3–10)
The Confession of Jonah (1:9; 4:2)

In 1:9, Jonah chooses to present his identity in such a way that would reveal his nationality as a "Hebrew" and one who is defined by his national religion, as "one who fears Yahweh, the creator of heaven and earth, sea and land." This religious nationalistic confession of Jonah reflects a dominant understanding of Yahweh, his national God who is the creator and has dominion over the natural world. Arrogance in front of the foreign sailors at a ship-wreck crisis moment has been his attitude since he boarded the ship. Jonah provides another confessional statement in 4:2, where he invokes a list of divine attributes.[8] Jonah's confession eliminates all doubts concerning the extent of the authenticity and orthodoxy of Jonah's Yahwistic religion, which is far from the true nature and

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[8] Explained by Stuart, "At any rate, by citing this ancient formulation, Jonah confesses eloquently that hoping to see Nineveh destroyed even after he has preached there (4:5), he was actually expecting God to suppress his own natural inclination to show mercy wherever possible. It was not simply the case that Jonah could not bring himself to appreciate Nineveh. Rather, to a shocking extent, he could not stand God!" See Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, 503.

attributes of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is only natural that it invites a serious critique from Yahweh on Jonah's traditional religious nationalism.

Jonah's Religious Nationalism (2:3–10 HT)

The prayer of Jonah inside the fish belly reflects the most inner aspect of Jonah's Yahwistic belief. He appeals to the "temple" twice in the prayer (2:5, 8), promise to offer sacrifice and declare public praise (2:10), and he is well aware of his "calamity" (2:4–7) being inflicted by Yahweh as the source of it (2:4), but he will, however, continue to appeal to Yahweh through prayer (2:3, 8, 10). The prayer offers no confession of him having wrong Yahweh in his deeds and words. There is no connection to the reason for his fleeing to Tarshish; this has to wait until 4:2. No doubt Jonah is a person of faith and believes in Yahwism, yet for all its worth, his Yahwism appears to be a defect and even truncated in their communication. His traditional faith is a mere construct of his religious and national bias. Some considered the prayer as a thanksgiving psalm, though perhaps in forms, but there is not much to give thanks to, except he is still alive in the fish belly in distress, lest it was forgotten that he has no fear of dying for his national belief.

The 'Death' Pronouncement (3:4)

"Jonah began to go into the city, going on a day's journey. And he called out, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!'" (3:4, ESV). Is it not what Jonah wanted all the while to pronounce "death" to the people of Nineveh? There is serious "cold-bloodedness" in Jonah towards the people of Nineveh, a hate sentiment towards common people in the city. Again, obviously Jonah is blinded by his nationalism, as most acts of nationalism share this common sentiment and mentality, that his Yahwistic faith does not come to the forefront of his religious consciousness when it comes to real life engagement that involves enemy parties.

Jonah the Nationalist Bystander (4:5)

Jonah makes a rude and insulting but interesting move, after disputing with Yahweh (4:2) that he preferred death over accepting the "relenting move" of Yahweh on Nineveh (4:3), and that Yahweh has responded with a rhetorical question, "should you be so rightly angry" (4:4). In 4:5, he just left for the city without any response to Yahweh's rhetorical question in 4:4. This move to the east side of the

city, finding himself a nice spot and making himself a shelter knowing it will be hot under the sun, reflect not just a comedian sentiment, but more so as a bystander with careless attitude, because he "wanted to see what would happen to the city" (4:5). At any rate, Jonah is either awaiting a confirmation on his pre-understanding of Yahweh's relenting character (4:2), or he is gambling on the act of Yahweh on Nineveh, whether his national God will behave according to the prescription of his religious nationalistic understanding of Yahweh.

Jonah the "die-hard' Religious Nationalist (4:1, 3, 8–9)

Three times in chapter 4, Jonah uttered his "death wishes" (4:3, 8, 9). The first "death wish" (4:3) arises from a great dispute with what and how his national God is supposed to function, as he reflected a full knowledge of understanding on the attributes of his national God (4:2). Perhaps, it was the feeling of betrayal by his national God, who does not work according to his understanding of the interest of the nation. Thus, it is better to die than to live in the face of this reality (4:3). This death wish came after his raging complaint, calling Yahweh's relenting act an "evil" (4:1). The dispute that leads to such ruthless words is their differences in the priority of "concerns" as Yahweh was trying to educate him through the "plant and heat" lesson. This educational process led Jonah to further resistance, voicing out twice (4:8, 9) his death wishes. Self-interest, couple with support from a religious nationalistic ideology at work, Jonah is a classic example of religious nationalism. Death, three times acclaimed, Jonah demonstrates the highest quality of a religious nationalist mentality.

The Populists, The People, The Malaysian Bersih, and Jonah The Who!

On Populism and the People

In May 1967, there was a conference at the London School of Economics (LSE), organized by Ionescu and Gellner, that gathered forty-three experts in the field in an attempt to understand and define what populism is. In the "Introduction" of the volume, *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, which consists of collected essays from the conference, it was noted that, "There can, at present, be no doubt about the importance of populism. *But no one*

is clear what it is (italic mine)."[9] Almost fifty years later, in 2016, Jan-Werner Müller, professor of politics at Princeton University, begins his book, *What is Populism*, by stating that, "We simply do not have anything like a *theory* (italic his) of populism."[10] Likewise, in *The Global Rise of Populism*, Benjamin Moffitt, a postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Political Science at Stockholm University in Sweden, sums up on the current state of understanding of populism:

> Despite this widespread interest in populism, we still do not understand a number of aspects of the phenomenon all that well. Questions still abound: why has populism seemingly spread so rapidly across the globe? What do these different manifestations of populism have in common? Does populism really represent a threat to democracy? And perhaps the most basic question of all—what are we actually talking about when we use the term 'populism' today?[11]

Although this catchy word, populism, has puzzled many political scientists for more than half a century, it gained prominence during the 2016 Presidential election in the United States of America, with both far left and far right politicians like Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump being branded as populists. Likewise, in Europe's political arena, Marine Le Pan, Geert Wilders and Nigel Farage are all labelled as populists. "After all, every politician—especially in poll-driven democracies—wants to appeal to '*the people*' (italic mine)," as Müller remarks.[12] An example would be the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, declaring at a party congress in defiance of his numerous domestic critics, "We are the people. Who are you?"[13] As Jürgen Habermas points out, "'the people' does not comprise a subject with a will and consciousness. It only appears in the plural, and as a people, it is capable of neither decision nor action as a whole."[14] Without any doubt, populism, national populism and

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[9] Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 1.

[10] Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2016), 2.

[11] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, 2–3.

[12] Müller, *What is Populism?*, 2.

[13] Müller, *What is Populism?*, 3.

[14] For further discussion on the concept of "the people," see the section under the heading, "The plural people vs. the people-as-one" in Carlos de la Torre, "Global

nationalism, all have "*the people*" as their key referent.[15].

Margaret Canovan recently makes an attempt to understand "what does it mean to attribute ultimate political authority to 'the people'?"[16] She observes that,

> 'The state' began its conceptual career as the estate of an anointed king, but is now supposed to derive its legitimacy from 'the people.' Populists and politicians alike defer to the people's authority, which can confer legitimacy upon constitutions, new regimes, and changes to the borders of states. Even informal outbreaks of 'people power' seem often to be regarded as authoritative. Despite the crucial role played by 'the people' in contemporary political discourse, analyses of the notion in recent political theory are meagre and scattered.[17]

So the *how*, *who*, *what* and *why* formed the four crucial questions that Canovan in her *Oxford Handbook*'s chapter on political theory provides an understanding to "the people" and their relation with political authority.[18]

Taking on the wave of populism with nationalism, and worried that populism is anti-democracy due to the general impression that it is anti-elite and anti-establishment, Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, observe that

> Brexit and Trump actually followed the much longer rise of national populists across Europe, like Marine Le Pen in France, Matteo Salvini in Italy and Viktor Orbán in Hungary. They are part of a growing revolt against mainstream politics and liberal values. This challenge to the

Populism: Histories, Trajectories, Problem, and Challenge," in *Routledge Handbook of Global Populism*, ed. Carlos de la Torre (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 1–27; see also, Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 469.

[15] Margaret Canovan, cf., *The People*; cf., s.v. "The People," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, 349–62; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, 16.

[16] Canovan, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, 351.

[17] Canovan, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, 349.

[18] The four questions Canovan asked are: "1. *How* did the people come to have this authoritative status? The first section will attempt a brief historical survey. 2. *Who* are the people? The most pressing aspects of this question in the contemporary world concern external borders and the relationship between "people" and "nation." 3. *What* is/are the people? Is the repository of ultimate political authority a collective entity, a collection of individuals, or (somehow) both at once? 4. *Why* is the people the ultimate political authority? Is this best analyzed in terms of political myth?" Canovan, *The Oxford Handbook of Political* Theory, 349–50.

liberal mainstream is in general not anti-democratic. Rather, national populists are opposed to certain aspects of liberal democracy as it has evolved in the West.[19]

But there is obviously a clear and present danger felt by European "elites" in recent European elections about the rise of populism. In 2019, Guy Chazan (Berlin) and Olaf Storbeck (Frankfurt) jointly report on the European elections, writing under the heading, "German business takes on populism," on the current state of the German situation:

> German business leaders are appealing to voters to resist populist parties in this month's European elections, in an unusual intervention that reflects alarm about the rise of nationalism and the threat it poses to the EU's single market….

In an interview, Paul Achleitner, chairman of the Deutsche Bank, said civil society had to "fight back against those who are promising easy, populist answers" which are aimed at "marginalizing certain social groups"; "Europe's diversity and cultural pluralism is the continent's big advantage relative to China and North America," he said. "We must not be tolerant towards intolerance."

> … A similar call came from the German bank association, which said it strongly opposed "nationalist tendencies, isolationism and protectionism" and supported "pro-european parties that want to lead Europe towards a successful future."[20]

The mixture of "nationalism" and "populism" has promised to turn the western world upside down, and the same is happening in Asia, for instance, in Thailand, Malaysia and Taiwan. Although the "populists" are often set against their imagined opposite, the "elites," the famous phrase, "'Government of the people, by the people, for the people' pronounced by President Abraham Lincoln in his 1863 Gettysburg Address, could easily be accepted by both democrats and populists alike."[21] "The people"[22] being the key

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[19] Eatwell and Goodwin, *National Populism,* x–xi.

[20] *Financial Times,* Monday, May 13, 2019, 2.

[21] Gianfranco Pasquino, "Populism and Democracy," in *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy,* ed. Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 15.

[22] Margaret Canovan, *The People*; cf., s.v. "The People," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*: 349–62. She "aimed to develop a theory of a specific element of

referent of populism clearly needs further clarification and defining to be useful. On the psychological front, however, it has been observed that populists present themselves with particular moods and emotions, such as, "populists are 'angry'; their voters are 'frustrated' or suffering from 'resentment.'"[23]

The following section now returns to relate Jonah with the discussion above on the populists and the people, after highlighting the populists movement in Malaysia with allusions from *Jonah the Who!*

On Malaysia's Bersih *Movement (2007-1st, 2011-2nd, 2012-3rd, 2015-4th, 2016-5th)*[24]

The rise of the *Bersih* ("clean" in Malay) social action as a populist movement goes back as early as 2007; however, it is not the intention here to repeat what has been posted on the web, except that aspects will be highlighted when necessary. The movement, *Bersih*, as its identity and purpose is defined, is a social and nationalistic movement of the "the people." It is "national populism" at play. The purpose is clearly stated in the official web, which deserves to be reproduced in full:

> The **Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections** (Malay: Gabungan Pilihanraya Bersih dan Adil) or (meaning 'clean' in Malay) is a coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which seeks to reform the current electoral system in Malaysia to ensure free, clean and fair elections.
>
> In April 2010, the coalition was relaunched as an entirely civil society movement ("*Bersih* 2.0") unaffiliated to any political party. On 19 June 2011, former president of the Bar Council, Dato' Ambiga Sreenevasan became the chairperson of the coalition. In 2011 and 2012, two more rallies (*Bersih* 2.0 and *Bersih* 3.0) were organised seeing that the demands for the electoral reforms have not been met by the Electoral Commission.
>
> The 2007 rally had raised Malaysian citizens' awareness to

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populism: something approaching the 'politician's populism' and 'populist democracy' as she identified in her original typology, focusing on its stylistic and ideological features," as Benjamin Moffitt commented in *The Global Rise of Populism*, 16

[23] Müller, *What is Populism?*, 1.

[24] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bersih#2007_Bersih_rally, edited on June 30, 2020.

the irregularities and controversies in the electoral system. Ahead of the anticipated 2012 13th general election, Bersih scheduled a second public demonstration at Kuala Lumpur on 9 July 2011. Bersih 2.0 rally, also called the Walk for Democracy, called for eight points, including the four demands that remained not met in the 2008 general election:

1. *Clean up of the electoral roll*
2. *Reform of postal ballot*
3. *Use of indelible ink*
4. *Minimum 21 days of campaign period*
5. *Free and fair access to mass media for all parties*
6. *Strengthening of public institutions*
7. *No corruption*
8. *No dirty politics*

Bersih 2.0 was endorsed by 62 NGOs and joined by rallies in more than 30 international cities by oversea Malaysians in solidarity. The rally was again denied a permit. Plans for the demonstration were extensively criticised by the government and pro-government media. Police set up multiple road blocks around Kuala Lumpur and arrested 225 *Bersih* supporters in the lead-up to the event.

After being granted an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to discuss the issue, *Bersih* subsequently agreed on 5 July 2011 to move the rally from the streets to Stadium Merdeka.[9][10] Estimates of the turnout on 9 July 2011 ranged from 10,000 to 50,000. The police deployed tear gas and water cannons to break up the protest and arrested more than 1600 protesters, including Ambiga and several event organisers and opposition figures.

2015, *Bersih* 4 rallies are scheduled to be held on the streets of Kuala Lumpur, Kuching, and Kota Kinabalu from 29–30 August, 2pm until midnight. The gathering places for the rally should be located at Brickfields, Pasar Seni, Dataran Maybank, National Mosque, and Sogo shopping mall, according to the *Bersih* 2.0 chairperson. This is the first *Bersih* rally that are racially imbalance, with Chinese predominantly at the rally.

Global *Bersih* is a movement by Malaysian diaspora communities to lend support to *Bersih* and its cause. In conjunction with the *Bersih* 2.0 rally, Global *Bersih* organised rallies in 38 international locations with 4003 overseas

Malaysians in solidarity:
New Zealand (Wellington, Auckland, Christchurch); Australia (Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Hobart, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth); China (Suzhou, Shenzen, Shanghai); Hong Kong(SAR); Taiwan (Taipei); Japan (Osaka); South Korea (Seoul); Singapore; United Arab Emirates (Dubai); Egypt (Cairo); Turkey (Istanbul): Sweden (Stockholm); Austria (Graz): Switzerland (Zurich, Geneva); France (Paris); United Kingdom (London); Scotland (Glasgow); Northern Ireland (Belfast); Ireland (Cork, Limerick, Dublin); Canada (Ottawa); USA (New York City, Washington DC, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver, Portland).

The people of a nation's moral conscience, be it religious or not, were put into action and their demand for a "clean" election, "clean" government, "clean" society and a "clean" country is a noble goal by any standard in any country or nation on earth. The Malaysians did that! From local to global, from private individuals to public social action, they move as a people—regardless of their color, gender, race and ethnicity, religious affiliation or political association, near the center of power or far in the country-side—and are driven by a simple human moral ethical consciousness of "cleanliness." Seldom, if ever, is such a motive for a social action in human history heard of!

Clean, being the opposite of unclean, is a major religious concept and consciousness in the Pentateuch, particularly in Leviticus, whereby the entire Israelite camp in the wilderness is organized and operated under the priesthood administration. Life and death, especially with reference to community corporateness, depend on the administering of "cleanliness" in everyday living. It is as true and valid in the modern era as it was in ancient time.

During the process of finalizing this essay in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out and spread globally, with no end in sight, affecting daily activities worldwide. The virus may have originated from the malpractice of certain culture and people in relation to the concept of "cleanliness." The implication is that implementing a moral and ethical value of "cleanliness" is a matter of life and death anywhere on earth. From drinking water that sustains life, to river and sea pollution that affects the ecosystem which seriously affects human survival, as well as environmental protection issues, these all boil down to the basic concept of "cleanliness" for earthly human living.

The Malaysian *Bersih* movement, though initially may have been politically motivated, has made a remarkable imprint on human history, sounding out loud the message that human survival depends on the realization of "cleanliness" in daily living.

Religious cleanliness often segregated different community groups within the nation. The segregation between the Israelites and the Ninevites in Jonah's mind is perhaps religiously righteous and humanly profitable. But that is not Yahweh's lesson to Jonah; rather the people of the great city Nineveh is the concern of Yahweh.

Jonah the Who!

The moods and emotions of Jonah match the populist description—easy to be angry, frustrated and suffers resentment easily. In his confession to the sailor on board the ship, he speaks like a populist leader who is the answer to the crisis of the people. While there is no other fellow countryperson seen in the story, and that he is free to act as the sole representative for his Hebrew ethnic, he makes it a point to distinguish himself clearly from the sailors, even at a time of crisis of life and death, that being a Hebrew means that his national God is in control of everything and there is nothing a non-Hebrew can do. The result, as the narrator puts it, is exactly what is expected from the revealing of the identity of Jonah, that the sailors revered Jonah's Hebrew God when the sea and wind settled down. As pointed out by Moffitt, populist leaders are often "presenting themselves as the singular figure who can fix 'the people's' problems, as in the case of Thailand's ex-prime minister Thaksin who claimed in 2006: 'I am the major force in government and everyone else is just my help."[25]

The bold and courageous act of inviting the sailors to throw him overboard the ship into the raging sea is an unimaginable idea that the escapee Jonah could have dreamt of doing. In his discussion on "The Leader's Body and the Body Politic," Moffitt observed that populist leaders sometimes go "too far as presenting oneself in a divine light":

> Berlusconi in 2006 declared: "I am the Jesus Christ of politics. I am a patient victim, I put up with everyone, I sacrifice myself for everyone", while Hugo Chávez presented himself as the reincarnation of Simón Bolívar and claimed that Jesus Christ was his "commander-in-chief".

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[25] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, 63.

Jonah inside the fish belly for three days may be taken as an allusion in Matt 12:40, "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (ESV).

The singular sentence uttered to the great city of Nineveh by Jonah sounds just like a political statement at a rally by popular populist leader, if not a fortune teller: "forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4).

When the outcome of his pronouncement is not realized as he had proclaimed, but instead turned into a salvific act of Yahweh, a great emotional resentment burst out in burning anger from the inside of Jonah, turning it into a frustrative accusation that Yahweh's relenting act is evil (4:1). Following such resentment is a theological defense and offence for his action of fleeing to Tarshish in disobedient to Yahweh's command (4:2; 1:3).

Above all else is Jonah's narrow religious nationalism that induced Yahweh's serious critique of his theology and world view (4:8–11). Nationalism must encompass a global reality of human condition. Religious nationalism with a populist effect must address the suffering human condition of injustice imperatively (1:2). Yahweh's concern is made clear to Jonah, "the people, I care!" Whether this "die-hard" red-blooded Hebrew, Jonah son of Amittai, learnt the lesson that Yahweh taught in person, he will have to decide for himself if he will live a life of blessing or curse in days to come.

The Conclusion: We, the People's Lives Matter (PLM)!

The designation of the great city Nineveh as "evil" sparked off the motion in the story of Jonah. The destiny of the great city Nineveh has since been the focus of the story, doom or not doom, perish or redeem? It is the center of the debate between Yahweh and Jonah due to their divergent opinions, despite the fact that their roles and statuses are very different and, in fact, opposite to each other.

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[26] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, 63.

Yahweh is the commander while Jonah the executioner of Yahweh's command. Escaping from the call of duty, disobeying order, and being a renegade are not options for Jonah under Yahweh's watch, though Jonah would still want to try. The escape route embarked (1:3–10) and the motion progressed, drawing the reader's attention to anticipate what could be the outcome of the sparring between Yahweh and Jonah, like that of Jacob's wrestling with the messenger from heaven (Gen 32:24–30). There seems no other way for Jonah but to face the divine reality at the end of the day as the story develops. Their differences may be summed up in a tri-party relational perception: Yahweh's perception on Nineveh, Jonah's perception on Yahweh, and Yahweh's perception on Jonah.

It is a normal religious practice for Jonah to receive a divine authoritative command to go. Accepting such divine authority is actually reflected in Jonah's confession to the people on the ship. Jonah acknowledges the ultimate divine authority of Yahweh in the midst of the ship-wreck crisis (1:9). It also reflects Jonah's religious nationalism, when he confesses that "I am a Hebrew, and I fear Yahweh the God of heaven, who made the sea and dry land" (1:9). This sense of religious nationalism develops further in Jonah's prayer (2:3–10), which provides a deeper understanding for the reader of Jonah's faith in his national God and their relationship to the "others." No apology is made inside the "fish belly" for Jonah's runaway attempt from the call of duty, nor is there any admission of "wrong" that would instigate a repentant act for Jonah. Instead, a full red-blooded religious nationalism is in view, as a way of appeal to the national God for rescue action. Nationalist Jonah offers in the prayer for delivery a promise to repay with loyalty to worship in the temple, a handsome offering, and a declaration of praise (2:8–10). There is no mention in the prayer any reason for Jonah's disobedience due to the difference of opinion on the destiny of the great city Nineveh. Neither is there any sense of regret nor repentance in Jonah's consciousness in the midst of his calamity. The central focus of Jonah's prayer is his fervent appeal to a national God, Yahweh, for deliverance as a way of fulfilling the duty of a national God. It is his religious nationalistic belief that Yahweh's duty is to take care of the interest of the nation above all else. The appeal to the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and Jonah, who spells out clearly his national identity (1:9), and his promise to continue as a fervent Yahweh worshipper (2:8–10), should warrant a full and immediate rescue operation from Yahweh to fulfill the

duty of a national God.

Rightly responding, on the part of Yahweh, to Jonah's prayer, Jonah is "disgorged" (NET) on the dry land. There are no words from Yahweh to Jonah, instead, only action after Jonah's prayer. The purpose for such an action of Yahweh to bring Jonah back to the land is quickly disclosed in the next chapter in 3:1–2, repeating the command of 1:2 that Jonah is to go immediately to Nineveh to deliver the message. The divine action as a response to the evil of Nineveh has not changed; Jonah is to go and deliver the message to Nineveh. The command, once again, is simple and straightforward, except that the details of the message are not disclosed in 3:2 as in 1:2.

Jonah, for whatever reason, also never asks for the "message" to be delivered to Nineveh. Instead, the message spoken is a rather short one, "at the end of forty days, Nineveh will be doomed" (3:4). This is a pronouncement of a "death" sentence. There is no correction nor further instruction from Yahweh on Jonah's sentencing speech. Either it is exactly what Yahweh wants Jonah to deliver, or it is not important at this point to elaborate on the details of Jonah's message to Nineveh. This remains a puzzle to the reader.

The story goes on to focus on the people of Nineveh, describing the effect of Jonah's message to Nineveh (3:5–9) and Yahweh's response to Nineveh's actions (3:10).

The repentance in Nineveh is initially from bottom up (3:5) and then progress to top down (3:6–9). It is the decree (3:8) that provides a glimpse into how Nineveh perceives its own "way of life" that is designated as "evil" in the presence of Yahweh: "Everyone must turn from their evil way of living and from the violence that they do" (3:8, NET). This repentant act of Nineveh prompts a similar "turn" in the action from Yahweh to Nineveh: "When God saw their actions—that they turned from their evil way of living—God relented concerning the judgment he had threatened them with and did not destroy them" (3:10, NET). Nineveh turns, so Yahweh also turns!

This relenting act of Yahweh, perceived in the eyes of Jonah, is a habitual relenting attitude of Yahweh that Jonah's religious nationalism forbids and forsakes (4:2). There is, as if, in Jonah's Yahwism, that a certain set of conduct with regards to Yahweh's duty on the nation is expected and worshipped. The relenting nature of Yahweh applied to foreigners is not acceptable from Jonah's nationalist belief. National ownership of Yahweh, the national God

of heaven and earth, sea and land, is prescribed in Jonah's national identity (1:9). Their differences lay with the disharmonious concept of Yahwism. The Yahweh who acts is not the same Yahweh that Jonah wants.

Before reaching Yahweh's concluding statement (4:11), which offers the rhetorical answer to the central dynamic of the story that creates and prompts the setting and plotting of the entire narrative, there is this small lesson that Jonah has to learn and Yahweh needs to deliver (4:6–9). It is here, eventually, that a dialogue between Yahweh and Jonah occurs. The purpose of this object lesson occurs right at the context of location, east of the city, where it displaces Jonah's attitude towards Yahweh's (non)action on Nineveh (3:10) and his anticipation of the outcome of the great city Nineveh (4:5). The lesson of "plant grows and plant dies," "hot heat and cool shade," and Jonah's "painful suffering and delights" (4:6–8), prompts a heavy exchange of argument between Yahweh and Jonah (4:9–10) on "life and death." It all happens while Jonah is sitting on the east of the city wanting to see what would happen to the city (4:5). What would Jonah anticipate? A destruction of Nineveh, as he had uttered earlier, "death to the city"? (3:4). Or awaiting an unwanted confirmation message of his understanding of Yahweh's "relenting" nature (4:2) that Nineveh will be spared, and "life to the people"? The "relenting nature" of Yahweh against the selfish "religious nationalism" of Jonah is at play. The ultimate concern of both is distance apart. The narrowly focused identity and religious nationalism of Jonah is met with the urging concern for life for global humanity in Yahweh.

The argument from Yahweh is that "the people's lives" matter (PLM) and that Yahweh has concerns for the people; while Jonah's key argument, based on his narrowly accustomed "religious nationalism" as a Yahweh worshipper, is that of the "Hebrew" first and that of a selfish and ethnic religious chauvinist.

The populist movements in Malaysia, as characterized in the series of *bersih* actions over a span of several years and intensified often before national general elections, not only "voice" out the discontent of the people, but also proclaim and pronounce the highest "virtue" value of the Malaysian people to the world, that "clean" is good and "unclean" is not an option, especially in the midst of a crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Malaysia is a nation proud of being multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic, multicolor and multireligious, living harmoniously. The value of being *Bersih*

(clean)—moral, ethical and dietary cleanliness—is that which is shared across all walks of lives, through this *Bersih* movement, among the Malaysian people. The voice of the people, demanding a nation to demonstrate *bersih* in the daily living of the entire country, is a timely message to the world in such a pandemic. It should be the pride of the Malaysian people, the nation, and its government—and shame on the police crack-down on the *bersih* march—to proclaim, "We, the *bersih* people!"

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"For All of You Are One in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28)
Paul's Social Vision Beyond Inclusivity and Diversity

Kar Yong Lim

Religion, ethnicity, and social identity are facets of human interactions that have become increasingly prominent in recent conflicts and debates. Some of the most pressing challenges to peaceful co-existence in our world today could be attributed to the intersection of these categories. Drawing from recent interests in the study of ethnicity and identity in Early Christianity and Pauline communities, this essay attempts to re-examine Paul's understanding of ethnic relations between Jews and Gentiles by exploring key passages in Galatians, the Corinthian letters, and Romans. This essay will also offer contemporary reflections on the contribution the Christian church could offer in nation building in multireligious, multiethnic, and multicultural Malaysia.

Introduction

Religion, ethnicity, gender, and social identity are facets of human interactions that have become increasingly prominent in recent conflicts and debates in Asia. These issues present insurmountable challenges to peaceful co-existence in a religious and ethnically diverse continent as evidenced in the prolonged Israel-Palestinian conflicts, anti-Shia hostility in Pakistan, anti-Muslim aggression in northeast India, violence against Rohingya Muslims in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, and increased religious attacks on Christians in Indonesia and Pakistan. There seems to be no concrete and immediate solutions to these conflicts. In Malaysia, we witness increased ethnic and religious tensions, fueled by unfavorable political discourses and policies on the intersection of these issues. It is not uncommon to witness emotionally charged address in public meetings organized by political parties, public academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations promoting the dominance and supremacy of the majority ethnic group to the detriment of others.

My interest in ethnic relations stems from personal experience living as an ethnic and religious minority in predominant Islamic

context of Malaysia. In 1971, Malaysia formally introduced a comprehensive system of affirmative action based on the legislative power to do so under Article 153 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. One of the main objectives of the affirmative action was economic restructuring along ethnic lines favoring the politically and ethnically dominant majority group of Malays. Since then, a wide-ranging practice of ethnic preferential policies, programs, and instruments that benefitted the Malay community were implemented according to the provisions of the Constitution in order to safeguard the position of this ethnic group. These included offering positions in the civil service, extending government procurement contracts, guaranteeing scholarships and higher education, and issuing permits and licenses for trade and business, amongst others, to the Malays. This ethnic preferential policy has invariably generated discrimination towards other minority groups, such as the Chinese and Indians, and contributed to the deteriorating ethnic relations in the country that hinders nation building where negative feelings and prejudices towards the majority persist.

As Christians, I believe we should not let public policy hinder us from playing a contributing role in nation building and ethnic reconciliation. What contribution can the church offer in nation building in multireligious, multiethnic, and multicultural Malaysia? What insight can we learn from Paul's social vision that goes beyond inclusivity and diversity based on his letters? Drawing from recent interests in the study of ethnicity, gender, and social identity in Early Christianity, I aim to re-examine how Paul navigates ethnic relations between Jews and Gentiles and social classes in his community by exploring Gal 3:28 and other relevant passages taken from Romans and the Corinthian letters. This is then followed by offering brief reflections on how the church in Malaysia could meaningfully participate in nation building.

Studies in Ethnicity, Equality, Gender, and Social Identity in Paul Based on Galatians 3:28

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of studies on ethnicity, equality, gender, and social identity in Paul. One key passage that guides these studies is Gal 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and

female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."[1]

Each of the triads in Gal 3:28 highlights social statuses standing in opposite (Jew/Greek, slave/free, and male/female). Jews could be viewed as people with designated privileges as the elect people of God while Gentiles or Greek as people outside of the covenantal relationship. Slaves denote people possessed by their masters who, through their social-economic status, governed the lives of the slaves. Male, holding the role of *paterfamilias*, possessed greater status than the female. This formula in Gal 3:28 could then be seen as highlighting tensions between social inclusion and exclusion and between social privilege and social marginalization. And yet in Christ, Paul seemingly declares that Jews or Gentiles no longer makes any difference, social hierarchy is obliterated, and there is now no basis for gender-based violence and discrimination. What is crucial is the communal unity in Christ.

It is not surprising that such a radical statement by Paul attracts numerous interests and studies in issues related to ethnicity, social status, and gender studies. The history of interpretation of Gal 3:28 tends to follow either taking one of the antitheses to fuel further studies in ethnicity, social status, and gender, or taking the phrase "one in Christ" as the foundational argument of Paul's social vision of Jew-Gentile unity.[2] Space does not permit me to evaluate all these

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[1] See also 1 Cor 12:13 and Col 3:11 where similar formulaic affirmations can be found. The echoes of Gal 3:28 can also be found in other Pauline passages such as Rom 3:9; 10:12; 1 Cor 1:22–24; 7:18–22; 10:32; and Eph 6:8.

[2] For selected examples of recent studies, see Jennifer Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3–38; Miroslav Kocúr, *National and Religious Identity: A Study in Galatians 3, 23–29 and Romans 10, 12–21* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003); Atsuhiro Asano, *Community-Identity Construction In Galatians: Exegetical, Social-Anthropological and Socio-Historical Studies*, JSNTSup 285 (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2005); Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Bruce Hansen, *'All of You Are One': The Social Vision of Galatians 3.28, 1 Corinthians 12.13 and Colossians 3.11*, LNTS 409 (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 32–66; and Gesila Nneka Uzukwu, *The Unity of Male and Female in Jesus Christ: An Exegetical Study of Galatians 3.28c in Light of Paul's Theology of Promise*, LNTS 531 (London: T&T Clark, 2015), 134–139, 183–201. See also Wayne Meeks, "Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *History of Religions* 13 (1974): 165–208; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 125–26; Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 22–24; Judith Gundry Volf, "Male and Female in Creation and New Creation:

studies in detail.[3]

Suffice to say that the notion of one in Christ has been used to argue for either equality or inclusivity in the social vision of the Pauline community. In 1958, Stendhal claimed that Gal 3:28 was the basis for equality between gender and challenged the view of the subordination of women.[4] This opened up further discussion on the egalitarian view of gender. Schüssler Fiorenza has been at the forefront arguing for this position and promoting the end to structures of male dominance within Christian community.[5] Schüssler Fiorenza further argues that "insofar as this egalitarian Christian self-understanding did away with all male privileges of religion, class, and caste, it allowed not only Gentiles and slaves but also women to exercise leadership functions within the missionary movements."[6]

Yet, not all scholars are convinced that Paul is merely addressing equality. Some see Paul building a new inclusive community in Christ. According to this view, Paul does not declare that all those who are in Christ are equal. James Dunn argues that in Gal 3:28, "these distinctions have been relativized, not removed."[7] Similarly, Keener believes that "Paul is thus posing not an elimination of differences but rather a unity that encompasses diversity."[8] Schreiner also concurs that all believers are united in

Interpretations of Galatians 3.28c in 1 Corinthians 7," in *To Tell The Mystery: Essays on New Testament Eschatology*, ed. Thomas E. Schmidt, JSNTSup 100 (Sheffield: JSOT 1994), 95–121; and Judith Gundry Volf, "Christ and Gender: A Study of Difference and Equality in Gal 3,28," in *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift: Studien zur Hermeneutik des Evangeliums*, ed. Christof Landmesser, Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Hermann Lochtenberger (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 439–77.

[3] See D. Francois Tolmie, "Tendencies in the Interpretation of Galatians 3:28 since 1990," *Acta Theologica* Suppl 19 (2014): 105–29 and Bernard C. Lategan, "Some Remarks on the Origin and Function of Galatians 3:28" in *Paul, John, and Apocalyptic Eschatology: Studies in Honour of Martinuc C. de Boer*, ed. J. Krans, B. J. Lietart Peerbolte, P.-B Smit and A. Zwiep, NovTSupp 149 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 15–29. For a detailed study on the history of interpretation of Gal 3:28 in the first four centuries, see Pauline Nihn Hogan, *"No Longer Make and Female": Interpreting Galatians 3.28 in Early Christianity*, LNTS 380 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), and the review by Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 204–41.

[4] Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*, trans. E. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 32–34.

[5] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 205–41.

[6] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 217–218.

[7] James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, BNTC (London: A&C Black, 1993), 207.

[8] Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019),

Christ "regardless of their ethnic background, their social class, or their gender."[9] In other words, the social realities remained even though ethnic, social, and gender differentiations no longer had any significance before God. Slaves remained slaves, and Jewish believers were still Jews. In light of this, some understand this passage as a theological rather than a social statement, where baptism into the body of Christ is available to all regardless of ethnicity, social status, and gender.[10] Yet, some scholars like David Aune take the argument further by advocating that Gal 3:28 speaks of "the abolition of Jewish law as a primary means of eliminating the differences between Jew and Greek"[11] and that this new social group's self-identification is rooted in Christ rather than any other self-identification that was not shared equally by all.

What seems to emerge from the history of interpretation of Gal 3:28 in recent years is that the reading of this text is often directed by our contemporary concerns for issues confronting us. This is certainly not a misguided step as Christians often look to the scriptures for guidance and direction to help us navigate through theological issues and the social realities in our contemporary world. What is typical of this line of discussion is that it often misses the force of Paul's overall rhetoric in Galatians and neglects two very critical issues.

First of all, there is a tendency of taking one of the three pairs of opposites mentioned by Paul as linchpin to address contemporary issues, be it studies in ethnicity, social status, or gender. What is often missed is to take these triads as a unified statement of Paul and examine the issues in light of Paul's argument in Galatians. Secondly, the two major incidents recounted in Galatians 2 leading to Paul's statement in Gal 3:28 have often been neglected: the Jerusalem incident (Gal 2:1–10) and the Antioch incident (Gal 2:11–14). In this essay, I will argue that the Jerusalem and Antioch incidents are two critical issues in our understanding of Gal 3:28. I will now turn to give some attention to these two neglected issues

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308.

[9] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians,* ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 257.

[10] Troy W. Martin, "The Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17:9–14) and the Situational Antitheses in Galatians 3:28," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003): 122.

[11] David E. Aune, "Galatians 3:28 and the Problem of Equality in the Church and Society," in *From Judaism to Christianity: Tradition and Transition: A Festschrift for Thomas H. Tobin, S.J., on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, NovTSupp 136, ed. Patricia Walters (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 165.

and examine the sort of unity in Christ that Paul envisions.

Galatians 3:28 as A United Statement: Moving Beyond Inclusivity and Equality

As I briefly noted, Paul's statement in Gal 3:28 has often been torn apart in its investigation by examining only issues related to ethnicity (Jew/Greek), social status (slave/free), or gender (male/female) individually rather than examining all the three triads together. Karin Neutel rightly laments this and argues for a need to understand Paul's thought on these issues as part of the cultural conversation in his day.[12] When these three pairs are taken together, Paul's deep concern for reconstructing the social identity of his community surfaces clearly. Neutel argues that Gal 3:28 is best read from an eschatological perspective by comparing it with contemporaneous Jewish and Greco-Roman sources dealing with real (present) and ideal (future) communities that have in common three pairs of opposites (Jew-Greek, slave-free, male-female). Neutel refers to the household management in the Greco-Roman world where preserving unity and harmony depend on proper understanding of the roles each party plays in a structured and well-ordered hierarchy. To Neutel, in an ideal cosmopolitan community, opposites are removed, and equality is experienced. As such, she argues that being "one in Christ" for Paul forms the basis for unity and for doing away with distinctions. To achieve this, Neutel draws insights from Plato's *Republic*, Zeno's *Republic (Plutarch)*, and other moral philosophers from the Greco-Roman world, and also from the Essenes and the Therapeutae communities from the Jewish world. Neutel argues that the writings from these communities represent ideal communities that were characterized by a unified humanity with the absence of hierarchy. This represents what the future, utopian, or eschatological communities could possibly look like as well.

Applied to Gal 3:28, Neutel sees Paul's negation of social opposites as a form of utopianism. The notion of "neither Jew nor Greek" is solidly grounded within the Jewish eschatological tradition where non-Jews are ushered in for the end-time salvation. As for "neither slave nor free," Neutel's Paul envisions a utopia

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[12] Karin B. Neutel, *A Cosmopolitan Ideal: Paul's Declaration 'Neither Jew Nor Greek, Neither Slave Nor Free, Nor Male and Female" in the Context of First-Century Thought*, LNTS 513 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 2.

without slaves while the statement on "nor male and female" does not refer to gender equality but gender in connection with marriage at the end times where there is an end to marriage and procreation. Taking all the three phases together, Neutel sees Paul negotiating an end time cosmopolitan ideal with the reality of the present world where the present community is an attempt to realize that goal characterized by an ideal community that is close-knitted and mutually supportive. In light of this, to be "one in Christ" is to be united in an undifferentiated whole.

Neutel's argument seems to suggest that all social identities of the various communities that were incorporated in Christ are obliterated in order to achieve the eschatological utopia. Pauline Nigh Hogan also takes on a similar line of argument where social distinctions are to be erased.[13] Yet, not many are convinced by this line of thought. The unity envisions in Gal 3:28 does not exclude all other social identities.[14] For Paul, it is not that all other social identities are obliterated, rather, they should not have primacy over other identities to the extent of excluding the others.

In this respect, the work of Bruce Hansen is significant where he draws insights from ethnic theory in reading Paul's unity formula in Gal 3:28, 1 Cor 12:13, and Col 13:11 on how different groups construct and maintain themselves.[15] Hansen argues that the norms and boundaries of an ethnic group are constantly renegotiated in various social settings and in successive generations, yet the ancestors, historical traditions, rituals, and the named group identity persist through time while the group's social practice is negotiable.[16] In light of this, Hansen sees Paul radically renegotiating Israel's identity through the intervention of Jesus the Messiah, and the construction and renegotiation of multiple ethnic identities on the

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[13] Hogan, *No Longer Male and Female,* 21–46. See also Dunn, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 205, who believes that oneness in Christ refers to "a oneness of Jew and Greek in faith, without the Law's interposing between them to mark them off as distinct from each other."

[14] See Hansen, *All of You Are One,* 86. Contra Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "The Singularity of the Gospel: A Reading of Galatians," in *Pauline Theology,* Vol. 1, ed. Jouette M. Bassler (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 147–159, especially 149: "The new creation results in nullification of previous identifications, whether these come from within the law (1.11–17) or from outside it (4.8–11)."

[15] See Hansen, *All of You Are One.*

[16] Hansen, *All of You Are One*, 193. See his further discussion on ethnic theory in pages 32–66.

basis of Scriptures and the gospel.[17] He argues that Paul's statements of unity formulae epitomize his vision of social unity in light of identity construction. As identity construction is dynamic and continual, alternative identities such as gender, ethnic, and religious belief may continue to influence each other in any new community. Therefore, it is significant that Paul's unity formula in Gal 3:28 opposes cultural dominance by any group. Hence, Hansen argues for an amalgamation model in Galatians where the ethos and defining identity of this new group comprising both Jews and Gentiles coming together in Christ are derived from Paul's gospel. It is through Christ that the Gentiles are genealogically incorporated into the people of God, and thereby claiming Israelites' ancestor Abraham as theirs. Yet, in this new community, any form of dominance by any particular cultural identity is fiercely contested by embracing the presence of others with various identities. This results in "social reconciliation of members from normally alienated groups. Their embrace of members from conventional out-groups (Greek, slave, female) against whom privileged groups (Jews, free, male) defined themselves now constitutes their definitive familial characteristics."[18] Because of this, Paul can assert that this socially diverse group, "all of you are one in Christ" (Gal 3:28).

William Campbell takes Hansen's argument further by arguing that Paul is not to be interpreted as opposing ethnic differentiation, but against discrimination on grounds of difference as seen in ethnicity and social divisions in Pauline community.[19] Campbell maintains that Paul held to the conviction that God's covenant is to be differentiated between Israel and the nations (Gentiles), and this forms the basis for the apostle's conviction that Christ followers should remain in the state they were called, whether as Jew or non-Jew.[20] Yet, how does one account for such distinction between the Jews and non-Jews? By locating his argument on the phrase οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολὴ Ἰουδαίου τε καὶ Ἕλληνος in Rom 10:12 (see also Rom 3:22), Campbell raises the issue of what Paul was really asserting that in Christ there is "no distinction" between Jew and non-Jew, a phrase clearly referring to ethnic

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[17] Hansen, *All of You Are One*, 193.

[18] Hansen, *All of You Are One*, 202.

[19] William S. Campbell, *The Nations in the Divine Economy: Paul's Covenantal Hermeneutics and Participation in Christ* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018).

[20] Campbell, *Nations in the Divine Economy*, 19–128.

designation.[21] The rare word διαστολή typically translated as "distinction" (RSV, NRSV, ESV) or "difference" (NIV 2011) suggests the meaning of differentiation. However, this is not the only meaning for the word. It could also mean "discrimination."[22] In light of this, Campbell asserts that "differentiation and discrimination are two different activities and that these should not be confused."[23]

To illustrate his point, Campbell carries out a careful study of διαστολή and how it is used in the NT (1 Cor 14:7) and LXX (for example, Micah 5:8; Gen 25:23; Lev 10:10, 20:25; Num 16:9). All instances of the use of διαστολή call for separation, where the holy and common, the unclean and clean, sacred and profane are to be distinguished. This leads Campbell to conclude that "when Paul talks of making distinctions, he draws on a whole encyclopedia of terms to do with making or not making things holy, making or not making distinctions between A and B. It is Christ who makes those from the nations holy and enables no discrimination to be made against them."[24] He further argues that once the differences are used to treat one another favorably or unfavorably, it is no longer distinguishing by virtue of perceived difference, but rather of discriminating against one in favor of the other.[25] Taking the cue from the basis that God is impartial and does not show favoritism, Campbell maintains that the same Lord is fair to all who call on him, both the Jews and Gentiles, and there is no discrimination.

By applying this same principle in reading Gal 3:28, Campbell makes a convincing case that when Paul asserts that "there is neither Jew nor Greek," he is "opposing all ethnic distinctions and levels all such human distinctions that often function as sources of discrimination."[26] While the social identities of the Jews and Gentiles remain, no party is to claim the higher moral ground based on certain aspects of their social practices, be it religious or cultural, and thus discriminate against the other. In other words, Jews cannot, based on their status of covenant or their boundary markers, claim superiority and discriminate against the Gentiles just because they were uncircumcised. While Campbell stops at the issue of ethnicity,

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[21] Campbell, *Nations in the Divine Economy*, 129–130.

[22] See LSJ, s.v., listing "discrimination" as possible meaning for διαστολή.

[23] Campbell, *Nations in the Divine Economy*, 131.

[24] Campbell, *Nations in the Divine Economy*, 134.

[25] Campbell, *Nations in the Divine Economy*, 134.

[26] Campbell, *Nations in the Divine Economy*, 135. See further his wider discussion in pages 129–152.

I believe that his argument can similarly be extended to the rest of the opposite pairs in Gal 3:28—there is also no discrimination against slaves and free and male and female.

Campbell's reading finds support in Sze-Kar Wan's Asian-American response to the notion of hybridity in postcolonial discourse by engaging with diaspora hermeneutics in reading Gal 3:28.[27] Wan argues that ethnic groups within a multicultural nation can only continue to flourish if the principle of equal treatment without discrimination is extended to all groups.[28] Towards this end, Wan's reading of Gal 3:28 leads him to conclude, along with Campbell, that Paul does not intent to erase ethnic differences but he is concerned with combining these into a hybrid existence where power differential among different groups are obliterated. Each cultural entity is to give up its claims to power in the creation of the identity of this new people, only then will there be no discrimination against the other. For Wan, his Asian-American reading of Gal 3:28 can be paraphrased as "You are *both* Jew *and* Greek, *both* free *and* slave, *both* male *and* female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus."[29] To achieve this goal, further calls for dialogue and engagement with all parties involved in ethnic relations must be openly negotiated.

With this established, I will now turn to examine how Paul fiercely opposes any form of discrimination in Gal 3:28 by taking a closer look at two incidents mentioned in Galatians: the Jerusalem (Gal 2:1–10) and the Antioch (Gal 2:11–14) incidents.

The Jerusalem and Antioch Incidents (Gal 2:1–14)

In the Pauline community, there were diverse contrasting social groups of people who through Christ became united into a new social group. In any form of social construction, there are challenges, prejudices, and differences to overcome. How each group negotiated through these challenges to be united in Christ in this new social group is marked by divisions, conflicts, and opposition. In addition, part of the process of socialization, whether moving towards inclusivity, diversity, or equality, could potentially erase diverse social identities of the different groups in the name of

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[27] Sze-Kar Wan, "Does Diaspora Identity Imply Some Sort of Universality? An Asian-American Reading of Galatians," in *Interpreting Beyond Borders*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 107–31.

[28] Wan, "Does Diaspora Identity Imply Some Sort of Universality?," 128.

[29] Wan, "Does Diaspora Identity Imply Some Sort of Universality?," 127, emphasis his.

unity.

In recounting the Jerusalem and Antioch incidents in Gal 2:1–14, Paul has to negotiate two potential explosive issues that threaten the survival of the Christian community: observance of the Jewish boundary markers and table fellowship with the Gentiles. He portrays these events as the continuation of his struggles and battles with Jewish-Gentile relations in Galatia.

In his ministry to the Gentiles, Paul attempted to dissuade them from conformity to Jewish identity, particularly the rite of circumcision, as the essential requirement to the participation of God's covenantal people. For Paul, any submission to the Jewish boundary markers such as circumcision, observance of the food laws, and keeping the Sabbath would nullify the work of the cross of Christ. If the Jews were to insist on complete Torah observance, this would have led to a permanent split of the Christ-believing community, resulting in the establishment of separate Jewish and Gentiles churches. This split, should it have happened, would nullify Paul's ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles and his vision of a united people of God comprising both Jews and Gentiles.

The fear was unfounded as the pillars—Peter, James, and John—during a meeting in Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas, decided that Gentiles need not be circumcised in order to be the people of God. They also granted both Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. In addition, they also recognized the sphere of ministry: Paul would go to the Gentiles while Peter to the Jews. The only thing that the pillars required for Paul was to remember the poor, one which he was eager to do so (Gal 2:1–10).

Yet, this solidarity was short lived. During his visit to Antioch, Peter refused to have table fellowship with the Gentiles following warnings from representatives from James, resulting in him caving in to the pressure of fear (Gal 2:11–14). This behavior led to the discrimination and segregation of the Jews and Gentiles believers. If anything, this behavior of Peter, who was the original party approving of the agreement forged in Jerusalem, demonstrates how fragile the unity between Jews and Gentiles was.[30] The practical and

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[30] Various reasons have been proposed for Peter's behavior and James' purported recanting of earlier decisions. For further discussion, see Hansen, *All of You Are One*, 69–70; Dunn, "The Incident in Antioch (Gal.2.11–18)," in his *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (London: SPCK, 1990), 155–56, reprint from *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 5, no. 18 (1983): 3–57; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible Series 33A

social implications of this Jerusalem agreement were not adequately addressed and followed through by the Jewish believers.[31]

Peter's example presents to the Gentiles two options: either live like Jews and they will be welcome to the table fellowship and thereby preserve the unity of the church or eat separately and thereby causing a split of the church. The action of Peter indicates that there were power dynamics among the believers in Galatia that could potentially marginalize others. The representatives from Jerusalem had the influence and power to exclude others to the extent that Paul's close partner in ministry, Barnabas, could even be led astray.

Paul was furious at the behavior of Peter and confronted him (Gal 2:14). Paul insisted on the mandate for unrestricted and indiscriminate table fellowship. He also defended the cultural diversity of the group and rejected any cultural hegemony in the church by refusing to allow any group to impose their cultural dominance on others. His battle for unrestricted table fellowship for both Jews and Gentiles demonstrates the social unity he envisions. The symbol of eating together in the ancient Mediterranean world signifies equality, and those who ate together were either kin or social equals who are close-knitted friends. This is even more pronounced as the social reality of Galatia shows that participants in the table fellowship Paul envisions were clearly not social equals. They came from different social classes and segments of the society, with some from out-groups. To be able to come together powerfully exhibits that this new community in Christ is truly kin and brothers and sisters in the Lord. These "practices of open table fellowship, sacrificial service to others outside of patronage or natural kinship relationships and promoting the honour of others, would mark them as a peculiar group in the context of Greco-Roman cultural norms."[32]

Therefore, recounting both the Jerusalem and Antioch incidents underscores Paul's stubborn insistence that the truth of the gospel he proclaimed must mean that there is unreserved and unconditional social unity. Any hint of requesting the Gentiles to live like Jews is to be completely rejected. If Gentiles were asked to live like Jews, it would mean that the social markers of one dominant group would be presented as normative and imposed on others.

(New York: Doubleday, 1998), 220–22; Philip F. Esler, *Galatians* (London: Routledge, 1998), 135–39.

[31] See also Richard B. Hays, *Galatians*, NIB (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 232.

[32] Hansen, *All of You Are One*, 73.

This is nothing short of being oppressive and discriminative. David deSilva is right to argue that the triads in Gal 3:28 "represent not merely alternative states of being but power relations and evaluations. They are categories not merely of self-identification but also of other-identification."[33] In other words, differentiation is often used to discriminate against others.

In light of this background, Paul's social vision according to his statement in Gal 3:28 is one that moves beyond inclusivity and diversity to one that eliminates any form of discrimination based on ethnicity, social status, and gender.

How does Paul Move beyond Discrimination?

If my reading of Gal 3:28 is correct that Paul's social vision for Christ-followers is to move beyond any form of discrimination, the next question that I would like to address is this: How does Paul demonstrate that his social vision is one that is beyond discrimination? To answer this question, I will be drawing on Paul's Jerusalem collection project, his instructions on the proper behavior during the celebration of the Eucharist, and his relationship with Phoebe in addressing the triads found in Gal 3:28.

Moving Beyond Jew-Gentile Discrimination: The Jerusalem Collection for the Poor

In recounting the Jerusalem incident, Paul indicated that the pillars in Jerusalem requested that he should continue to remember the poor (Gal 2:10). Interestingly, scholars often treat Paul's mention of remembering the poor as a peripheral issue compared to other seemingly more important issues concerning the inclusion of the Gentiles and the rite of circumcision debated in the letter. For example, Hans Dieter Betz describes this instruction as an "additional request" and "unrelated to the main points of the debate" in the Jerusalem incident.[34] Likewise, Larry Hurtado also states that this phrase, "remember the poor," is often thought to be "of no real significance, and only serves to give an unimportant detail of the agreement with Jerusalem."[35]

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[33] David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 338–39.

[34] Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*. Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 101.

[35] Larry Hurtado, "The Jerusalem Collection and the Book of Galatians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 5 (1979): 46–62, quotation from page 51.

This line of argument fails to do justice to Paul's concern for the poor. Paul was most likely aware of the economic inequality and the neglect of the poor in the Greco-Roman world. As argued by Verbrugge and Krell, Paul's concern for the poor was deeply rooted in his understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures and their subsequent traditions.[36] His Pharisaic background certainly influenced how he viewed the poor, and how he was obligated by the Law of Moses to care for them. This probably explained why he carried out acts of mercy towards the poor, as evident in Acts and in his letters.[37] It is also interesting to note that a century after the time of Paul, there is a legend that depicts the apostle as someone who had deep concern for the poor. According to the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, a rich lady by the name of Tryphaena left "much apparel and gold" for Paul "for the ministry of the poor" (*Acts of Paul and Thecla* 2.47). This narrative is notable because it highlights that Paul, even a century after his death, is remembered as someone through whom the resources of the rich could be used to help the poor.

In order to alleviate the poor in Jerusalem, Paul organized a major relief fund.[38] This massive project took at least a number of years and covered churches from the regions of Macedonia and Achaia (Rom 15:25–28), and possibly Asia Minor and Galatia as well. The most extensive exhortation and instructions on how the collection was to be carried out is found in 2 Corinthians 8–9.

Paul's primary motivation in urging the Corinthians to complete the collection has often been seen to be rooted in the example of Jesus in 2 Cor 8:9.[39] However, little attention is often paid to the fact that Paul grounds his appeal for the collection on the

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[36] Verlyn D. Verbrugge and Keith Krell, *Paul and Money: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Apostle's Teachings and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 119.

[37] For example, see Acts 11:27–30; 20:33–35; Rom 12:13; Gal 6:10; 1 Thess 5:14.

[38] For a detailed historical treatment on Paul's collection for Jerusalem, see Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992); David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in Its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts*, WUNT 2/248 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2008); and Verbrugge and Krell, *Paul & Money*, 107–201.

[39] For example, see Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 578–79; and Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 2nd ed., WBC 40 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 40–41. See also John M. G. Barclay, "'Because He Was Rich He Became Poor': Translation, Exegesis and Hermeneutics in the Reading of 2 Cor 8.9," in *Theologizing in the Corinthian Conflict: Studies in the Exegesis and Theology of 2 Corinthians*, ed. R. Bieringer, M. Ibita, D. Kurek-Chomycz and T. Vollmer (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 337.

notion of equality, or ἰσότης, in 2 Cor 8:13–15:

> I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance (ἰσότητος) between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance (ἰσότης). As it is written, "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little."

According to Garland, the notion of equality is the "principle undergirding the whole project" where it relates to justice and fairness.[40] Garland also further comments that in 2 Cor 8:13, Paul literally writes, "but out of equality" (ἀλλ᾽ ἐξ ἰσότητος) that the Corinthians should give generously. In other words, Paul was not talking about the purpose of giving so that it might create equality, but that the giving should be from equality,[41] where there is no discrimination. The question of equality goes beyond giving according to one's means or one's possession (2 Cor 8:11–12) as rooted in the grace exhibited by the Macedonians who gave generously.

Paul's instructions to the Corinthians were clear — that all, whether rich or poor, should give to the Jerusalem poor. However, for the collection to be successful, he would have expected the rich believers and those who at least enjoyed some form of surplus beyond the subsistence level to contribute more to the collection, while those poorer believers would contribute less. Believers of means like Crispus (Act 19:8; 1 Cor 1:14), Gaius (Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14), and Erastus (Rom 16:23) in the Corinthian community were expected to contribute a large portion to the collection compared to the large majority who lived at or below subsistence level.

In addition, Paul also explicitly used the example of the Macedonians, who were in "extreme poverty" (2 Cor 8:2), as those who gave generously, and even "beyond their means" (2 Cor 8:3) to the Jerusalem collection. They even begged Paul for this privilege of sharing their generosity (2 Cor 8:3). Paul also referred to the Macedonians in Rom 15:26–27, where they "have been pleased to

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[40] David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 382. See also, Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 87.

[41] Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 382. Unfortunately, ἀλλ᾽ ἐξ ἰσότητος is not properly translated to bring out its full force in most English translations such as NIV (2011), ESV, and NRSV.

share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do this, and indeed *they owe it to them*; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things" (emphasis mine).

This rhetoric would have sounded shocking to the richer Christ-followers in Corinth in a number of ways. Firstly, how could those who lived in extreme poverty, presumably living at or below the level of subsistence who might need assistance for survival themselves, be extremely generous in giving? If anything, this should move the Corinthians, who were better off materially, to greater generosity.

Secondly, Paul's language in Rom 15:26–27 claiming that the Gentiles owed their generosity to the Jerusalem poor reflects a language of reciprocity. Within the context of the Greco-Roman world, Welborn suggests that this language clearly placed the Corinthians as beneficiaries.[42] By the logic of inverse proportion, they were obliged to make a gift to the Jerusalem Christians based on the notion of equality. Furthermore, Paul also designated the collection as a "gift" (χάρις) in 2 Cor 8:4 and 6, and this evoked the notion of reciprocity.[43] He also appealed to the unequal status of the Corinthians who enjoyed abundance and compared it to the Jerusalem believers who suffered need. This inequality must be addressed (2 Cor 8:13–15).

This sort of argument would have been offensive to the Greco-Roman culture deeply rooted in the obligations between benefactors and clients and the superior and the inferior. Furthermore, Victor Furnish argues that this giving by the Corinthians to the Jerusalem church did not obligate the Jerusalem church to reciprocate monetarily in the future.[44] The Jerusalem poor were placed in positions of superiority because they first gave the Corinthians spiritual blessings. Spiritual wealth now stood "in proxy for material wealth so that Paul's congregations become the ones who owe the

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[42] L. L. Welborn, "'That There May be Equality': The Contexts and Consequences of a Pauline Ideal," *New Testament Studies* 59 (2013): 81.

[43] For further discussion on the language of grace and benefaction in the Greco-Roman world and among the philosophers, see James R. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace in its Graeco-Roman Context*, WUNT 2/172 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 167–210.

[44] Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB 32A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 419–20.

Jerusalem saints."[45]

According to Welborn, this expectation of Paul based on equality would have appeared to be "a dangerous attempt to reverse the established social relations of power within Greco-Roman friendship."[46] The table had now been turned. The rich, always viewed as the benefactor, were now called to be the beneficiaries. The wealthy, out of equality, were now obliged to the poor. The Gentiles were now called upon to give to the Jews. Not only would this be completely unheard of in the Greco-Roman world, it also stood up in sharp contrast in the economy of the Roman Empire where tribute was always given to the elites and superiors.

In light of this, Welborn suggests that "Paul contributes to the tentative emergence of a new category of thought—economic."[47] The goal of this new economic structure was to achieve an equality of possessions between persons of different classes—rich and poor, and ethnic groups—Jews and Gentiles, through voluntary redistribution of wealth so that any form of discrimination among the different social groups is removed.

The economic discrimination that motivated Paul to organize the Jerusalem collection is a lesson that the Malaysian church could possibly emulate. One of the primary reasons for the implementation of affirmative action in 1971 was the glaring economic disparity between the dominant Malay community who was poor and the minority Chinese who controlled the economic activities and wealth of the nation. Although the affirmative action was meant to redistribute the economic wealth among the different ethnic groups, the actual implementation of this policy subsequently created discrimination among the minority. If we take Paul's Jerusalem collection and his motivation to remember the poor seriously (Gal 2:10), it is imperative that those of us who are materially well off, even though we are ethnic minority, be cognizant of the needs of others. By sharing resources with those in need can be a positive way of bridging the divide and discrimination between ethnic groups.

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[45] B. J. Oropeza, *Exploring Second Corinthians: Death and Life, Hardship and Rivalry* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 518.

[46] Welborn, "That There May be Equality," 80.

[47] Welborn, "That There May be Equality," 88.

Moving Beyond Slave-Free Discrimination: The Celebration of Eucharist

According to 1 Cor 11:17–34, divisions mark the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the Corinthian congregation. Some wealthier members of the community arrived at the meal earlier, devouring the food and drinks, and shaming those who were poor that could only arrive, presumably, at the end of the day's work. This can be seen in Paul's strong admonition in 1 Cor 11:20–22 and 33–34:

> When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not! So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

It is clear that Paul was rebuking the wealthy, those who went ahead without waiting for anybody else, those who were drunk, those who had homes to eat and drink in, and those who despised the church and humiliated those who had nothing. The works of Gerd Theissen and others have argued that these factions resulted from the practice of the Lord's Supper in a manner that is consistent with the practices and values of the Greco-Roman patronage system.[48] Within such a setting, close associates of the patrons received choice wine and food, and most honored seats in the dining area, whereas the patron's client and those who were poor received lesser treatment and most likely dined separately at the courtyard of the house. Such behavior is succinctly summarized by Theissen:

> It can be assumed that the conflict over the Lord's Supper is a conflict between poor and rich Christians. The cause of this conflict was a particular habit of the rich. They took part in the congregational meal which they themselves had made possible, but they did so by themselves—possibly physically separated from the others and at their own table.[49]

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[48] See Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 145–74 and Jerome Murphy-O'Conner, *St Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, 3rd ed (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), 178–85.

[49] See Theissen, *Social Setting,* 151.

Thessien continues:

> The core of the problem was that the wealthier Christians made it plain to all just how much the rest were dependent on them, dependent on the generosity of those we were better off. Differences in menu are a relatively timeless symbol of status and wealth, and those not so well off came face to face with their own social inferiority at a most basic level. It is made plain to them that they stand on the lower rungs of the social ladder.[50]

The primary reason why Paul instructs the Corinthian church on proper observance of the Lord's Supper is the disregard for the poor shown by the wealthy Corinthians. Some in the congregation had food, and some did not. Paul refuses to commend the Corinthians for this practice. It is unfortunate that in examining 1 Cor 11:17–34, much concentration has been placed on the history and theological meaning of the ritual;[51] the study of possible layout of the house of the wealthy that hosted the meal;[52] and the study of social status[53] leading to the so-called "new consensus" among New Testament scholars that regarded Pauline communities as comprising a cross section of society of the rich and poor. While these studies certainly enrich our understanding of the social world of Paul's congregation, it is unfortunate that focus on the poor in the reading of this text has been largely ignored. Richard Hays notes this irony that without the public humiliation of the poor in Corinth, we would probably have no idea how Paul instructed the congregation to observe the Lord's Supper.[54] It is only in recent years that this deficiency has been corrected in the works of Steven Friesen and others that rightly put the poor back into focus in the reading of this text.[55]

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[50] Theissen, *Social Setting*, 160.

[51] See Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 192–203.

[52] See Theissen, *Social Setting*, 145–68 and Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 178–85.

[53] Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale, 2003), 51–73.

[54] Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 203.

[55] Steven J. Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-called New Consensus," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2004): 323–61; Justin J. Meggit, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); and Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and The Greco-Roman World*

From 1 Cor 11:17–34, those who had food not only disregarded the poor, but also refused to share food with the poor. The refusal to share food with the poor violated Paul's understanding of the Lord's Supper. The hunger and humiliation experienced by the poor at Corinth is a clear denial of the character of what a Pauline community should look like. And most of all, it discredited the gospel that Paul preached. As such, Paul's assault on social class structure of the Roman society in which division between those who had the power to control their economic destinies and those who could not, came to the fore as Paul challenged the rich to wait for one another before the meal (1 Cor 11:33).

To counter this wealthy Corinthians' unbecoming behavior, Paul reminds the Corinthians that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is rooted in the narrative of Jesus' self-giving of himself for the benefits of others. It is when the Corinthians celebrate the Lord's Supper involving a meal in which the poor are not disadvantaged and discriminated that they are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes—the very self-giving death of Jesus for others. Paul also warns the Corinthians that judgement awaits those who eat and drink without discerning the body of believers (1 Cor. 11:27–34).

Thus far, it seems to suggest that the celebration of the Lord's Supper together with a proper meal may not merely only be a religious meal but also a means in which distribution of food to the poor is being practiced.[56] If this is correct, then the celebration of the Lord's Supper is a clear demonstration of how a community cares and provides for the poor so that there could be equality in sharing the most basic means of survival, namely, food. By exhorting the rich to wait for one another and to eat at home if they were hungry would ensure a proper redistribution of food that could possibly be a strategy to offset poverty among the poor in Corinth, so that any excessive practices can be avoided, and any form of discrimination removed.

Unless the community embodies a concern for others, particularly the poor and less fortunate, rooted in the model of Jesus himself, it cannot proclaim the Lord's death. In defending those who have nothing, against those who have houses to eat, Paul is concerned not about the position or status of the person, but

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(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

[56] See also the discussion in Suzanne Watts Henderson, "'If Anyone Hungers…': An Integrated Reading of 1 Cor 11.17–34," *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002): 295–308.

economic relationships in the body of Christ. There is no room for the exploitation, humiliation, and discrimination of the have-nots. As such, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is one that is oriented towards the economy of God, an economy that welcomes and embraces the poor to share in the abundant banquet at the table of the Lord. It reminds us of Jesus' Parable of the Great Banquet, "still there is room" for everyone (Luke 14:15–24) where all discrimination is finally removed.

Social classes have the tendency to discriminate and divide. In Malaysia, the B40 group, classified as the bottom 40% of the population with the lowest household income, are also community with the lowest level of education, wealth distribution, and financial asset ownership. This group of people are the most vulnerable to economic shocks and highly dependent on government assistance. If the poor is to be always welcome at the table, and assured of a place of belonging, how can the church in Malaysia reach out to this group of people, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic that has caused the most severe hardship to this group of people? One excellent example is the Methodist Crisis and Relief Development, a ministry of the Chinese Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Malaysia.[57] This ministry has contributed in excess of RM1.6 million (approximately US$380,000) during the COVID-19 pandemic to supply medical and food aids to the B40 groups, refugees, and migrant workers in Malaysia without discriminating ethnic, religious, and nationality of the recipients. In addition, special maternity funding has also been channeled to pregnant refugees that could not afford to pay for healthcare charges for safe delivery of babies. This initiative in reaching out to the most vulnerable in the community is a living testimony of the gospel of Christ by removing exploitation, humiliation, and discrimination suffered by this community.

Moving Beyond Male-Female Discrimination: Accepting Patronage from Phoebe

In Rom 16:1–2, Paul commends Phoebe to the Roman believers in a series of designations: sister (ἀδελφή), deacon (διάκονος), and patron (προστάτις). Although this is her only appearance in the New Testament, the manner in which she is introduced honors her

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[57] For further information of the ministry of the Methodist Crisis and Relief Development, see https://www.facebook.com/cacmcrd, accessed on June 26, 2020.

service, status, generosity, and influence not only for the apostle but for many others as well.[58]

The early church fathers speak highly of the role Phoebe played in the Pauline community. John Chrysostom remarks that "how many ways" Paul "takes to give her dignity" by beginning a long list of friends with her name and calling her sister, an honor that is "no slight thing."[59] Paul has also "added her rank, by mentioning her being deaconess."[60] Chrysostom also highlights that Paul highly praises Phoebe with "encomiums" and "exhortation."[61] Similarly, Origen also points out that Paul honors Phoebe with "great praise and commendation"[62] and concludes that Rom 16:1–2 teaches "two things at the same time: . . . women are to be considered ministers in the Church, and the kind who have assisted many and who through good services have merited attaining unto apostolic praise ought to be received in the ministry" and they should receive "recompense and honor from the brothers" and "be held in honor."[63]

Yet, strangely, the role of Phoebe is under-recognized today. A sample of English translations of how διάκονος and προστάτις are translated can be seen in the table below.

English Versions	Translation of διάκονος	Translation of προστάτις
NRSV	deacon	benefactor
ESV	servant	patron
NIV (1984)	servant	a great help
NIV (2011)	deacon	benefactor
NET	servant	a great help
NASV	servant	a helper

Table 1: Translation of διάκονος and προστάτις in various English translations.

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[58] On the person and contribution of Phoebe to the apostolic ministry, see Joan Cecelia Campbell, *Phoebe: Patron and Emissary*, Paul's Social Network Brothers and Sisters in Faith (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), 47–92. See also Lynn Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 305–7.

[59] John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of St John Chrysostom, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, Homilies XXX (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1841), 477.

[60] Chrysostom, *Homilies*, 477.

[61] Chrysostom, *Homilies*, 488.

[62] Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Books 6–10*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 290.

[63] Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 291.

Interestingly, when applied to male figures like Tychicus and Epaphras, the word διάκονος is almost always without exception translated as "minister" in the same translations as highlighted in the table below, probably a strong indication of gender bias.

English Translations for διάκονος	Tychicus in Eph 6:21	Epaphras in Col 1:7	Tychicus in Col 4:7
NRSV	minister	minister	minister
ESV	minister	minister	minister
NIV (1984)	servant	minister	minister
NIV (2011)	servant	minister	minister
NET	servant	minister	minister
NRSV	minister	minister	minister

Table 2: Translation of διάκονος in various English translations when applied to male figures

The manner in which διάκονος and προστάτις are translated in major English translations underscores the controversies in accepting the critical role Phoebe as a female played among Pauline communities. As seen from Table 1, translations such as NASV, NET and NIV (1984) downplay Phoebe's role by according her merely as a "servant" and someone that is of a "great help" or "helper." This completely watered down her position as a deacon and benefactor, as rightly translated in NRSV and NIV (2011). ESV, interestingly, views Phoebe as a patron but not a deacon, and opted for the word "servant." It is worth noting that NIV corrected the translation from "servant" and "great help" in the 1984 edition to "deacon" and "benefactor" in the 2011 edition respectively. In addition, Phoebe's importance has also been subverted by a number of scholars as well. Romaniuk thinks that Rom 16:1–2 are "a pleasant exaggeration" for Phoebe's service and that Paul elevates her role to that of an official deacon,[64] even though she probably shares similarities in terms of character and nature of ministry compared to Epaphras and Tychicus.

The manner in which Paul commends Phoebe is striking. She is referred to as a διάκονον τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κεγχρεαῖς (a deacon of

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[64] K. Romaniuk, "Was Phoebe in Romans 16,1 a Deacon?," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 81 (1990): 132–34, citation from 133. Contra Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary,* Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 941 who suggests that by calling Phoebe as a helper downplays her role of patronage for the Pauline mission.

the church in Cenchreae). The fact that "the church in Cenchreae" is explicitly mentioned further underscores the important role Phoebe played and that she had a recognized office in the church. Otherwise, Paul could have easily introduced Phoebe as διάκονον τῆς ἐν Κεγχρεαῖς, a convention that commensurate with the common practice of introducing people where only the city/town is mentioned, such as Paul from Tarsus or Jesus of Nazareth.

As a προστάτις, Phoebe also plays a significant role in Paul's apostolic ministry. This word suggests that Phoebe could have been a woman of wealth and social status, and possibly held influential positions within the society in the first century. She provided financially for Paul and for many others, and certainly it is not too difficult to imagine that she also provided for her church in Cenchreae. To those doubting the appropriateness of assigning such a high social status to a woman like Phoebe, it is helpful to consider contemporary epigraphic evidence for other influential females in the Greco-Roman world.

Inscriptions referring to two female patrons, Iunia Theodora and Claudia Metrodora, Roman citizens who lived around the mid-first century in the Greek cities of the Roman Empire and who were contemporaries of Paul, may shed more insight to the role of Phoebe.[65] Iunia Theodora was a resident of Corinth, most probably a native of Lycia. A total of five inscriptions referring to her were found near Corinth.[66] According to a decree of the federal assembly of the Lycians (*SEG* 18 (1962):143, *ll.* 1–14), Iunia Theodora is referred to as "a fine and worthy woman, and devoted to the nation, continuously shows her zeal and her munificence towards the nation." She was said to provide hospitality and care for all the Lycians (both visitors and exiles) coming to Corinth in her home and assisted them in their needs. In addition, she also used her influence among the official circles, especially among the Roman provincial government, to plead on behalf of the Lycians. This earned her a "gold crown for the time when she will come into the presence of the gods" and an honorific title of "The federal assembly of the

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[65] See R. A. Kearsley, "Women in Public Life in the Roman East: Iunia Theodora, Claudia Metrodora and Phoebe, Benefactress of Paul," *Tyndale Bulletin* 50 (1999): 189–211.

[66] Kearsley, "Women in Public Life," 191. See also D. I. Pallas, S. Charitonidis, and J. Venencie, "Inscriptions lyciennes trouvées à Solômos près de Corinthe," *Bulletin de correspondance héllenique* 83 (1959): 496–508, and *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 18 (1962): 143.

Lycians to Iunia Theodora, a Roman, fine and honourable woman and devoted to the nation." Such generous actions by a benefactor were not uncommon in the first century, but they were mostly carried out by male benefactors. To have Iunia Theodora carrying out such tasks normally taken by male benefactors is unusual indeed.[67]

Another female, Claudia Metrodora, a native of the island of Chios off Ephesus, was also well known in public life, holding the office of the magistrate and also a benefactor to the city of Chios. Six honorific fragments concerning her survived. She generously gave sumptuous banquets for the city, presided over imperial games as agonothete, held the office of gymnasiarch numerous times, donated to the public bath complex, and her other activities earned her praise from the city.[68]

These two women exemplify the prominent roles increasingly open to wealthy women by the time of the Roman Empire. There seems to be a gradual shift of positive opinion about women in public office, and there appears to be no reason on gender grounds to deny Phoebe her role as a benefactor of Paul and the people living in Cenchreae.[69] As such, Paul's identification of Phoebe as a sister, deacon, and patron undergirds her highly respected social position and bestows upon her a publicly acknowledged role of a patron that not only provides material but practical assistance for others.[70]

Moving to the wider context of Romans 16, Paul presents a long list of twenty-nine individuals showcasing an inclusive ministry that is beyond gender discrimination where both men and women actively participated with him.[71] There are eight named

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[67] Kearsley, "Women in Public Life," 193–194.

[68] Kearsley, "Women in Public Life," 198–201.

[69] For further discussion, see Bruce Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and The Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 183–210.

[70] See also James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC 38B (Dallas: Word, 1988), 886–87; Jewett, *Romans*, 944. Contra Erlend D. MacGillivray, "Romans 16:2, προστάτις/προστάτης, and the Application of Reciprocal Relationships to New Testament Texts," *Novum Testamentum* 53 (2001): 183–99. MacGillivray sees Phoebe and Paul's relationship as a general reciprocity dynamic of benefaction, rather than specifically within the patron-client relationship.

[71] For further discussion on the names of individuals listed in Romans 16, see Peter Lampe, "The Roman Christians of Romans 16," in *The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. Karl P. Donfried (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 216–30; and Susan Matthew, *Women in the Greetings of Romans 16.1–16: A Study of Mutuality and Women's Ministry in the Letter to the Romans*, LNTS 471 (London: Bloomsbury

women plus a mother and a sister, and nineteen named men plus a household and brothers.[72] The extraordinary long list of women is deliberate and it underscores the role women played in the apostolic ministry of Paul. It is worthwhile to note that seven of the ten women are described in terms of their leadership in ministry (Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Junia, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis). By comparison, only three men are described in this manner (Aquila, Andronicus, Urbanus), and two of these men are working alongside a female partner (Aquila with Prisca, Andronicus with Junia). What is most striking is that Phoebe should be the first name mentioned in this significant list, a tradition of putting the most important person first in the list.[73] She is likely the carrier and expositor of Paul's letter to the Romans as well, and her status of a patron or benefactor and a woman of wealth accorded her the freedom to travel. It is remarkable, according to Aune, that "how frequently in the last century and a half the ideology of gender hierarchy has obscured and downplayed the role of Phoebe, the deacon and patron of Paul (Rom 16:1–2), or turned Junia, the apostle, into a male figure (Rom 16:7)."[74]

Through Rom 16:1–2, Paul demonstrates that there is no gender discrimination towards women. The manner in which Phoebe is described as a sister, deacon, patron, and a courier of Paul's letter to the Roman believers elevates her to a position of importance. This is significant and would have gone against some of the prevailing worldview concerning women that is present among some of Paul's contemporaries. According to ancient view, particularly among philosophical and medical knowledge, women were believed to be ontologically inferior to men.[75] Women were

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T&T Clark, 2013), 65–85, especially 79–81.

[72] I take Junia in Rom 16:7 as a female Jewish co-worker of Paul, who suffered imprisonment. Much ink has been split on whether Junia could have been Junias, a male co-worker. It is worth noting that the name Junia was the unanimous choice of interpreters in the history of interpretation of Rom 16:7, as least up to the 14th century. She is also often referred to as the wife of Andronicus. It is only from 1927–1998, the critical editions of NA and UBS chose the masculine name of Junias. In light of this, a number of English translations prefer the masculine Junias over Junia (see Darby Translation and ASV). This move appears to be the result of gender prejudice rather than reason. For further discussion, see Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

[73] Peter is often listed first in the list of the disciples, suggesting that he is the leader of the band of disciples. For example, see Matt 10:2; 26:37; Mark 3:16; 5:37; 9:2; 14:33; Luke 6:14; 8:51; 9:28.

[74] Aune, "Problem of Equality," 183.

[75] See Aristotle *Metaph.* 10.9, 1058b; *Gen. an.* 4.1765–766, and Galen, *On the Natural*

believed to be the result of imperfect implantation of male seed in the womb or some other accidents during the course of gestation. It is also believed that fathers merely implanted the seed into the womb of a woman as replicas of themselves. If the condition of the womb was not ideal, the seed could not develop into a man, and hence, a daughter was born. Aristotle also believed that women were biologically flawed men.[76] They were considered intellectually flawed as well and were less capable of exercising authority like men.[77] These discriminations against women justified a system of patronage in the Greco-Roman world where women were placed in a position of dependence.[78] In this respect, Dale Martin is right to say that "Paul assigns women a larger role and more respect in his churches and in his theology than they would have enjoyed in many areas of the Greco-Roman Society."[79]

In Malaysia, gender discrimination against women in terms of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, and political empowerment may not be pronounced. However, sexual harassment against women and child marriage below the age of 18 particularly among the Malays remain issues of concern. Currently, only the state of Selangor and the federal capital of Kuala Lumpur prohibit child marriage, while there is no prohibition for the rest of the other twelve states in Malaysia. Poverty, lack of access to education, and religious convictions are primary reasons cited for the existing practices of child marriages. This is one area in which the Christian community can be an advocate for the community in supporting governmental framework toward abolishing child marriages. In addition, empowering and educating women in communities with high percentage of child marriages can also be an avenue to overcome gender discrimination.

Galatians 3:28 and Nation Building in Malaysia

In this essay, I have argued that Paul's social vision based on Gal 3:28 is one that moves beyond equality and inclusivity where all forms of discrimination against one's ethnicity, social status, and gender are removed. This radical vision of Paul not only informed

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Faculties 1.6; 2.3.

[76] Aristotle *Gen. an.* 4.1.756b; 2.3.737a.

[77] Aristotle *Pol.* 1.1259b; 1.1260a.

[78] See also the discussion in Tatha Wiley, *Paul and the Gentile Women: Reframing Galatians* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 78–102.

[79] Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, Yale, 1999), 199.

but guided Paul in the manner in which he offered practical solutions to the various issues he addressed in his communities such as the Jerusalem collection project, the instructions on the abuse of the Eucharist, and his relationship with Phoebe.

How does this understanding of Gal 3:28 inspire us in our contemporary reflections towards our contribution in nation building in multireligious, multiethnic, and multicultural Malaysia? Although I provided some brief reflections in the three categories of Jew-Gentile, slave-free, and male-female discriminations earlier in this essay, in this concluding section, I aim to bring all these together in providing some key pointers of how Malaysian church could be a catalyst in nation building. First of all, Paul's social vision and ideal based on Gal 3:28 could have easily challenged the prevailing Greco-Roman culture that emphasized social classification and stratification. For Paul, inclusivity and diversity for unity are not sufficient, and all forms of discrimination must be removed. The church in Malaysia can play a very significant role to challenge any form of discrimination based on one's ethnicity, social status, and gender that exists in the church and beyond. This can be done at different levels—within the church, at the local level, and at the national level—by participating in public projects that promote religious and ethnic unity and examining public policy and speaking up against those that seem to promote injustice and discrimination.

We have also seen that Paul is a practical theologian. He ensures that his social vision firmly rooted in his gospel governs his practical outworking of this vision in building a community that is markedly different from the Greco-Roman world. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the church in Malaysia can offer hope and practical help that cuts across ethnic, social, and gender discrimination by extending help to all who are in need—by distributing basic necessities to the under-privileged, marginalized, and those who are the worst hit and those without any social safety net. Many churches and Christian NGOs have been at the forefront in assisting the government in extending hands of mercy without taking into consideration one's color, creed, and status. This is probably the most visible manifestation of Paul's social vision at work.

Finally, Paul reminds us that being one in Christ is not merely about levelling or abolishing all ethnic, social or gender differences that could be our pride or embarrassment, but it is an integration whereby removing all discrimination, our differences serve to enrich

our mutual interdependence of each other as God's creation whereby God's grace and the beauty can be showcased in all of us, "for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). This calls for dialog and engagement with all parties where our diversity can be celebrated rather than be a cause for discrimination.

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PART II

Theology and Ethics

Wawasan 2020 *and Christianity in Religiously Plural Malaysia*

Edmund Kee-Fook Chia

The present article examines why the problem of interracial and interreligious relations persists even in what is supposed to be the New Malaysia. It begins by briefly discussing Wawasan 2020 *and the challenge of promoting a racially blind society. It then interrogates the nation's history, focusing on the impact of European colonialism and the migrations of peoples to the Malay Archipelago. With that as backdrop it reflects on how race and religion intersect within the socio-political structures of the country's development as a new independent nation-state. The place of Christianity in the country's religiously plural society is then discussed, especially with reference to the country's Islamization policies.*

Wawasan 2020 and the New Malaysia

Wawasan 2020 (Vision 2020) was a wishful proclamation in 1991 by Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. He was envisioning that by the year 2020 Malaysia would be joining the ranks of the industrialized nations. We are already in 2020 and no one, not even Mahathir himself, would dare claim that the vision is any closer to being realized. The most important element, that the peoples of the nation would be united as one *Bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian race), remains but a vision, if not merely a dream. Not only has this been unaccomplished, interracial and interreligious relations continue to deteriorate.

In a Working Paper presented at the inaugural meeting of the Malaysian Business Council on February 28, 1991, Dr. Mahathir expressed this hope: "By the year 2020, Malaysia can be a united nation, with a confident Malaysian society, infused by strong moral and ethical values, living in a society that is democratic, liberal and tolerant, caring, economically just and equitable, progressive and prosperous, and in full possession of an economy that is competitive,

dynamic, robust and resilient."[1] Even as the primary aim of the vision is for Malaysia to be an economically developed nation, *Wawasan 2020* is deliberate about attaining a united, well-rounded, self-sufficient and ethical citizenry in its pursuit of a democratic, liberal and dynamic society. This vision set the directions for the nation's trajectory in the 1990s and early 2000s under the continued leadership of Mahathir's 22-year rule.

With the change in national leadership in 2003 and again in 2009, and amidst the financial crisis of 2007–2010, *Wawasan 2020* had to be recalibrated. In its stead, Malaysia's sixth Prime Minister Najib Razak launched the *Transformasi Nasional 2050* (National Transformation 2050) initiative in 2018, with the expectation that by the year 2050 Malaysia will have successfully negotiated and dealt "with issues relating to the globe, equitability, sustainability, unity, responsibility and attentiveness."[2] This was despite the fact that an intense campaign was already underway for multi-country investigations into large-scale corruption and money-laundering charges against Najib and the ruling government.

The turning point of the nation's fortunes came with the fourteenth General Elections held on May 9, 2018. The Malaysian electorate voted out the *Barisan Nasional* (National Front) government that had been in power since the country's independence from the British in 1957. The victors were the newly-formed coalition *Pakatan Harapan* (Alliance of Hope) that was led by Mahathir and his former deputy Anwar Ibrahim. The election manifesto of *Pakatan Harapan* decried that under the *Barisan Nasional* rule "Malaysians are threatened with narrow racist rhetoric such that we [are] beginning to distrust each other. [This] distrust is being sown by politicians because they know they can win easily by dividing us."[3]

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[1] Mahathir bin Mohamad, "The Way Forward - Vision 2020," accessed December 23, 2019, http://www.wawasan2020.com/vision/index.html.

[2] "TN50 Is Malaysia's Dream," *New Straits Times: Malaysian Digest*, February 28, 2018, accessed December 24, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/201802282019 49/http://www.malaysiandigest.com/frontpage/282-main-tile/725525-tn50-is-malaysia-s-dream.html.

[3] Pakatan Harapan, *Buku Harapan: Rebuilding our Nation, Fulfilling our Hopes* (March 2018), 8.

The Racial Discrimination Convention

Pakatan Harapan campaigned to be the government of a New Malaysia. Specifically, it pledged to "make our human rights record respected by the world," including taking the following action: "Suitable international conventions that are not yet ratified will be ratified as soon as possible, including the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights."[4] As a first step in this direction and in his first outing to the United Nations on September 28, 2018 as Malaysia's seventh Prime Minister, Mahathir announced that

> The new Malaysia will firmly espouse the principles promoted by the UN in our international engagements. These include the principles of truth, human rights, the rule of law, justice, fairness, responsibility and accountability, as well as sustainability. It is within this context that the new government of Malaysia has pledged to ratify all remaining core UN instruments related to the protection of human rights. It will not be easy for us because Malaysia is multiethnic, multireligious, multicultural and multilingual.[5]

However, when the *Pakatan Harapan* government tried to ratify the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the opposition party successfully mobilized protest against it. Their claim was that the convention challenges the special rights enshrined in the constitution for the protection of the Malay race, the Malay language, the Muslim religion, and the place of the Malay sultanate in the country. Some of its leaders even asserted that Islam prohibits equal treatment of all as it is the only true and absolute religion.[6]

Pakatan Harapan realized that the political cost for ICERD's ratification was too high. The initiative was abandoned. The politics of race and religion had won the day. The New Malaysia is set back, burdened by the baggage of the Old Malaysia. In order to better appreciate why the race-religion issue is so sensitive it would be

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[4] *Buku Harapan*, 60.

[5] "Dr Mahathir at 73rd UN General Assembly," *New Straits Times,* April 3, 2019, accessed December 24, 2019, https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2018/09/415941/speech-text-dr-mahathir-73rd-un-general-assembly.

[6] Fairul Asmaini Mohd Pilus, "PAS: All Muslims have a duty to oppose ICERD," *New Straits Times*, November 22, 2018, accessed December 24, 2019, https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2018/11/433566/pas-all-muslims-have-duty-oppose-icerd.

necessary to examine the demographics in Malaysia and the nation's history, beginning with the early settlers and how the Malays became the dominant race.

Malaysia's Multicultural Population

Unlike its neighbors, Malaysia's religious pluralism is unique in that there is no one religion which is overwhelmingly dominant in the country, as is the case in Indonesia (Islam 87%), Thailand (Buddhism 94%) or the Philippines (Christianity 86%). Of the 32 million people currently residing in Malaysia, a little more than 50% are ethnic Malays, 22% ethnic Chinese, 11% from the indigenous tribal communities such as the Negritos, Senois, Kadazans and Ibans, 6% ethnic Indians, 1% other races, and up to 8% are part of the new wave of immigrant workers (from Bangladesh, Philippines, Myanmar, Vietnam, Nepal, Indonesia, etc.) who are non-citizens.

The federal constitution defines 'Malay' as one who "professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, [and] conforms to Malay custom" (Article 160). Islam is the country's official religion while the freedom of practice of other religions is enshrined in the constitution. Most Chinese are adherents of the syncretic mix of the religions of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, while the Indians are mostly Hindus or Sikhs. Christianity derives most of its converts from the Chinese and Indian communities and especially from the indigenous peoples, particularly of East Malaysia. How this mixture of peoples came about has as much to do with the differential movements of peoples in the region over time as with the deliberate interventions by those in power during the colonial era.

The Malays as Definitive Peoples

While the indigenous peoples are believed to have inhabited the Malay Peninsula from pre-historic times, historical records reveal that the Malays as a people had become the dominant group by the 1st millennium CE. They were initially influenced by Indian culture and adopted the religions of Buddhism and Hinduism. The first significant wave of movements of people into the region came from the Arab states and Indic subcontinent along with the spread of Islam. By the late 14th and early 15th century, Parameswara, a rebel Srivijayan prince, had set up his kingdom in Melaka and wielded power over many of the provinces of the Malay world. He converted from Hinduism to become a Muslim, established a Sultanate, and

made Islam the official religion. The subsequent century was to become the golden age of Malay self-rule, whereby Melaka turned into a center of great culture and learning.

This datum of history enables the post-independence Malaysian government to claim that the Malays are what Mahathir, in his book *The Malay Dilemma*, calls the "definitive people" of Malaysia.[7] He likens this to the claims of the white Anglo-Saxons in North America and Australia who are considered owners of the lands even as they are by no means indigenous: "In sum, Mahathir postulates that 'the definitive people are those who set up the first governments and these governments were the ones with which other countries did official business and had diplomatic relations.' In the Malaysian context, the Malays claim primacy and 'rightful ownership' by virtue of being the first to 'civilise' the land, so to speak."[8]

European Colonialism in Malaya

Thus, when the European powers were competing to open trade routes to the Far East at the beginning of the 16th century, they had to contend with the existing political power in the Malay Archipelago. To counter the Muslim monopoly of trade, Alfonso de Albuquerque captured Melaka in 1511 for the Portuguese Empire. The Portuguese ruled the Far East until its decline towards the end of the 16th century.

In 1641, Melaka fell to the Dutch whose reign in the region lasted for about 150 years until the advent of British influence in Southeast Asia. While the Dutch officially ceded Melaka to the British only in 1824, the British had already acquired Penang in 1786 and later also Singapore. From these three city-ports, which constituted the Straits Settlements, the British gradually took control of the other states in the Malay Peninsula. They were to rule until the Federation of Malaya achieved its independence in 1957.

Meanwhile, the two states of Northern Borneo in what is present-day East Malaysia belonged to the Brunei Empire, which had reasonably good relations with the Portuguese. In the late 18th century, however, the British began to take an interest in the Borneo

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[7] Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma,* reprint ed. (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2005), 3, originally published in Singapore: D. Moore for Asia Pacific Press, 1970.

[8] Zairil Khir Johari, "The Real Malay Dilemma," *Cambodian Journal of International Studies* 1, no. 2 (August 2017): 88.

Island because it facilitated a trade route for ships from India to China. By the mid-19th century the British had a foothold in Sarawak and by the late 19th century in Sabah. They took control over the whole northern region of Borneo and ruled until 1963, when the two states joined Peninsula Malaya and Singapore to form the Federation of Malaysia. Singapore left the federation after two years to become an independent sovereign state in 1965.

The Arrival of Christianity in Malaya

The arrival of Christianity to the Malay Archipelago is often aligned with the arrival of the Portuguese in 1511. But it was with Francis Xavier that Christian mission really advanced during his five visits to Melaka from 1545 until his death in 1552. Converts to Christianity came from among the resident Chinese and even some local Muslims. But it was the group of Indian Hindu merchants, who had benefited most from their association with the Portuguese, which saw large numbers of converts to Christianity.

With the Dutch capture of Melaka, Catholicism was suppressed as Protestantism came into ascendancy. When the British came into power in the 19th century, they encouraged the Protestant missions to flourish alongside the spread of Catholicism. Missionaries from all over Europe quickly took advantage of this and made their debut into the Malay world. It was this era which saw the foundation of a variety of churches in Malaya.

Meanwhile, East Malaysia had a very different history. While there are reports of very brief Portuguese and Spanish missionary visits in the late 16th century, it was not until the late 17th century that missionaries of the Theatine Order were commissioned to spearhead the mission to Borneo. Don Carlos Cuarteron arrived in Borneo, together with two Milan Foreign Missionaries, in 1857 and ministered there for more than twenty years. Upon his withdrawal, the Mill Hill Missionaries, who arrived in Borneo in 1881, took charge and had control over the region until after the region entered the Federation of Malaysia.

British Imperialism and the Making of Race

It was the British who actively facilitated the influx of mass numbers of foreign settlers into Malaya, creating an artificial ethnic mix in the local community. By the early 20th century the Malay Peninsula had the largest Chinese population outside of China and,

apart from Sri Lanka, the largest Indian population outside of India.[9] The newly-arrived migrants served as source of indentured and cheap labor for the British at a time when the demand for raw material increased in order to sustain the industrial revolution in Europe and the colonialist economy.

The Malays had little role in this growing economy: "The Malays were predominantly rural, shunned big cities and were apathetic towards making money."[10] Environmental and social factors were used to explain their lackadaisical attitude: "The environmental explanation is that Malays find it unnecessary to work hard because nature is so bountiful. With abundant fresh fish and productive padi fields, the environment has not disciplined Malays to work hard or plan for the long term. The social explanation says that any economic gains will simply be confiscated by local elites."[11]

Syed Hussein Alatas challenges this perception in his book *The Myth of the Lazy Native*:

> This was true only in a colonial capitalist plantation. The foreign observers themselves noticed that the Malays were capable of prolonged sustained work in other areas, like the civil service, the police, driving, gardening, grooming, keeping horses, etc. They were only incapable, or to be more accurate, unwilling to work in the plantations owned by others. The unwillingness of the Malays to work as estate coolies was interpreted as an ethnic shortcoming.[12]

The Chinese and Indian immigrants were segregated from the local Malays so that each community lived in its own silo. By the beginning of the 20th century the three distinct communities dominant in Malaya were divided basically along labor lines: the Malays remained as peasants and smallholders in their farmlands and *kampungs* (villages), the Indians toiled as rubber tappers and in palm oil plantations in secluded rural settlements, and the Chinese

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[9] Anagha A Kamble, "Indians in the Plantation Industry of Malaya (mid-19th–20th century)," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 68, no. 2 (2007): 1168.

[10] Francis Joseph Moorhead, *A History of Malaya, Vol. II* (Kuala Lumpur: Longmans, 1963), 187.

[11] Charles Hirschman, "The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya: Political Economy and Racial Ideology," *Sociological Forum* 1, no. 2 (June 1986): 345.

[12] Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism* (London, Frank Cass, 1977), 78.

worked the tin mines and controlled trade in the urban areas. Thus, "the problematic inter-ethnic relationships of the pre-1850 era, which contained the potential of acculturation and even assimilation, were transformed into 'racial relations' by the colonial experience."[13]

World War II and the Quest for Independence

The Second World War heightened the subliminal interracial tensions. Due to the ongoing Sino-Japan War, the Japanese invaders of 1941 targeted the Malayan Chinese. The more radical amongst the Chinese founded the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army as the armed-wing of the Malayan Communist Party. The Japanese used the police force, which by then was Malay-populated, to harass and suppress them. This, of course, exacerbated the already touchy interracial relationship.

Meantime, the war years opened the eyes of the local population in their perception of foreign occupation. Unlike the European colonizers, the Japanese were fellow 5-foot tall brown-skinned Asians, who were neither gigantic in stature nor foreign in appearance. That they drove away the European soldiers shattered the myth of European invincibility and superiority. This encouraged the local Malays to raise questions about British imperialism.

Thus, when the Japanese surrendered in 1945, the local nationalist revolutionaries turned into independence movement advocates, campaigning for self-rule rather than a return to Western colonial rule. Drained of resources from the war, the British was ready to relinquish authority over its colonies. But when they established the *Malayan Union* in 1946, promising equal rights to all the residents, the Malay nationalists revolted. Because the Malays constituted a little less than 50% of the population in the 1950s, interethnic relations was exceptionally volatile.

Realizing that their time was up, the British promised independence and initiated talks with the Malay leaders, along with their Chinese and Indian counterparts. They agreed to what has since been known as the "social contract," which is a trade-off for the granting of citizenship to the non-Malays in exchange for the special rights and position of the Malays in the country.

Freed from colonial rule, the different communities in Malaya had no choice but to face off with each other on their own. Kenneth

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[13] Hirschman, "The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya," 332.

Williams asks perceptively:

> How could a country which was created and sociologically constituted by commercial interest, which was composed of autonomous ethnic groups, which was communally split on the levels of political and economic power, which was then asked to forget communal interest and unite into a truly pluralistic society—how could such a country find a national identity which would be the focus of a truly multi-racial society?[14]

Towards a Malaysian Indigenous Identity

With independence, the Malay social and political leaders found themselves thrust with the task of nation building. Establishing a national identity entails not only the quest for one's local and indigenous identities but also identifying and extending the resources responsible for shaping them. The Islamic religion features significantly among these resources.[15]

The Federal Constitution of Malaysia explicitly spells out Islam as the official religion. But since the same Constitution also provides for the freedom of religion, interreligious relations should be peaceful and harmonious. Politics, however, has decided otherwise. Two main Malay-Muslim parties emerged shortly after independence, i.e., the ruling United Malays National Organization (UMNO) party and a splinter group called the Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS is the Malay acronym). Since UMNO and PAS were competing for the same Muslim votes they had to portray themselves as champions of Islam. Michael Northcotte notes:

> The increase in ethnic rivalry and the surge in support for PAS were accompanied by the birth of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia in the same period. . . . Revivalist da'wa agencies such as the Muslim youth movement, the Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), and 'fundamentalist' groups such as the Darul Arqam Movement and the Tabligh Movement began to pose a strong threat to the traditionalist religious and political leadership of the Malay community.[16]

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[14] Kenneth Williams, "The Church in West Malaysia and Singapore: A Study of the Catholic Church in West Malaysia and Singapore Regarding her Situation as an Indigenous Church" (PhD diss., Katholieke Universiteit Te Leuven, 1976), 36.

[15] Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, *World Christianity Encounters World Religions: A Summa of Interfaith Dialogue* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2018), 137.

[16] Michael Northcotte, "Christian-Muslim Relations in West Malaysia," *The*

The 1980s saw the Malaysian government implementing a string of Islamization policies affecting many areas of the public sphere and permeating into institutions such as the media, judiciary, banks, schools, universities, etc.

The government's Islamization program coincided with the worldwide resurgence of Islam. Rapid urbanization, unbridled modernization, secularism and materialism in post-colonial Malaysia were forces that propelled Islamic resurgence. Muslims, especially those living in cosmopolitan cities, were more emphatic about Islamic attire, the use of Arabic greetings and mannerisms, and became exceptionally particular about Muslim dietary rules. They also became more overt about the practice of prayer and other religious duties. In reflecting on the phenomenon, Chandra Muzaffar has this to say: "Indeed *identity* is the crucial characteristic of Islam in the era of resurgence. Underlying the differences between present and past attitudes to attire and food, to education and economy, to law and State, is this perception of the importance of an exclusive Islamic identity."[17]

Impact of Islamization upon Christianity

Aside from strengthening the Islamic identity, the post-colonial Malaysian government was also concerned about arresting the continuous growth of anything associated with colonialism. Christianity was thus specifically targeted on account of its being an import of the European colonialists and because it continues to be perceived as a Western religion. It did not help that the Malays remembered that the local Christians did not play an active part in the nationalist quest for independence since they had been the beneficiaries of colonial rule.

The process of decolonization therefore also meant the process of de-Christianization. This began with the expulsion of Western Christian missionaries and the rejection of visa applications for new missionaries to serve in Malaysia. It then extended to systematic policies aimed at curbing the influence of Christian schools, hospitals, and other social agencies. Laws were enacted to specifically guard against Muslims from being proselytized and to hinder the propagation of the Christian faith. Most of these have to

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Muslim World LXXXI.1 (1991): 54.

[17] Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Fajar Bakti, 1986), 10.

do with the two issues of land and language and serve to impress upon the Christian community their powerlessness in the hands of the post-independence Malaysian Muslim bureaucrats.[18]

Thus, if in the pre-independence era the Christiaan communities were awarded prime lands, some in strategic hilltop locations, by the colonial government to build their churches and schools, the post-independence years saw the churches encountering difficulties acquiring land for religious purposes, including burial grounds. The language issue pertains to legislations forbidding non-Muslims from using lexicon items from Arabic words such as *Allah, Nabi, Rasul,* etc. This is within a context of the younger generation of Christians and those from East Malaysia educated in the Malay language using the Indonesian version of the *Alkitab* (Bible) and the *Perjanjian Baru* (New Testament) and the Malay language in their worship sessions. In the minds of the government the law serves to protect the simple-minded Malay from thinking that there is no difference between Christianity and Islam if the same terms are used to designate God, prophet, apostle, etc. in the respective religions.

Other policies that have affected Christians include Good Friday no longer being a national public holiday (as it was when under colonial rule) and, in some instances, even open displays of Christianity are discouraged.[19] Sometimes even the singing of Christmas carols in public places is forbidden. Again, in the minds of the Muslim bureaucrats these activities have the potential for misleading innocent Muslim children into embracing Christianity or actually believing the lyrics of the Silent Night carol that indeed Christ the Savior is born! Another ruling that has impacted the Christian community is that Christian events, such as evangelism rallies and faith healing sessions, and publications have to carry the "For Non-Muslims Only" sign. While Christians faithfully obey this, the leaders of the other religious communities wish that this protection could be extended to their members as well, simply be mandating that the signs should read "For Christians Only."

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18 Raymond Lee, "Patterns of Religious Tension in Malaysia," *Asian Survey* XXVIII.4 (April 1988): 410.

19 Malaysian Christians who complain about their rights being denied by the Muslim-led government are reminded that in most Western (Christian) nations the Muslim feast of *Eid al Fitr* or Hari Raya is an ordinary workday, that that there have been numerous protests against the building of mosques, and a host of other discriminations against Muslims.

Towards a Malaysian Christian Church

With the status and privileges afforded to Christianity during the colonial era removed, the local Christian community embarked on a process of renewal on their own in order to re-create Christianity's image in the nation of Malaysia. If their compatriots were in search of an indigenous national identity, the local Christians were in search of their own ecclesial and theological identities. To that end the post-colonial church in Malaysia realized that it had to work on an authentic process of contextualizing the faith.

For the Catholic Church this was given impetus by the Second Vatican Council of 1962–1965. The council encouraged the church to be actively engaged in the modern world, to be preachers of hope and peace, builders of bridges and relationships, and agents of reconciliation and dialogue. This nudge was especially necessary for the Catholic Church in Malaysia as the pre-Vatican II Church was seen as overly inward-looking, concerned only with its own welfare, as Anthony Rogers observes: "Prior to that era, the Church was seen both as the vehicle to heaven for all baptised Christians, and as the dispenser of grace and sacraments to the people. Its members were guided to avoid the 'evil world' resulting in little personal contact with the people, world events and trends. Evangelisation was seen as a process of increasing the number of the faithful."[20]

One of the first tasks for the Catholic community, as Maureen Chew notes, was to deal with the issue of racial segregation within itself: "The Malaysian Church in the 1960s was multi-racial, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural but lacked a strong unifying factor. Parishes were compartmentalised into English-speaking, Chinese-speaking, Tamil-speaking, each independent unit on its own, with hardly any intercommunication or link."[21] Concrete efforts had to be taken to facilitate interaction in view of transforming the multiracial and multicultural church communities to being interracial and intercultural church communities where the different languages are used and appreciated as the different communities come together to evolve into a truly Malaysian Church.

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[20] Anthony Rogers, "The Transplanted Church – Pre-Vatican II," in *Report on Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention 1986* (Port Dickson, November 1986), 37–38.
[21] Maureen Chew, *The Journey of the Catholic Church in Malaysia, 1511–1996* (Kuala Lumpur: Catholic Research Centre, 2000), 178.

Ecumenical and Interchurch Relations

The intense rivalry between the different European powers during the colonial era meant that the Catholic-Protestant conflicts of Europe were largely transplanted into Malaysia. The post-independence church, therefore, had the herculean task of attending to the problem of Christian division, especially since the Christian community was a tiny minority. Thus, inter-church relations became an important item on the agenda. The story of inter-church relations in Malaysia and Singapore is often traced to the establishment of the Malayan Christian Council (MCC) in 1948. The founding churches included mainline Protestant denominations as well as interdenominational organizations such as the YWCA, YMCA, and the Bible Society. The MCC was later renamed the Council of Churches in Malaysia (CCM).

During this period, the more evangelically oriented churches continued to function independently. It was not until 1983 that many of these independent churches came together to establish the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) of Malaysia. In 1986 the CCM, the NECF, and the Roman Catholic Church came together to establish the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM).

Even if the CFM is an ecumenical establishment, ecumenical dialogue for the purpose of Christian unity was by no means its prime objective. Instead, it was established in response to the Islamization process, as Robert Hunt notes: "The presence of common political challenges was a major force in the formation of the Christian Federation of Malaysia, which embraces the Roman Catholics, the CCM, and the NECF."[22] The CFM provides a united forum for Christians to speak out against any anti-Christian policy, as well as to make representations on behalf of the member churches. At the same time it also allows the Christian body to adjudicate on behaviors and activities of fellow Malaysians who claim to be Christian. Goh Keat Peng suggests that,

> "Of special concern to the national leadership is the continuing proliferation of independent congregations of Christians. . . . Another item of particular concern is the methods of evangelism sometimes practiced by a small fraction of the Christian community. In a multi-ethnic and

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[22] Robert Hunt, "The Church and Social Problems," in *Christianity in Malaysia: A Denominational History*, ed. Robert Hunt, Lee Kam Wing, and John Roxborogh (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 1992), 351.

religious situation, Christians should always consider the sensitivities of the other religious communities."[23]

Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation

Also, in view of the impact of Islamization, a group of leaders from the Christian communities had in 1982 come together with leaders of the other religions to inaugurate the Malaysian Consultative Council for Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism (MCCBCHS). The Taoist community joined the council much later. This body has since been acknowledged as the institution which speaks on behalf of all the non-Muslims in the country. It serves as basically a watchdog of government policies affecting non-Muslims. While the council purports to promote interreligious dialogue, the absence of Muslims in the council raises critical questions about the nature and dynamics of such dialogues. Nevertheless, such a body is necessary even if it serves primarily as front for non-Muslims to fight for their rights or to bargain for concessions.

The above efforts are but the institutional part of the interreligious relations story in Malaysia. The more significant and undocumented interreligious ventures are actually those which happen on a daily basis amongst the ordinary people. Schools, hospitals, shopping malls, and night markets are where the real interreligious dialogues of life take place. Most Malaysians are always and everywhere interacting harmoniously with persons of other religions. Christians have healthy relationships with their neighbors who are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, etc. Christian mission schools and hospitals exemplify this in that they not only cater to a clientele which is in the main non-Christian but are also administered and served by principals, teachers, doctors, and nurses who are Muslims, Confucians, Sikhs, etc. It comes as no surprise then that many Christians intermarry with persons of other religions, including Muslims. Likewise, Christian conversion to Islam is by no means an exception. In short, there is a relative degree of interreligious peace and harmony present in the lives of the ordinary Christian. But this can very quickly melt away when subject to the mercies of race and religious politics.

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[23] Goh Keat Peng, "Vision 2020 and the Ecumenical Movement of the Christian Federation of Malaysia," in *Vision 2020: A Malaysian Christian Response (Theologi Wawasan 2020)*, ed. Batumalai Sandayandy (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Seminai Theoloji Malaysia, 1992), 159–60.

In this regard there are groups—especially non-governmental organizations such as Aliran, KOMAS, SUARAM, MAJU, Sisters in Islam, etc.—which are speaking out against the instrumentalization of race and religion for political ends. Some are led by Muslim intellectuals and social activists and most have a multireligious and multiracial membership. A great number of Christians are also at the forefront of these NGOs. While they do not officially represent their churches, they are certainly there as Christians engaged in the dialogue of action with their brothers and sisters of other religions. This is the more common and effective form of interreligious engagement in Malaysia.

The Grace of Minority Status

As we saw in the discussion above, during the colonial era the Christian community was blessed with many privileges and thus was able to establish a stable mission in Malaysia which has lasted till this day. The fortunes, however, turned with the independence of the nation. Christianity was now on the receiving end as it was associated with the colonial powers and because its missionary agenda was in competition with the interests of the Muslim majority's interests. A lot of its previously accorded "rights" were now taken away: "In the discussions regarding religious freedom are found not only an indicator of the Church's political impotence, but also of the gulf between the Christian view of the ideal Malaysian society, and that being forged by the elected political leaders."[24]

While many lament the unfair treatment of Christians in Malaysia, the situation could also be viewed as a special grace and blessing for the Christian community. To be sure, Christianity continues to grow. Chan Kok Eng relates that,

> Despite limitations in propagating the Christian faith, the greater official regulation of Christian organisations and activities, restricted access to land for churches, the loss of influence formerly exercised by now secularised mission schools, and difficulties caused by a slow pace of indigenization of clergy in several denominations and churches (Ackerman and Lee, 1990), the growth of the

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[24] Robert Hunt, "The Church and Social Problems," in *Christianity in Malaysia: A Denominational History*, ed. Robert Hunt, Lee Kam Wing, and John Roxborogh (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 1992), 350.

Malaysian Church may be deemed remarkable.[25]

In particular, Malaysian Christians have become more sensitive to the feelings of their neighbors of other faiths in whatever they do. There is a heightened sense of caution that church actions do not disturb or pose a threat to others, especially the Muslim community. In short, they have become more respectful and more "Christian" in relating with those outside of the fold. Just as they are terrified of the Muslim's dakwah activities, Malaysian Christians have become more prudent in their own missionary activities so as not to impinge on the human rights of their neighbors. Overt proselytism and aggressive approaches are frowned upon by the leadership of mainline churches.

Furthermore, if in the colonial era church buildings reflected the grandiosity of Christianity's power and might, the post-independence era has forced Malaysian Christians to be less showy and even seen the emergence of simple storefront churches and churches built to resemble inconspicuous warehouses so as not to attract unwarranted attention. Likewise, huge church signboards and gigantic crosses have all but disappeared, partly for fear of protests from the Muslim majority. In other words, Christianity in post-independence Malaysia is becoming less associated with the supremacy of the Colonial Empire or of Christendom and slowly returning to Christianity's humble foundations.

It is in view of the above that when the Catholic bishops and priests of Peninsula Malaysia assembled for the first time in 1976 as a follow-up of Vatican II and after the nation's independence, they decided that the essence of the Catholic Church in Malaysia lies not in its magnificent structures or edifices but in the basic Christian communities. Thus, focus should be on developing small grassroots movements that are united and Christ-centered and concerned about their neighbors of other faiths and especially the poor and marginalized.[26]

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[25] Chan Kok Eng, "A Brief Note on Church Growth in Malaysia, 1960–1985," in *Christianity in Malaysia: A Denominational History*, ed. Robert Hunt, Lee Kam Wing, and John Roxborogh (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 1992), 377–78.

[26] Williams, *The Church in West Malaysia and Singapore,* 250–259.

Conclusion

All this is to say that the post-independence dynamics of politics, race, and religion have brought about a more humble and unassuming expression of church in Malaysia today. Such a church is in fact more akin to the early Christian community in Jesus' time rather than that of the triumphal, colonial Christianity that the European missionaries imported to Malaysia. It has also facilitated a Christian community that is more in touch with the local populace, seeing the need to be engaged with them in dialogue and to cooperate in building the nation together.

In other words, Christians are slowly but surely demonstrating that Christianity need not be viewed as a foreign religion and that Christians are as Malaysian as their other compatriots. They also play significant roles in addressing the challenges of the culturally and religiously plural nation. In the words of Varghese George, a former Secretary General of the Council of Churches of Malaysia, "Both individually and collectively as Malaysian Christians we have a responsibility to respond to this call (Vision 2020) to be part of the 'many, many people' doing 'many, many things' to develop a united Malaysian nation amidst the diversity of customs, cultures and religious beliefs that we have in our country."[27]

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[27] Varghese George, "A Malaysian Response to Vision 2020: A Vision of Liberal and Tolerant Society in which Malaysians Respect Each Other's Creed and Customs," in *Vision 2020: A Malaysian Christian Response (Theologi Wawasan 2020)*, ed. Batumalai Sandayandy (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Seminai Theoloji Malaysia, 1992), 165.

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From Fetish to Forgiveness
A Žižekian Intrusion on How the Church "Enjoys" Herself for the Sake of the World

Alwyn Lau

In line with Slavoj Žižek's theory of fetish and perversion, this essay contends that Malaysia remains enthralled to political fetishes, in which oppressive realities are held at bay via self-deluding narratives and acts whose main purposes are to cover up a traumatic void. Despite the promise of "New Malaysia" after GE14, there is much injustice and oppression which remains veiled and unspoken about (let alone adequately addressed), not least the case of the forced disappearance of individuals like Raymond Koh and Amri Che Mat. Such reticence with respect to continuing injustice, with the accompanying neurotic "protests" (for the sake of showing that one is protesting) and mocking of the powers that be, paradoxically masks a desperate attempt to "hold it together." In a word, there are traumatic voids which New Malaysia refuses to repair, opting instead to cover them up, resulting in institutional hush-hush. In such circumstances, I suggest that a psychoanalytically mediated understanding of the Malaysian Church's sinthome and singularity (or aspects within Lacanian theory of how the church experiences the kind of "enjoyment" which is central to psychic life) and, not least, the forgiveness she is meant to reflect, can help the Church remain authentic, prayerful, compassionate and resilient in the face of on-going challenges in the socio-political arena. In Žižekian terms, the Church needs to embrace the trauma of pain and forgiveness (or, in Lacanian terms, unleashing the Real) as a means of transforming the world as-we-know-it (what Lacan terms the Symbolic) on which the fetish mindset is inflicting misery via a cover-up of the traumatic. This paper thus aims to interrogate the subversive potential and limits of theologizing on the lived realities of LGBTQ Malaysians.

Introduction

There is a story related by Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek concerning a husband who lost his wife to cancer. When his friends visited him to console him, he appeared fine, well-balanced emotionally, more than able to cope and very accepting of the loss. This was surprising—but also disturbing. Because each time the friends visited, they noticed that this bereaved widower always had a hamster, the deceased wife's pet object, near him, which he kept playing with every now and then. A few months after the wife died, so did the hamster, after which the man suffered an emotional breakdown, spiraled into manic depression and had to be hospitalized.[1]

The hamster, in other words, acted as a *fetish*, that is, a substitute, a stand-in, which helped the man cope with his tragic loss via a deep disavowal of reality.[2] The fetishistic disavowal, in fact, constitutes a key characteristic of perversion as a psychoanalytical disorder.[3] This is the case whereby, to use common computer terminology, an individual as not been properly "installed" within society and thus exhibits signs which are out of the ordinary. In psychoanalysis-speak, the subject has been subjected to the paternal function but has disavowed it.[4] The perverse subject is constituted when he puts out of mind a complex of thoughts related to "symbolic castration"[5] in order to maintain a narcissistic non-

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[1] Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2009), 299–300.

[2] Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 299.

[3] The use of psychoanalytical concepts to suture theological ones remains relatively recent. Two good starting points include Marcus Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis & Trauma* (London: SCM Press, 2007) and Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000). I have also attempted an integration of psychoanalysis to Malaysian politics and the Malaysian church in Alwyn Lau, "Intimating the Unconscious: Politics, Psychoanalysis and Theology in Malaysia" (PhD diss., Monash University, Malaysia, 2017), posted February 13, 2017, https://monash. figshare.com/articles/Intimating_the_Unconscious_Politics_Psychoanalysis_and_ Theology_in_Malaysia/4648823.

[4] This is a psychoanalyst's way of saying that the Father (of social authority, norms, responsibilities, which implies adulthood) must wean the child from the Mother (of unconditional love and dependence, all of which implies infancy); such a "weaning"—also known as the "paternal function"—is juxtaposed with the acquisition (and subsequent mastery) of language.

[5] Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 167–70. The term "symbolic castration" is a popular psychoanalytical expression for the process of social-symbolic investiture, or what happens when a subject is normally constituted, by which a child, "enters the order of sense proper…(and is)…propelled into a wider

castrated view of himself. However, due to his incomplete "installation" within society, there remains an aspect of reality which cannot be endured without occasioning a breakdown. Put simply, because life is too traumatic, something has to come between the subject and his experience of life. An object, the fetish, is invoked as a stand-in for the unbearable truth (of castration and membership in society) the pervert cannot avow.[6] This key characteristic of perversion is known as the fetishistic disavowal. Such disavowals are commonly presented in the form, "I know very well that (for example, the project is a farce, that the paper chase is superficial, etc.) *but* I nonetheless choose to act as if I don't know (thus continue to support the project plan, to pursue corporate wealth, etc.)."[7]

This essay will attempt to illustrate how Malaysia's recent socio-political events and key players mirror the psychoanalytical themes introduced above. In particular, it will show how perversion as a clinical disorder and fetishistic disavowal offer a unique (if somewhat obscene) perspective by which to analyze Malaysian politics. I focus especially on two areas: The 1MDB scandal (and court case involving the former Prime Minister, Najib Razak) and the enigma of the "deep state" in the country, as manifested in the enforced disappearances of citizens. The final two sections involve

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social network" (see Slavoj Žižek *Organs Without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* [New York: Routledge, 2004], 83. To be non-castrated (as in the case of perversion), therefore, is to remain—from a psychoanalytical perspective—literally stunted in growth. I have also suggested that key elements within the Malaysian socio-political arena fit the description of Lacanian perversion, not least the actions of Mahathir Mohamad in his capacity as the country's Prime Minister in the 1980s, see Alwyn Lau, "Disorderly Conduct: Neurosis, Psychosis and Perversion in Political Malaysia," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 42, no. 6 (2014): 777–807.

[6] Ian Parker, *Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Revolutions in Subjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 95 and Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 13–14. It is often said that the pervert disavows the *phallus* itself, that is, he unconsciously rejects the gap introduced into his being by the phenomenon of symbolic identity (see Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies*, 87–88). To take on roles within a symbolic world is to acknowledge a void between what I am immediately (merely a man, for example) and the power and obligations I have been bestowed (as a father, a worker and so on); in such cases, the law is acknowledged and accepted. As someone caught in the grip of perversion, however, there is a part of me which rejects this split entirely given its traumatic nature, thus creating that ambivalence with the law and, subsequently, an obsession with *making present* the law (see Parker, *Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 49), i.e., with greater and greater acts of transgression which invite attention and even prosecution.

[7] Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2008), 389.

theological reflections on how the church can more delightfully mirror the image of Christ as part of her unique praxis in the midst of perverted power plays, and how radical forgiveness constitutes the central component of such a praxis.

The Najib Defense

One doesn't have to look long or far to find numerous examples of fetishistic disavowals characteristic of the pervert's mindset in today's Malaysian socio-political discourse. The on-going trial of former Prime Minister Najib Razak for his involvement in the 1MDB scandal, one of the world's largest, has him declaring ignorance at least forty-six times.[8] When "I don't know" is the primary defense of the chief protagonist of one of the largest financial scandals in history (and who also happens to have been the leader of a nation) one can't help but sense a form of fetishism at work. Najib was the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister for almost a decade up to 2018, is on trial for stealing billions from his own countrymen, and his best defense is disavowal of knowledge ordinary people would expect him to know, knowledge that massive heists were tied to his name when the scandal was an international talking point. It would be less mind-blowing if Hitler had declared at the end of World War II that he had no idea that people were being systematically slaughtered in Nazi concentration camps.

In an interview with Reuters, Najib even made the astounding declaration that given his time in government, he would know what's right and wrong:

> "I'm not party to the yacht, the paintings. . . . I've never seen those paintings whatsoever," said Mr. Najib. "I was not aware of these purchases. This was done without my knowledge. I would never authorise 1MDB funds to be used for any of these items. I've been in government so long, *I know what's right and what's wrong*.[9]

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[8] Randeep Ramesh, "1MDB: The inside Story of the World's Biggest Financial Scandal," *The Guardian*, 2016, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.the guardian.com/world/2016/jul/28/1mdb-inside-story-worlds-financial-scandal-malaysia; and the global bestseller Tom Wright and Bradley Hope, *Billion Dollar Whale: The Man Who Fooled Wall Street, Hollywood, and the World* (New York: Hachette Books, 2018). See also, *Malaysiakini*, "SRC Trial: Najib's 'don't Know' Counter Stands at 46 Times," December 9, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/502999.

[9] "Ex-Malaysian PM Najib Explains Why He Had So Many Luxury Handbags,

The implication, again, is an appeal to his supposedly high moral character in which if a) he knew what's right and wrong, he would therefore b) have not committed wrong, as if people who do evil were all somehow uninformed about the malevolent nature of their acts. Thus, not only is Najib denying any wrong-doing, he is basing his innocence on his presumably stalwart character, i.e., he *cannot* be guilty *because* he's such a good person. On the face of it, it would appear that Malaysia's former PM is desperately clinging to and repeating an alternate reality *as a means* of keeping the trauma of true reality one at arm's length. To repeat, Najib's repeated and obsessive declarations of ignorance function as a fetish without which his inner world may come asunder. Indeed, how many criminals have been on record claiming *both* that his/her knowledge of justice and rightness was impeccable *and* complete ignorance of processes which justify colossal crimes being attributed to them?

Such disavowals aim to block out the truth of Najib's trauma, employing the fetishistic object as a pleasant substitutionary locum of the negativity which must not be affirmed at any cost. Comparing the symptom and the fetish, the former is that which returns after one has repressed a particular traumatic reality, whilst the latter is what helps one embody the lived denial of the same reality.[10] A symptom disturbs the smooth trouble-free reality I manage to project, the fetish is what helps me sustain this same unbearable reality. A symptom reminds the subject of his lack, the fetish convinces him there is no lack.[11]

Yet the more Najib incredulously proclaims his ignorance of matters he clearly should be informed of, *the more he invites the scrutiny of the law*, an element which perfectly fits the picture of clinical perversion in which the subject, as a result of not having fully internalized the law, seeks to bid it draw nearer to him more and more.[12] To reiterate, it is in the nature of the Lacanian pervert to misbehave and transgress in increasing measure as a means of calling to the law which he physically yearns for given his mode of lack.

Lots of Cash, Jewellery," *The New Straits Times*, June 20, 2018, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/najib-explains-why-he-had-so-many-luxury-handbags-lots-of-cash-jewellery, italics added.

[10] Žižek, *On Belief*, 13–14.

[11] Parker, *Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 49.

[12] Parker, *Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 49.

That Najib's blatant lies and performatives are deemed acceptable by the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) and his supporters, such as blogger Raja Petra Kamaruddin, worryingly points to a sizeable portion of the country's population which is structuring its socio-political understanding in a likewise manner.[13] That UMNO, the leading party behind Malaysia's government since the country's independence, was itself sustained by political patronage and money politics lends greater necessity (and severity) to such a disavowal.[14] This would not, in fact, be at all surprising given that the National Alliance was the ruling administration for more than six decades before losing the 14th General Elections to the Alliance of Hope (or Pakatan Harapan).[15] The tense delays, in the aftermath of Pakatan's historic victory, in swearing in Mahathir Mohamad as the seventh Prime Minister of Malaysia, resonate strong with a fetishistic mindset which prevents radical alternatives to the present system.[16] A fetish, in fact, names the manner in which a subject avoids facing the void within himself, a situation which I claim perfectly describes Najib's defense of the charges put against him and of his supporters.

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[13] Raja Petra Kamaruddin, "What's Wrong With Najib's Defence?," December 11, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.malaysia-today.net/2019/12/11/whats-wrong-with-najibs-defence/; I have characterized Raja Petra's form of activism (based on exclusive information only he possesses, and performed from secret locations) as obscene and phallic, especially when compared to the open, public and vulnerable forms of protests by, for example, the Coalition for Clean Elections (or *Bersih*). See Alwyn Lau and Sim Chee Keong, "Just *Jouissance*: Discerning and Undermining a Politics of Inherent Transgression in Malaysian Socio-Political Discourse," *Asian Journal of Political Science* 22, no. 2 (2014): 147–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2013.879068.

[14] William Case, "Testing Malaysia's Pseudo-Democracy," in *The State of Malaysia: Ethnicity, Equity and Reform*, ed. Edmund Gomez (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 34–45; Edmund Terence Gomez and K.S. Jomo, *Malaysia's Political Economy: Politics, Patronage and Profits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 15–74. See also Lau and Sim, "Just *Jouissance*," 150–57 for how UMNO encapsulated superego indulgence in Malaysian politics, that is, that force which secretly violates its own publicly declared rules as a means of sustaining an unjust order.

[15] See especially Edmund Terence Gomez and Mohamad Nawab Mohamad Osman, eds. *Malaysia's 14th General Election and UMNO's Fall: Intra-Elite Feuding in the Pursuit of Power*, Routledge Malaysian Studies Series (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[16] NST Online, "Palace Denies Agong Delaying Tun Mahathir's Appointment as PM," *New Straits Times*, May 10, 2018, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2018/05/368207/palace-denies-agong-delaying-tun-mahathirs-appointment-pm; Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 996.

Switching gears, it may also be pointed that the 1MDB scandal also provides a unique Malaysian twist to politics from a Žižekian perspective. If nothing else, it may demonstrate that political perversion develops an even greater grip when manifested within societies as complex as Malaysia (arguably the most complex society in the world).[17] Given how perversion involves a willful and obsessive transgression of legal norms in order to invite their attention of said norm's guardians, multiethnic societies in which norms constitute a site of contestation will naturally be more vulnerable to the perverse, fetishistic mindset.

To use a (Malaysian) food analogy, putting chili into a simple meal of plain rice with non-spicy vegetables tends to elevate the taste of the chili, given the banality of the other elements of the meal. However, in a plate of rojak or curry laksa, the presence and taste of chili inevitably gets diluted. The lover of piquant food, therefore, will be tempted to increase the dimensionality of fieriness by either throwing in much more chili than normal or by raising the variety of spices thereby contributing to the sheer (if somewhat enjoyable) complication or devastation of anything resembling food norms!

Back to Malaysian politics, I claim that Žižek's complex idea of perversion is rendered even more confounding when exhibited in societies struggling to define a common identity let alone clear norms which all can adhere to. The severity of this problem is demonstrated in the aftermath of the 14th General Elections and the gradual emergence into public consciousness of the presence of a "deep state" in the country.

The Fetishistic Split and Malaysia's Deep State

The fetishistic disavowal resulting from perversion is a critical political factor because of how the fetishistic *split* connotes the struggle for hegemony which constitutes the dimension of *politicization* proper. What is this split and what is the link between fetishism and politicization?

One definition of the "political" involves the attempt by *particular* parties to usurp control of the *universal* space of politics; this implies that universality will always be stained with particularity.[18] In order for a particular group to win the place of

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[17] Barry Wain, *Malaysian Maverick: Mahathir Mohamad in Turbulent Times* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 9.

[18] Ernesto Laclau, "Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics," in *Contingency, Hegemony, University: Contemporary*

universality, this group has to tie its aims to the emancipation of the entire community.[19] To use a common point made by Malaysian politicians, the true leader of the country needs to meet the needs of *all* the primary ethnic groups in the country, not only one or two; a political party must sell itself as being representative of the entire nation (with all the diversity, needs and wants of each and every one of its citizens). However, logically, this is impossible as there will always be a mismatch between what the nation (or the "universal") wants and what the political party (as a "particular") can offer.[20] Because of the impossibility of the full coincidence between particular and universal, this means that politicization necessarily involves a *distorted* representation, what Žižek calls the "split" in the particular. Socio-political fetishes are therefore required to sustain the misalignment between the particular and the universal whilst enabling the former to represent the latter.[21]

This is to say, for a political party to serve as a representative of the nation, it must constantly reject or deny the fact that its representation is at best a slanted and biased one and, at worst, a completely self-serving regime grounded in lies. Hence, the element of disavowal. The fetishistic element, on the other hand, occurs when this same regime consistently employs a symbol or idea (for example, a flag or a Constitution or even the national anthem) to *mask* the very distortion is perpetuates by the very fact of its rule. In an act of socio-political fetishization, ruling regimes need to positivize an impossibility, a fantasy of unity to cover up the inconsistency within society itself.[22]

After the euphoria of GE14, Malaysians were hopeful that the new Pakatan Harapan government would be more inclusive of, and thus beneficial to, all communities in the country. The universality which was hoped for was at best contaminated given, among other problems, the continued marginalization and oppression of the

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Dialogues on the Left, ed. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Zizek (London: Verso, 2000), 50–51.

[19] Laclau, "Identity and Hegemony," 50–51.

[20] This does not even include the various mutually exclusive preferences of the voters. For example, some people may want more public spaces to smoke, others may wish to curb smoking in public and so on. Critically, in the context of politicization and fetishization, if even *the universal itself* is not "whole," how can any of its own particular components *fully* represent it?

[21] Laclau, "Identity and Hegemony," 56–57.

[22] Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2002), 80.

LGBTQ community, the indigenous people; the harboring of fundamentalist hate preachers; promotion of institutional racism (reflected in part in the non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination and in high-profile events dedicated to Malay supremacy); the government's blatant anti-Semitism (from Mahathir's public remarks to the banning of Israeli Paralympic swimmers from entering the country to compete).[23] It is not at all surprising that the ruling alliance has lost a considerable number of bi-elections since it took power.[24]

Most concerning of all is the continued silence and inaction regarding the whereabouts of activists like Pastor Raymond Koh, activist Amri Che Mat and others about which evidence suggests it is the Malaysian police themselves who are behind these enforced disappearances.[25] This in turn points to the existence of a deep state

[23] Sheith Khidhir, "Zakir Naik: Hate Preacher?," *The ASEAN Post*, August 23, 2019, https://theaseanpost.com/article/zakir-naik-hate-preacher; Boo Su-Lyn, "Malaysia Decides Not to Ratify ICERD," *The Malay Mail Online*, November 23, 2018, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2018/11/23/malaysia-decides-not-to-ratify-icerd/1696399; Abdullah Mohsin, "Bersatu and the Malay Dignity Congress," *The Edge Markets*, October 4, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/bersatu-and-malay-dignity-congress; "Malaysia PM Mahathir Defends Remarks Deemed Anti-Semitic, Citing Right to Free Speech," *Channel News Asia*, September 26, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/mahathir-anti-semitic-jews-remarks-defends-right-to-free-speech-11945526; and Michael Bachner, "After Banning Israelis, Malaysia Blocked from Hosting Paralympics Swimming Meet," *The Times of Israel*, January 27, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.timesofisrael.com/after-banning-israelis-malaysia-blocked-from-hosting-paralympics-swimming-meet/.

[24] Tashny Sukamaran, "In Mahathir's New Malaysia, a Perfect Storm for the Pakatan Harapan?," *South China Morning Post*, March 10, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2189289/mahathirs-new-malaysia-perfect-storm-pakatan-harapan; Kim Quek, "Malaysia's Mahathir Abandoned by Ethnic Chinese," *Asia Sentinel*, November 25, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.asiasentinel.com/politics/malaysia-mahathir-abandoned-ethnic-chinese/.

[25] Trinna Leong, "Malaysian Police behind Pastor and Activist Disappearance: Human Rights Commission," *Straits Times*, April 3, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysian-police-behind-pastor-and-activist-disappearance-human-rights-commission; and *Anglican Communion News Service*, "Pastor Raymond Koh Was 'Abducted by State Agents', Malaysian Human Rights Inquiry Finds," April 5, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2019/04/pastor-raymond-koh-was-abducted-by-state-agents-malaysian-human-rights-inquiry-finds.aspx.

in the country, a phenomenon which renders all talk of "New Malaysia" spurious and shambolic as it suggests that at the heart of the state lies a "deeper" and more powerful state, one which really pulls the strings in government and, crucially, one whose existence and agenda does not depend on general elections.[26] Mahathir's remark that he will "investigate claims of a deep state"[27] cannot appear but deeply ironic and thus suggestive of a fetishistic disavowal, given that who else but the Prime Minister would have full control of the Special Branch, a division of the police which activist Kua Kia Soong claimed had an air of non-accountability and could "get away with anything."[28] Whilst Kua was writing in the context of the government's leaders making excuses for their failures by blaming the deep state, he nevertheless demonstrates how if anything like the deep state exists, it cannot be divorced from Mahathir's draconian actions in the past.[29] As such, the Prime Minister's note that he will "look into" claims of a deep state in Malaysia effectively represents a disavowal akin to, "I know the deep state exists and I was, in fact, the one who created it but nonetheless I will act *as if* I don't know, as long as we can maintain the spirit of 'New Malaysia.'" If, in fact, the defining trait of fetishism is disavowal in the face of a truth too painful to acknowledge, then the deep state within New Malaysia is a perfect example of a fetishistic split, i.e., a traumatic failure of representation which is nevertheless covered up by institutional and propaganda-based façades. Furthermore, if the fetishistic split is constituted by the

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[26] Kua Kia Soong, "Who Created the So-Called Deep State?," *Free Malaysia Today*, August 1, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.freemalaysiatoday. com/category/opinion/2019/08/01/who-created-the-so-called-deep-state/; see also the blog post by Citizen Action Group on Enforced Disappearance (CAGED) spokesperson Ramanathan, "What Do I Think about the Abduction of Raymond Koh 1,000 Days Ago?," November 15, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, http://write2rest.blogspot.com/2019/11/what-do-i-think-about-abduction-of. html whose writings earned him visits and other forms of intimidation from the Malaysian police; Nicole Ng, "CAGED's Rama Remains Gutsy despite Police Questioning," *Free Malaysia Today*, November 7, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2019/11/07/cageds-rama -remains-gutsy-despite-police-questioning.

[27] "Dr M to Look into Claims of 'Deep State' in the Civil Service," *News Straits Times*, December 7, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.nst.com.my/ news/nation/2019/12/546003/dr-m-look-claims-deep-state-civil-service.

[28] Kua, "Who Created the So-Called Deep State?"

[29] See again Lau, *Disorderly Conduct*, 789–801 on Mahathir's perversion as reflected in events like Ops Lalang, the judiciary crisis, etc.

impossibility of a universal meeting the needs of its particulars, the problems listed above—especially the enforced disappearance of innocent citizens as possibly dictated by a deep state operating apart from elected government—could not more profoundly characterize such a split.

What follows is the proposal of an alternate mode of discourse and living, a counter-narrative, to the account of the fetish described above. Doctrinally Christian, I claim that a form of being is possible which not only reverses the features of fetishism within political society, but also helps sow the seed for a new and more hopeful future.

Singularities and How the Church "Sticks Out"

In the Christmas song, "Little Drummer Boy," a boy-drummer proclaims how he wants nothing more than to play his drums for the glory of God. It does not matter how "small" his talent is, how much others are doing, what the world thinks or how much it laughs at the boy, all the boy wants to do is serve God by playing his drums. Can we see in the drummer boy an echo of the vocation of the church?

Like the little drummer boy, I see the church as called to *focus* on becoming a unique blessing by giving all she has and doing so against a system which only knows of taking. Such a unique focus or characteristic may also be understood as a *singularity*, which may serve as the basis for the reversal of the fetish mindset. From a psychoanalytical perspective, an individual's singularity is that "thing" about him or her which goes against the grain of the society s/he is a part of, is something one is always tempted to abandon given its offense to others.[30] Likewise, a singularity tends to stick out, interfere with and disturb a subject's pursuit of a stable self-identity.[31] Observe brilliant performers like Robin Williams or Al Pacino or Michael Jackson or even great scientists such as Richard Feynman, and one can't help but notice something uniquely different about them. It's something which is nearly impossible to emulate—*that* is the singularity.

And what would constitute the singularity of the church? Christians are called to be "out of their minds" for the sake of God's

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[30] Paul Eisenstein and Todd McGowan, *Rupture: On the Emergence of the Political* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 173.

[31] Mari Ruti, *Solidarity of Being: Lacan and the Immortal Within* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 4.

love for people (2 Cor 5:13), possessing a mindset which contradicts the world's patterns but which *therefore* is able to discern divine designs (Rom 12:2). If a fetish is about denying a lack, what the church does is precisely to embrace that loss on behalf of others. Out of love, the people of God must "stick out" for everyone else. The church, by its very alignment with the "new creation" of Christ (2 Cor 5:17) rejects the perverse enjoyment of people and institutions caught up in a cycle of tempting the law yet disavowing any guilt when charged which in turn magnifies their crimes *ad hominem*; instead, the church must seek a kind of enjoyment which is irreducible to the symbolic order,[32] that is, an enjoyment which "refuses the validation of the Other,"[33] yet by doing so blesses this same Other via its suffering and forgiveness.

The church, indeed, arguably actualizes herself *only to the extent* that it embodies the suffering and death of Jesus in her daily existence by deeds, words, prayers and symbols which incarnate

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[32] Todd McGowan, *Enjoying What We Don't Have: The Political Project of Psychoanalysis* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 136. To reiterate, the psychoanalytical framework I am adopting here is distinctly Žižekian-Lacanian and is thus premised on Jacques Lacan's Imaginary-Symbolic-Real register of the individual psyche. To briefly explain, the Imaginary domain is generally the realm of narcissistic and infantile projects of the self. This domain is largely a deceptive stage which makes the subject blind to what is missing in our world. The subject must eventually suspend the Imaginary to enter the Symbolic Order which is essentially the everyday world of language, symbols and realia we live in. The Symbolic Order is what structures our everyday world, providing not only the rules and norms a subject lives by but also his identities. Finally, the Real is that destabilizing element inherent in the world which renders everything (not least powerful institutions) awry. In Lacanian thought, all three domains are inter-linked and a subject at times experience all simultaneously. Practically, all introductions to Jacques Lacan include an explanation of this triad; two notable works I have found helpful are Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan*, Routledge Critical Thinkers Series (New York: Routledge, 2005) and Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007). For further thoughts on adapting this framework towards Malaysian socio-political discourse in the process of constructing a political theology predicated on the love of enemies, see Lau, "Intimating the Unconscious," chapters 5 and 6.

[33] Joan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 166. The word "Other" (usually capitalized) in psychoanalytical terminology interchangeably refers both to the subject's parents and the loci of authority within which the subject is granted freedom yet is also constrained. Psychoanalysis in general, and Lacanian theory in particular, views the subject's constituted being as the outcome of unconscious negotiations and deliberations regarding what one's figure of authority desires and demands of him. See Homer, *Jacques Lacan* and Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness*.

other-directed compassion. Within a Lacanian framework, freedom is not limited to the commonsensical notion of being able to do whatever one wants (1 Cor 6:12) but instead is correlated to the degree to which our acts are truly ethical. To merely do whatever pleases us is to remain stuck within the cycle and dictates of an external law and serves "either the necessity of nature or the rule of cultural tradition. The only way to escape this servitude is to interrupt it by *giving a law to oneself*."[34] Such a giving of a law to oneself, and flourishing within a pure ethical act, is precisely what occurs when the church "carries around the death of Jesus" (2 Cor 4:11) and clings to the law of love alone (Gal 5: 14, Eph 5:2, Jas 2:8).

The contrast from the discourse of the fetish could not be greater, not unlike the contrast of an attitude of deep spirituality which trusts in invisible forces for ultimate justice with that of a secular mindset which equates justice with legal intervention. For within the Christian narrative, it is God who is the ultimate judge; and it's his people who are defined by an expectation that he will do so in his time, with or without earthly institutions. Yet, precisely because the church has rejected the approval and accolades of anyone other than Christ himself, she is frequently charged to be a fool (1 Cor 4:10), is considered lowly and, even, *nothing* (1 Cor 1:28). She functions in an entirely different modality from that of the world. A church dedicated to the vision and work of Christ is evidently enjoying herself in a manner dismissive of the endorsement of a tyrannical Other, not least by always "carrying around the death of Jesus and are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4:11). [35] Forgiveness looks weird to the pervert high on his fetishes.

In this context, Mari Ruti offers some critical caveats to the popular Lacanian injunction to "never give up on our desire," or that call to answer one's all-consuming yearning to pursue a desired object at all costs. She rightly chides Žižek's almost unqualified endorsement of the need to remain utterly focused on one's desire and "*jouissance*"[36] even if it results in the disintegration or

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[34] Eisenstein and McGowan, *Rupture*, 161.

[35] Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman*, 166

[36] This refers to how clinical patients derive pleasure from the very symptoms which afflict them, how they keep repeating certain symptoms (themselves denoting anomaly, pain or trauma) primarily *because of* the enjoyment attained by such repetition; see Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 63–68 and McGowan, *Enjoying What*

annihilation of one's world and that of others.[37] Instead, Ruti insists that:

> (A) big part of learning to accurately read the 'truth' of our desire is being able to intervene in this desire *whenever it threatens to wound others*. Furthermore, the reverse of being able to distance ourselves from the desire of the Other is our willingness to claim full responsibility for our own desire. Ethics, on this view, is a matter of owning up to our actions even when they are motivated by unconscious forces that remain partially impenetrable.[38]

Ruti's ethical counsel is extremely pertinent as it juxtaposes a commitment to principled action with a similar commitment to the well-being of other people. When coupled with the call to embrace suffering for the downtrodden, this subtly echoes what the church is called to do. Via vulnerability, self-giving and forgiving love, the church makes present Christ to and in society. Through ritual, service and homily, the church manifests the divine gift of divine self and loss, seeking to incite a continuous shattering of the world's values. Again, compare this to Najib's relentless siphoning away and squandering of the nation's wealth in the interest of his own desires.

Forgiveness as Sinthome and Reversal of Fetishism

By embodying a life of self-sacrifice and forgiveness, the church finds and fulfils her *sinthome*, that most elementary tier of her being within her singularity, that in the church which is "more than" the church herself.[39] The *sinthome* denotes the nexus of *jouissance* which binds the subject together, it points at the heart of who we are after all our symbolic layers and social casings have been stripped away.[40] Likewise, if God is love (1 John 4:8), then it follows that His people, ultimately, must also *be* love. Love is the Christian *sinthome*,

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We Don't Have, 31. In this essay, I'm suggesting that the "symptom" the church must continually enjoy is that of showing forgiveness and love to the world. When applied to politics, the idea of *jouissance* suggests that we will never fully comprehend the behavior and motivations of political groups and individuals until we recognize that there is an unconscious domain of pain-in-pleasure, of a strange form of enjoyment, underlying their disposition as subjects. See Lau and Sim, "Just *Jouissance*."

37 Ruti, *Solidarity of Being*, 107–10.
38 Ruti, *Solidarity of Being,* 167, emphasis added.
39 Ruti, *Solidarity of Being*, 62.
40 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 176–77.

the Church's "enjoyment," and love is that which "fixates/registers the 'too muchness of life.'"[41] Simply put, the church must grow to revel in the pleasure, in the *jouissance*, of showing mercy, in spite yet paradoxically because of the pain and trials which arise both before and as a result of choosing forgiveness and peace as a way of life (2 Corinthians 12:10; Romans 5:3; James 1:2–4). What kind of people does this? Only one liberated from anarchic perversion of the fetishistic narrative.

We could even suggest that such radical love represents an *inversed positive form* of the fetishistic disavowal. Recall that such disavowals involved the basic linguistic formula, "I know full well (regarding a certain embarrassing or disturbing truth, for example, that my boss is corrupt, that my friends do not really like me, etc.) but nonetheless I will behave *as if* it's not true." Authentic Christian forgiveness and mercy could represent a creative reversal of this situation. The Christian acts under the knowledge that his kindness will not be reciprocated by his enemies (and may, in fact, lead to further oppression, persecution, etc.) but nevertheless he persists in behaving *as if* the enemy is a friend. For example, "I know fully well that my enemy will or may take advantage of my kindness but nonetheless I will behave *as if* he is my dearest friend."

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to provide a reading of problems within Malaysia's socio-political arena via a Žižekian psychoanalytical framework (whilst suggesting ways in which the 1MDB scandal added a uniquely Malaysian provocation to such a framework). In the same vein, it has also reminded the Church that the primary way of defeating political injustice in the country is to behave in the exact opposite manner in which political foes usually defeat each other, i.e., the Church must take up the cross of Jesus and learn to love her enemies in creative yet society-transforming ways. Refusal to meet enmity with enmity is—unlike its fetishistic counterpart—based not on wishful thinking nor false hope, but is grounded in the mercy and character of God.

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a society to produce a major financial scandal and even a deep state; it will, therefore,

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[41] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 698. See also Alwyn Lau, "Forgiveness as Singularity: The 'Allah' Controversy in Malaysia and the Church's Public Discourse of Cheek-Turning," *Dialog* 57, no. 1 (2018): 40–46, https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12376 for an application of this principle towards the 'Allah' controversy.

require a redeemed people behaving like their Redeemer, to make things right again. If the world is increasingly fetishistic, all the more the Church of Christ should "lead the way" by growing, even more abundantly, in the kind of forgiveness demonstrated by her Lord on Cavalry. Where sin (and perversion) increased, grace (and love for the enemy) must increase all the more (Rom 5:20).

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Christian-Muslim Relations in New Malaysia
Overcoming Barriers, Building Bridges

Albert Sundararaj Walters

For centuries, relations between Christians and Muslims have been one marked not only by periods of confrontation and conflict but also peaceful co-existence. This essay examines Christian-Muslim relations in Malaysia with a view of establishing whether political manipulations of religion in recent decades has engendered a real threat to harmonious interfaith relations in the country. Understanding the history of the development of Christian-Muslim relations since gaining independence in 1957, as well as current political realities, will help give context to the current situation. Special emphasis on post-1970 changes due to the impact of Islamization and affirmative action programs and how interactions between Christians and Muslims have taken many different forms will be examined. Some of the barriers that are still plaguing an amicable relationship between Christians and Muslims will be studied. This essay seeks to demonstrate that there have also been many attempts at building bridges in interfaith encounters. Both aspects of this relation will be presented, discussed and assessed and their relevance for the contemporary situation analyzed. In "New Malaysia," Muslims and Christians are redefining their positions and adapting them in different ways to local circumstances, thereby developing some creative responses to the tensions of religious co-existence.

Introduction

"Malaysia Truly Asia" is the slogan that is publicized all over the world to show how diverse Malaysian society is and how proud the people are in maintaining peaceful co-existence. In fact, since its inception, Malaya and later Malaysia has acquired the distinction of being one of the most strongly plural societies among Asian and Muslim-majority nation states of the world. Furthermore, Southeast Asia has been called "the cross-roads of religions" because of the great diversity of cultural and religious influences that have been sweeping across the region for more than two thousand years.

Religions came in waves to Malaysia. Islam was brought by merchants between the 10th and 12th centuries; Buddhism and Taoism came over with Chinese immigrants; Hinduism and Sikhism arrived with Indian immigrants; and Christianity first appeared with Arab Christian traders, then it flourished with conquests by the Portuguese, Dutch, and British. According to the 2010 census, Islam was the most widely professed religion with the proportion of 61.3 per cent. Other religions embraced were Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%), Hinduism (6.3%) and Confucianism, Taoism, or other traditional Chinese philosophies and religions (1.3%).[1]

Under British rule, Islam and indigenous Malay rulers or sultans were granted official position, prestige and privileges. At the time of independence in 1957, the Malay leaders established Islam as the official religion of the Federation of Malaya (Malaysia after 1963),[2] while assuring non-Muslim communities the constitutional freedom to practice their faith. The British not only oversaw the crafting of the constitution, but also facilitated the formation of ethnic-based parties representing the respective communities: United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). These political parties together formed the ruling coalition, Alliance, and government. Alliance, dominated by UMNO expanded over the following years to form *Barisan Nasional* (National Front) which remained in power till May 2018. These political developments over six decades have had far-reaching consequences on interreligious and interethnic relations in Malaysia.[3]

In May 2018, Malaysia underwent the first regime change in its political history. Malaysians voted for change and placed their faith in the *Pakatan Harapan* (Alliance of Hope) party to form the new federal government. Since that historic day, one of the popular

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[1] "Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010," Department of Statistics Malaysia, July 29, 2011, accessed December 10, 2019, https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemeByCat&cat=117&bul_id=MDMxdHZjWTk1SjFzTzNkRXYzcVZjdz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09.

[2] Malaysia was formed when four British colonies—Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore—came together to form a federation on September 16, 1963. In 1965, however, Singapore seceded from the federation.

[3] Kikue Hamayotsu, "Democracy and Religious Pluralism in Southeast Asia: Indonesia and Malaysia Compared," September, 2015, accessed December 6, 2019, https://www.bu.edu/cura/files/2015/10/Religious-Pluralism-and-Democracy-in-Southeast-Asia-Hamayotsu-093015.pdf.

slogans that has emerged is "New Malaysia" or in Malay, "Malaysia Baru." And this "New Malaysia" aspires to be a peace-loving, harmonious multiracial and multireligious nation that upholds democracy, freedom, human rights and the rule of law.[4] On the first anniversary of the *Pakatan Harapan* (PH) government, the Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, launched a new vision called "Shared Prosperity 2030." The idea is to make Malaysia economically, a fully developed industrialized society and, politically, a united Malaysian nation.

Peaceful co-existence enjoyed in pluralistic Malaysia is founded on the principle of tolerance and the various communities have generally lived together in relative harmony. However, this tranquil living was severely disrupted with the unprecedented racial riots of May 13, 1969 and the rise of Malay nationalism.[5] The riots had acutely affected the government's efforts in managing race relations and nation-building. And so on August 31, 1970, the government announced the Rukun Negara or the National Ideology to restore Malaysia's fragile democracy, national unity and political stability. Of particular importance is the fourth principle of the Rukun Negara: ensuring a liberal approach towards the rich and varied cultural traditions. However, over the last few decades encounters between the various faiths and ethnic groups have been taking place in the midst of rapid socio-economic, cultural, religious and political changes. Furthermore, in Malaysia religion is highly correlated with ethnicity and, increasingly ethno-sectarian and divisive politics have built barriers between communities. Public opinion surveys[6] also identify religion as a major barrier to national

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[4] "Foreign Policy Framework of the New Malaysia: Change in Continuity," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, 2019, accessed November 30, 2019, https://www.kln.gov.my/foreign-policy-framework/files/assets/common/downloads/Foreign%20Policy%20Framework.pdf. See also Al-Azharri Siddiq Kamunri, "What does new Malaysia mean?," *New Straits Times*, January 25, 2019, accessed December 2, 2019, https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/letters/2019/01/454503/what-does-new-malaysia-mean.

[5] After the May 13 racial riots, Malay nationalistic ideal evolved with the assertion of Malay hegemony. The Malay population was dissatisfied just protecting the three pillars of Malayness—language, religion and royalty. And so the NEP—a set of preferential policies favoring the Malays—was introduced. Furthermore, in the wake of May 13, Mahathir's *The Malay Dilemma* essentially set out the vision for Malaysia's economic route arguing for the "constructive protection" of the Malays from the "predatory Chinese."

[6] Lee Hwok Aun, "Fault Lines—and Common Ground—in Malaysia's Ethnic Relations and Policies," *Institute of Southeast Asian Studies* 63 (August 2017), accessed

integration, and this is an area where change of attitude and perception and an increase of knowledge, are especially important.[7]

The new PH government is facing a multitude of problems, some self-inflicted while others were inherited from the previous government. One of the biggest problems facing the country is the deep-seated issue of race and religion that is being exploited by unscrupulous politicians in their bid to gain political mileage.[8] There seems to be a persisting glass ceiling formed by mindsets that promote inherent societal divisions based on communalism and ingrained in many through continued exposure to identity politics.[9]

Muslims and Christians have been involved in exchanges over matters of faith and morality since the historical rise of Islam. From the beginning, there have been two dimensions to such encounters. The first is related to the practical living together of individuals and communities of the two faiths, and the second to theological challenges. In the present scenario, what kind of relations do Muslims and Christians want in "new" Malaysia? What are some of the everyday issues, obstacles and challenges Christians and Muslims face in pluralistic Malaysia? How have the post-1970 developments due to the effects of the NEP and Islamization policy impacted interfaith interactions? How do political manipulations of religion threaten harmonious interfaith relations in the country? And what steps can be taken to overcome these barriers and to build better bridges? How can people in both faith communities learn more about and from each other and move forward towards nation-building and a common destiny? This article intends to identify and discuss some of the major practical issues affecting Christian–Muslim relations in Malaysia in the recent past, and not the theological aspect.

December 10, 2019, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2017_63.pdf.

[7] Tashny Sukumaran, "Religion, race, politics: what's causing Malaysia's great divide," *This Week in Asia*, August 27, 2017, accessed December 2019, https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/society/article/2108367/religion-race-politics-whats-causing-malaysias-great-divide.

[8] Gan Chee Kuan, "Revisiting Vision 2020," *The Star Online*, January 22, 2019, accessed December 16, 2019, https://www.thestar.com.my/opinion/letters/2019/01/22/remember-vision-2020-whatever-happened-to-it.

[9] Joshua Gan, "The fading vision of 'Malaysia Baru,'" *Free Malaysia Today*, August 18, 2019, accessed December 1, 2019, https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/opinion/2019/08/18/the-fading-vision-of-malaysia-baru/.

Issues and Challenges in Christian-Muslim Relations

Attitudes between Muslims and Christians today are deeply colored by the legacy of past encounters and often preserve centuries-old negative views. The interest of the two communities in understanding each other is also phenomenal in history. Christians and Muslims have been living in Malaysia for centuries and yet harmonious co-existence has had a rocky history and is constantly being tested by a number of interreligious and interethnic encounters and misperceptions. Much of the Christian community's concerns have to do with practical issues due mainly to uncontrolled and unaddressed prejudicial attitudes ingrained in Malaysian society.[10] The following are some of the observations regarding discrimination and marginalization in Malaysian society.

Islamization in Pluralistic Malaysia

Article 3(1) of the Constitution declares that Islam is the religion of the Federation but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony. However, this original established understanding of this proviso has since shifted sharply. Over the past few decades, this legislation has been seized on by political and legal actors as a platform for expanding the place of religion in the public order.[11] The position of Islam is also strengthened and institutionalized in the constitution through the definition of Malay. "Malay" means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom.[12] As such the status of Malay is synonymous to Islam. In Malaysia, religion is so intricately intertwined with race, politics and economics that it is impossible to speak of one without touching upon the other. And so religious discrimination has a knock-on

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[10] Arfah Ab. Majid, "Inter-religious Dialogue in Malaysia and Prejudice Reduction: A Preliminary Survey," *Proceeding of the International Conference on Social Science Research*, 4–5 June, 2013, Penang, Malaysia, 707, accessed December 16, 2019, https://vdocuments.net/reader/full/inter-religious-dialogue-in-malaysia-and-prejudice-reduction.

[11] Yvonne Tew, "Constitutionalizing and Politicizing Religion in Contemporary Malaysia," *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 23 (March 2018), accessed November 21, 2019, https://kyotoreview.org/issue-23/constitutionalizing-and-politicizing-religion-in-contemporary-malaysia/.

[12] Rosli Dahlan and Mohammad Afif Daud, "Who is the Malay?," *The Star Online*, December 14, 2015, accessed November 21, 2019, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2015/12/14/who-is-the-malay-the-confusion-between-the-constitutional-definition-and-the-understanding-of-the-wo.

effect on racial tensions, thus, giving rise to racial and religious polarization in Malaysian society.

Additionally, the resurgence in Islamic consciousness that has swept the world since the 1970s has had a profound impact on Muslims in Malaysia. Over the past few decades, the government's efforts at implementing the Islamization policy have intensified and have deepened and permeated into the public sphere. The influence of Islamic administration, Islamic education, Islamic banking and Islamic law has expanded and extended significantly into every layer of society, especially under the former premiership of Mahathir Mohamad (1981–2003).

Although peoples of various faiths and cultures have lived side-by-side for centuries, implementation of the Islamization policy has gradually built barriers between communities over the past few decades. With the state moving into the realm of societal values and "Islamizing" institutions, a number of pertinent questions disturb the minds of religious minorities. Since the government's introduction of the Islamization project, Malaysian Christians have continually expressed fears of the encroachment into their rights and freedom to practice their religion.

Is Malaysia an Islamic State?

Malaysia's establishment as a secular state is the essence of a social contract which was crystallized in the Federal Constitution with "Islam as the religion of the federation." For decades, the secular federal judiciary understood the clause to carry ceremonial and symbolic meaning only. However, in recent years with the intensification of Islamization, the meaning and intent of the clause has gained a far more robust meaning and has practically elevated Islamic law to be the new underlying basis in the Malaysian legal system.[13] As such, some political leaders interpret this to mean that Malaysia is an Islamic state.[14] And so the announcement in September 2001, soon after the 9/11 attacks, by the then Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, that Malaysia was already an Islamic state created a wave of concern to both Muslims and non-Muslims

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[13] Tamir Moustafa, *Constituting Religion: Islam, Liberal Rights, and the Malaysian State* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 138–54.

[14] The concept of Islamic state lies at the heart of Islamic political philosophy. And central to the concept of an Islamic state is the strict implementation of the syariah law. Under the syariah, both Muslims and non-Muslims would have to observe and conform to its legal injunctions, with no room for a secular legal system.

alike.[15]

In a further development, Dr. Mahathir announced in June 2002 that Malaysia was "an Islamic fundamentalist state" because the government adhered to the fundamental teachings of Islam.[16] Although some Malaysians downplayed these statements as plain rhetoric made for political expediency, it has had a ripple effect on the society. Following the unilateral and unconstitutional declaration by Dr. Mahathir, the country has been falsely viewed in the eyes of some as being associated with Islamic militant elements.

The Rise of Political Islam

Related to the Islamic state issue is the problem of the dangerous rise of political Islam that has come about primarily through three factors. The first is derived from the fierce political competition between the UMNO and the Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia [PAS]) for the Malay vote. The second factor was UMNO's bureaucratization of Islam. Third, after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Malaysia, like the rest of the Islamic world, underwent a revival of Islam. Its aim was to counter Iran and promote ultraconservative Islam—Wahhabism and/or Salafism.[17]

At present, Malaysia's much-cherished multiculturalism and pluralism is gradually becoming inevitable victims of the country's

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[15] Following the declaration, a booklet *Malaysia adalah Sebuah Negara Islam* (Malaysia is an Islamic State/Nation) was published by the Ministry of Information explaining why Malaysia is already an Islamic nation.

[16] "Mahathir: Malaysia is 'fundamentalist state,'" CNN.com, June 18, 2002, accessed November 12, 2019, https://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/06/18/malaysia.mahathir/.

[17] James Chin, "'New' Malaysia: Four key challenges in the near term," *Lowy Institute*, March 14, 2019, accessed November 12, 2019, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/new-malaysia-four-key-challenges-near-term. The terms Salafism and Wahhabism are often used interchangeably. Salafism (Arabic: *Salafiyyah*) advocates a literal, and to some degree binary, interpretation of Islamic teachings as enjoined by Prophet Muhammad and subsequently practiced by the early pious predecessors known as the salaf al-salih. Wahhabism (Arabic: *Wahhabiyyah*) is based on the teachings of Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahhab. In matters of jurisprudence, Salafis and Wahabbis subscribe to the Hanbali *mazhab* (school of thought) and law. Ideologically, Salafism is wider than Wahhabism. Wahhabism is one of Salafism's many orientations. As such Salafism and Wahhabism are not two sides of the same coin. See Mohamed Bin Ali and Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah Bin Sudiman, "Salafis and Wahhabis: Two Sides of the Same Coin?," *S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies*, October 11, 2016, accessed April 9, 2020, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/co16254-salafis-and-wahhabis-two-sides-of-the-same-coin/#.XpAC8cgzbIV.

transformation from a rainbow nation to a Wahhabi-Salafi-driven polity. As such, in the emerging Islamist body politic, the voices of non-Muslims and unorthodox Muslims are being systematically marginalized.[18] The unintended consequence has been the emergence of a generation of intolerant Muslims who reject non-Muslims. Many Malay Muslims think Malaysia should be an Islamic state in which non-Muslims would be second class citizens with limited political rights.

The rigid positions gradually adopted by Islamic stakeholders have arguably worsened both interreligious and intra-Muslim relations and progressive Muslim voices are increasingly finding themselves marginalized in the state-controlled political environment.[19] To counter such moves, the government should respond by creating a ministry to engage with religions other than Islam. PH should re-establish its credibility as a reform movement and lay the foundation for a long-term shift away from racial and religious politics. Politicization of religion needs to be arrested without further delay.

NEP and Bumiputra Policy

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was announced in 1970 as part of a package of measures introduced after the devastating ethnic riots between Malay and Chinese communities in May 1969. The NEP was an ambitious affirmative action program intended to reduce poverty in the predominantly Malay rural sectors while developing Malay urban business and middle classes. Under this scheme, preferences, privileges, and benefits in the forms of scholarship, university admission, loans, contracts, public offices and positions, welfare, housing, and various other allowances were almost unconditionally given to Malay.[20]

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[18] Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "Shifting Trends of Islamism and Islamist Practices in Malaysia, 1957–2017," in *Divides and Dissent: Malaysian Politics 60 Years after Merdeka*, ed. Khoo Boo Teik, *Southeast Asian Studies* 7, no. 3 (December 2018): 363–90.

[19] James Chin, "Mahathir and the rise of political Islam," *Nikkei Asian Review*, April 19, 2019, accessed November 12, 2019, https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/Mahathir-and-the-rise-of-political-Islam.

[20] Kikue Hamayotsu, "Democracy and Religious Pluralism in Southeast Asia: Indonesia and Malaysia Compared," Institute on Culture, Religion & World Affairs, September 2015, accessed December 6, 2019, https://www.bu.edu/cura/files/2015/10/Religious-Pluralism-and-Democracy-in-Southeast-Asia-Hamayotsu-093015.pdf.

With increased emphasis on Malay ethnicity, the NEP has continued to promote the privileged position of the bumiputra (Malay, literally 'son of the soil') and Malay-Muslim community. Consequently, racial, ethnic and religious minorities face disadvantages in many areas of life.[21] The NEP certainly did not help foster pluralistic attitudes and mutual respect between various communities. Quite to the contrary, it damaged the otherwise traditionally vibrant cultural interactions and communications among communities against the backdrop of growing conservative Islamism.[22] To restore inter-communal relations, this system should be replaced by one where government assistance is based on need, rather than ethnicity. What is needed is a policy to demonstrate that affirmative action in Malaysia is about social justice, not racial dominance.

Dual Justice System

The Malaysian government regulates Islam more than almost any other country in the world. One such control is the dual court structure created following Malaysia's independence. The civil and Syariah courts were established in an effort to ensure that there would be a federal secular legal system in the form of the civil courts, as well as a religious forum for Muslims under which to dispense Islamic personal and family law.[23] However, the boundaries between the parallel court systems have been blurred with the institutionalization of Islamic law in its contemporary form. In practice this bifurcated legal system has engendered three different types of challenges: burying the dead, freedom of religion, and child custody and conversion.[24]

Under the Federal Constitution, Malays are required to be Muslims and the Islamic law does not allow one to leave the religion.

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[21] The Equal Rights Trust, "Washing the Tigers: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Malaysia," *ERT Country Report Series* 2, November 2012, accessed November 12, 2019, https://www.equalrightstrust.org/ertdocumentbank/ Malaysia%20CR%201.pdf.

[22] Hamayotsu, "Democracy and Religious Pluralism in Southeast Asia."

[23] Yvonne Tew, "The Malaysian Legal System: A Tale of Two Courts," *Georgetown Law Faculty Publications and Other Works. 1922* (2011), accessed December 10, 2019, https://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/facpub/1922/.

[24] Tamir Moustafa, "The Judicialization of Religion," in his *Constituting Religion: Islam, Liberal Rights, and the Malaysian State*, Cambridge Studies in Law and Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 63–90, accessed December 11, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108539296.005.

According to the law, a non-Malay/non-Muslim who wishes to marry a Malay/Muslim must convert to Islam. The implications of conversion in Malaysia extend beyond a mere personal choice.[25] Due to the dual justice system, conversion cases in general have raised particular complexities in navigating jurisdictional issues. The more difficult disputes involve the conversion and custody of minors by one parent who has converted to Islam.

Apostasy cases, in particular, lie at the very heart of the jurisdictional complexities arising from the relationship between the civil and religious courts. One such example is the case of the Christian convert, Lina Joy. In May 2007, she lost a six-year battle to have the word "Islam" removed from her identity card. Despite several appeals in the civil courts, the Federal Court ultimately refused to recognize Lina Joy's conversion from Islam to Christianity. The Chief Justice in delivering judgment in the case said, "The issue of apostasy is related to Islamic law, so it's under the sharia court. The civil court cannot intervene."[26]

For more than 50 years, the Malaysian legal system has had to deal and grapple with the ongoing and seemingly endless conflict of judicial authority between the civil and syariah courts. Therefore, for the sake of finality, consistency and predictability, courts in Malaysia should be streamlined into one system and vested with jurisdiction over all members of society.[27] As "new" Malaysia moves forward in the twenty-first century, the evolution of the legal landscape will hopefully be guided by an approach that is true to the spirit of the Constitution and the safeguarding of the fundamental liberties enshrined therein.

The Allah Controversy

Malaysian Christians have been using the word *Allah* in their Malay language Bibles, publications, sermons, prayers, and hymns

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[25] Ooi Kok Hin and Appolonia Tesera, "Leap of Faith: Interracial Relationships in Contemporary Malaysia," *New Neratif*, September 13, 2019, accessed January 24, 2020, https://newnaratif.com/journalism/leap-of-faith-interracial-relationships-in-contemporary-malaysia/share/xuna/16db7db24367bf438df20ad57112c8e0/.

[26] Jalil Hamid and Syed Azman, "Malaysia's Lina Joy loses Islam conversion case," *Reuters*, May 3, 2007, accessed December 10, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-religion-ruling/malaysias-lina-joy-loses-islam-conversion-case-idUSSP20856820070530.

[27] Ilham Ramli, "Vital to streamline judicial system," *New Straits Times*, July 8, 2017, accessed September 7, 2019, https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2017/07/255458/vital-streamline-judicial-system.

without much fanfare or complications for more than a century. However, in 1981, a federal level statute was introduced banning the possession and circulation of the Indonesian-language Bible, *Alkitab*, because it was deemed to be prejudicial to national interests and the security of the country. The restriction on the use of the *Alkitab* was accompanied by other legal restrictions such as the banning in 1991 of the use in any non-Islamic literature of four terms regarded as Islamic: *Allah*, *Kaabah*, *Baitullah* and *Solat*.[28] According to a series of government orders and rulings by the Islamic councils, the word *Allah* is reserved for Muslims only.

Interestingly, in December 2009, a court ruling allowed the Malaysian Catholic Weekly, *The Herald*, to use the word *Allah*. Lawyers for the Malaysian government, however, had argued the case for continuing its ban on the basis that Christian use of *Allah* would cause confusion among Muslims and pose a threat to the sanctity and supremacy of Islam. They argued that *Allah* is monotheistic, whereas the Christian God is trinitarian.[29] Several fundamentalist Muslim NGOs backed by UMNO hardliners immediately protested the court ruling. Consequently, several churches were vandalized and burnt.[30]

Although many ordinary Muslims dissociated themselves from both the attacks on churches and the ban on the non-Muslim use of *Allah*, this represents a crisis point in Christian-Muslim relations in Malaysia. The attacks on Christian people and property are partly the fruit of a policy of increasing delineation (some even call it apartheid) between Muslims and non-Muslims.[31]

One crucial aspect that the *Allah* judgment did not directly consider is the implication on what it means for Malay to be the national language. In East Malaysia, for instance, where there are many cultural and linguistic groups, the use of Bahasa Malaysia in churches has been a crucial unifying platform. And so if Malay is the

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[28] Albert S. Walters, *We Believe in One God? Reflections on the Trinity in the Malaysian Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), 77.

[29] Peter Riddell, "Churches at risk in 'Allah' debate," *Church Times*, January 13, 2010, accessed December 6, 2019, https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2010/15-january/comment/churches-at-risk-in-allah-debate.

[30] Greg Lopez, "The Allah dilemma in Malaysia," January 15, 2010, accessed December 12, 2019, https://www.newmandala.org/the-allah-dilemma-in-malaysia/; "Malaysian churches fire-bombed as 'Allah' row escalates," *BBC News*, January 8, 2010, accessed December 13, 2019, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8447450.stm.

[31] Riddell, "Churches at risk in 'Allah' debate."

lingua franca, it defies logic that the government can reserve the use of certain Malay words to only one ethno-religious group. Why would only some Malaysians be able to use the word *Allah* to denote their god, and not other Malaysians and their god? It is not only discriminatory; it goes against the very idea of a national language.[32]

Bibles Seized

After the government first outlawed the use of *Alkitab* in 1981, in January 2014, the offices of the Bible Society in Malaysia were raided and authorities seized 320 copies of the Bahasa Malaysia Bible and ten copies of the *Bup Kudus*, the lban Bible.[33] In a related issue that caused much distress and anxiety to the Christian community, 30,000 copies of the Bible were confiscated at the Kuching Port in January 2011, while a previous shipment of 5,000 Bibles were impounded in Port Klang in March 2009. The impoundment of the Bibles was because of the pending court appeal by *The Herald*, over the use of the word *Allah* in its publication.[34]

To address this matter, a 10-point solution was announced by the Federal Government in April 2011. This 10-point solution was established as a fair and amicable way to manage the polarity of views between the various religious groups, in particular Christians and Muslims, taking into account the laws of the country. The then prime minister, Najib Razak, reiterated the government's commitment to work with the Christian community and all the different religious groups in order to address interreligious issues and work towards the fulfilment of all religious aspirations in accordance with the Constitution.[35]

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[32] Jaclyn L. Neo, "What's in a name? Malaysia's 'Allah' controversy and the judicial intertwining of Islam with ethnic identity," *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 12, no. 3 (July 2014): 751–68, https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/mou050.

[33] Staff Reporter, "Bibles seized in raid," *Church Times*, January 10, 2014, accessed November 15, 2019, https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2014/10-january/news/world/bibles-seized-in-raid.

[34] P Aruna and Lee Yen Mun, "Govt lifts Bible impound," *The Star Online*, March 16, 2011, accessed November 15, 2019, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2011/03/16/govt-lifts-bible-impound.

[35] Aliran Admin, "Bahasa Malaysia Bibles: The Cabinet's 10-point solution," *Aliran*, January 25, 2014, accessed November 10, 2019, https://aliran.com/web-specials/bahasa-malaysia-bibles-10-point-solution/; Idris Jala, "The 'Allah'/Bible issue, 10-point solution is key to managing the polarity," *The Star Online*, February 24, 2014, accessed November 10, 2019, https://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2014/02/24/my-take-on-the-allah-issue-10point-solution-is-key-

Education System Islamized

There was a time when religion did not play any role in the Malaysian education system. Public schools were completely secular. However, in the 1980s Islam began creeping into the formal school system.[36] Since then education has become a hot button issue creating deep divisions among Malaysians. In November 2019, for instance, the education ministry was reported to have allowed an NGO to carry out Islamic religious propagation activities in schools and institutions of higher learning. The ministry, however, clarified later that the preaching activities (*aktiviti dakwah*) in schools is not an act of Islamization.[37] In another development, the Association of Churches in Sarawak expressed its displeasure with the statement made by the former Minister of Education urging Islamic teachers in Sabah and Sarawak to make these two states their "Medan Dakwah" (The Propagation/Preaching Field) of Islam.[38] In recent decades, Christians in East Malaysia (where two-thirds of the country's Christian population live) have become vulnerable targets of Islamic evangelization.[39]

In a further development, over the years parents have lost confidence in national schools for a variety of reasons. Some have opted to send their children to vernacular, religious and private international schools. The segregated education system has contributed to distrust and allowed intentional cultural isolation to be deeply rooted in the psyche of the people, not as a collective whole but distrust based on ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic identity among each other.[40] Consequently, the lack of interaction

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to-managing-the-polarity.

[36] Bakri Musa, "Islamization of Education," August 8, 2011, accessed November 10, 2019, https://blog.limkitsiang.com/2011/08/08/islamization-of-education/.

[37] "Yadim programme in schools not an act of Islamisation, says Education Ministry," *The Star Online*, December 24, 2019, accessed December 26, 2019, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2019/12/24/yadim-programme-in-schools-not-an-act-of-islamisation-says-education-ministry.

[38] Sarawak Evangelical Christian Association, "Response to Maszlee's 'medan dakwah'—Sarawak Evangelical Christian Association," *Malay Mail*, December 26, 2018, accessed November 5, 2019, https://www.malaymail.com/news/what-you-think/2018/12/26/response-to-maszlees-statement-an-infringement-of-malaysia-sarawak-evangeli/1706271.

[39] "How Malaysian Islamization has its roots in European colonialism," *World Watch* Monitor, n.d., accessed November 12, 2019, https://www.worldwatch monitor.org/how-malaysian-islamization-has-its-roots-in-european-colonialism/.

[40] "A more integrated education system needed," *The Sun Daily*, June 10, 2018,

and racial integration has contributed to polarization not just in schools, universities and civil service but also in the larger society.

The deterioration in the education system not only affects the future of the children but also the nation. As such, Malaysia's school curriculum needs a thorough overhauling. National unity and development through the education system are enshrined in the National Philosophy of Education.[41] It stresses the holistic development of the individual based on the tenets of the Rukun Negara.[42] This set of principles should serve as a guide to national unity and peaceful, harmonious living in Malaysia.

Divisive Actions and Remarks

The past two decades has seen Malaysia's slow and steady shift toward an increasingly conservative Islam. One divisive action that caught the attention of the Sultan of Johor was the "Muslims only laundry." Taking an unusual and significant step, the country's constitutional monarchs expressed their concern in a public statement regarding controversies over race and religion that threaten Malaysia's multicultural harmony.[43] Incidences such as the Muslim-only launderette service show how Islam has permeated every mundane activity in the country.

In 2016, a related issue regarding halal and non-halal trolley dominated heated discussions on social media. The government proposed to set guidelines on the segregation of trolleys for halal and non-halal items in supermarkets under the business licensing requirements in the future.[44] The general public and the international community reacted with much perplexity and scorn

accessed December 16, 2019, https://www.thesundaily.my/archive/more-intergrated-education-system-needed-XUARCH553611.

[41] Ministry of Education, "National Education Philosophy," accessed November 5, 2019, https://www.moe.gove.my/en/dasarmenu/falsafah-pendidikan-kebang saan.

[42] The five principles are: belief in God; loyalty to king and country; upholding the Constitution; rule of law; good behavior and morality.

[43] Sulaiman Daud, "Worried about religious divide, Malaysia's monarchs make rare collective call for greater tolerance and respect," *Mothership*, October 11, 2017, accessed December 3, 2019, https://mothership.sg/2017/10/worried-about-religious-divide-malaysias-monarchs-make-rare-collective-call-for-greater-tolerance-and-respect/.

[44] Bernama, "Ministry mulls guidelines to segregate halal, non-halal trolleys in supermarkets," *Malay Mail*, January 19, 2016, accessed November 12, 2019, https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2016/01/19/ministry-mulls-guidelines-to-segregate-halal-non-halal-trolleys-in-supermar/1043957.

for focusing time and resources on such a trivial issue.

Another glaring example of disrespect is when Muslims spread fabrications among their community about the dangers of offering good wishes to their Christian friends during Christmas. A 2005 *fatwa*[45] issued by JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development) assures Muslims that it is not wrong for them to utter festive greetings to non-Muslims. Despite that, lingering doubts often lead Muslims to question those who wish their Christian friends "Merry Christmas" because some say it could affect their faith. Furthermore, religious tensions again reared its ugly head when a group of Malay Muslims demanded for a cross erected on the façade of a shophouse in Selangor state to be brought down fearing it could make Muslims renounce Islam. All these might be isolated incidences with nothing in common but they eventually stack up into a huge wall of intolerance that creates even more distrust and suspicion.[46]

The Christian community in Malaysia is, therefore, no stranger to misconceptions, prejudices, discriminations, violence and hatred. As such, over the last four decades, Christians have responded to the above practical issues and challenges by mapping out strategies in order to feel secure in working together on matters of common interest. The Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM),[47] for instance, acts on behalf of the Christian community in relations with the government and other religious communities. The CFM is also a member of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST). This Council, founded in 1983, serves as a forum for resolving sensitive issues regarding religion and related matters for the five non-Islamic religions. If twenty-first century Christians and Muslims in Malaysia are to live peacefully and harmoniously, they need to understand the issues and challenges that exist and find ways to build bridges between the two religious communities.

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[45] Fatwa is an authoritative legal opinion given by a mufti (legal scholar) in response to a question posed by an individual or a court of law.

[46] Malaysian Digest, "Why do Malaysians still struggle with the concept of mutual respect for each other's religion?," *Herald Malaysia Online*, February 19, 2016, accessed November 12, 2019, http://www.heraldmalaysia.com/news/why-do-malaysians-still-struggle-with-the-concept-of-mutual-respect-for-each-others-religion/27856/5.

[47] The CFM is an ecumenical umbrella body that comprises the Council of Churches of Malaysia, National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) and the Roman Catholic Church.

Christian-Muslim Relations: Overcoming Barriers, Building Bridges

A survey conducted in 2011 revealed that healthy interreligious and interethnic relations have declined.[48] There seems to be a lack of collective desire or imagination to build a "Malaysian" national identity based on mutual respect among various religious and ethnic communities. Furthermore, interreligious discourse that allegedly has had a long history in Malaysia seems to have had no significant impact on improving interreligious and interethnic relations.[49] Yet despite such findings and various obstacles, there have been numerous attempts at overcoming barriers and building bridges of understanding. Malaysians of different faiths have been reaching out with true interfaith initiatives and activities with the intention of promoting better harmonious living.

Open House Tradition

The distinctive "open house" tradition speaks volumes about Malaysian hospitality. It is of paramount importance because it fosters close relationship among neighbors and promotes concord and unity among races and religions. The country's unique "open house" practice has been around for decades although its origin is unknown.

With a mix of different races, religions and cultures, Malaysians celebrate a variety of festivals. During such occasions, friends, families and even strangers would visit the homes of those who are celebrating the festival, to wish them well and enjoy the feast prepared by their hosts.[50] The former Prime Minister Najib Razak said that the tradition of hosting open houses during festivals will be more meaningful if the people also open their hearts and minds so that the nation will not only be united but the diversity will be a source of strength to the country and not a problem.[51]

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[48] Merdeka Center, "Public confidence in state of ethnic relations decline," August 12, 2011, accessed December 12, 2019, https://www.merdeka.org/v4/phocadownload/News/2011%20ethnic%20relations%20poll%20news%20release%20-%20final.pdf.

[49] Wan Sabri Wan Yusof and Arfah Ab. Majid, "Inter-religious Dialogue in Malaysia: Past Experience, Present Scenario and Future Challenges," *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah* 3.2 (December 2013): 45–52.

[50] International Office, "Malaysian Culture," University of Nottingham Malaysia, n.d., accessed December 12, 2019, https://www.nottingham.edu.my/International/LifeinMalaysia/Culture/Festivals.aspx.

[51] Bernama, "Open house tradition unites people – Najib," *The Malaysian Times*, March 4, 2018, accessed December 17, 2019, http://www.themalaysiantimes.com.

Muhibbah Formula

Muhibbah (translated as goodwill with a feeling of friendship and camaraderie or closeness) is a home-grown formula for dealing with interethnic and interreligious issues in Malaysia. Many laudable muhibbah activities have been undertaken by government ministries, corporate and sports organizations, NGOs and others. For instance, in December 2019, a Muhibbah Camp was organized by two NGOs, Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Abim) and the Chinese educationist group Dong Zong. The three-day camp brought together about 80 students from various schools in the Kuala Lumpur area. The camp gave an opportunity to the younger generation to understand the country's cultural diversity and to get rid of the mindset of stereotypes and discrimination based on race or religion.

One of the greatest challenges in "new" Malaysia is the lack of trust among peoples of different races and religions. As such, at the Muhibbah Camp, students "urged political leaders not to destroy the nation's harmony, saying they did not want Malaysians to be mired in racial and religious rhetoric."[52] Additionally, a badminton academy has been organizing the yearly Muhibbah Badminton Championships since 2006. The main objective of the tournament is to foster harmony and unity through the sport. The academy also creates a dynamic platform for social interaction and encourages the fostering of new friendships.[53]

Muhibbah should be the guiding principle for religious communities to deal with diversity and bringing people together. It is hoped that the essence of muhibbah, which consists of seven distinctive principles of dialogue, kinship, harmony, sincerity, mutual trust, integrity and respect, will provide a source of strength for all Malaysians and continuously bind the community together

my/open-house-tradition-unites-people-najib/; "Everyone is welcome at Sarawak open house," *The Star Online*, December 17, 2019, accessed December 17, 2019, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/ nation/2019/12/17/everyone-is-welcome-at-sarawak-open-house#xDu5lMkVDP8fb75G.99.

[52] Adam Abu Bakar, "Don't destroy Malaysian harmony, say students to national leaders," *Free Malaysia Today*, December 15, 2019, accessed December 23, 2019, https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2019/12/15/dont-destroy-malaysian-harmony-say-students-to-national-leaders/.

[53] "8th MBA Muhibbah Badminton Championship," *Michael's Badminton Academy*, August 1, 2018, accessed November 12, 2019, https://www.mba101badminton.com/8th-mba-muhibbah-badminton-championship%E2%80%8B/.

with love, respect and mutual understanding.[54]

Interfaith Tours

Over the last four decades, segregation among the various ethnic groups and religions in Malaysia has become obvious. Political parties have been emphasizing religious differences rather than similarities for their own political gain. People refuse to visit places of worship of other religions. However, through an NGO, *Projek Dialog*, interfaith walks have been organized to give young Malaysians the chance to tour mosques, churches and temples.[55] Moreover, in an effort to promote interfaith harmony between the different communities, the historic 217-year-old Masjid Kapitan Keling in Penang has opened its doors to all, especially non-Muslims.[56] In addition, through its public tours at the mosque, an NGO, the Islamic Propagation Society International, Penang (IPSI), has been actively involved in interfaith dialogue.[57]

At an event themed "Blowing the wind of love and unity," scores of youth and young adults visited five places of worship to better learn about other cultures and religions. The tour was organized by the Friendship Group for Inter-religious Service (FGIS) and supported by the National Unity and Integration Department. Accompanying them were youth interfaith leaders from the Council of Churches Malaysia (CCM) and Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM).[58] In 2015, fifty-two pilgrims immersed themselves in Malaysia's vibrantly diverse socio-religious fabric when they

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54 Munira Mutalib and Mashitah Sulaiman, "Understanding Religious Pluralism in Malaysia: A Christian and Muslim Debate," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* (2017): 7; Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, *Religion and Pluralistic Coexistence: The Muhibah Perspective* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2010).

55 Jennifer Pak, "The man behind Malaysia's interfaith tours," *BBC News Kuala Lumpur*, October 22, 2013, accessed November 9, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-24583935.

56 Susan Loone, "A 217-year-old mosque in Penang opens doors to boost interfaith understanding," *Malaysiakini*, July 5, 2019, accessed January 17, 2020, https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/482504.

57 Muhammad Yusuf Khalid et. al., "The Role of Islamic Propagation Society International (IPSI) and its Implementation of Interfaith Dialogue in Mosque Penang, Malaysia," *Al-'Abqari Journal* 6 (2015): 101–26.

58 Tashny Sukumaran, "Fostering religious tolerance," *The Star*, January 17, 2016, accessed November 9, 2019, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2016/01/17/fostering-religious-tolerance-event-held-to-inculcate-appreciation-of-other-faiths.

undertook the "Peace and Harmony Tour." The visit was organized by Universal Peace Federation Malaysia to honor the United Nations' World Interfaith Harmony Week.[59] And in 2016, during the 'Harmony Tour' program community and religious leaders visited patients in hospitals in their respective states.[60]

Interfaith Iftar

Another commendable effort aimed at interfaith harmony has been the *iftar* breaking of fast events. *Iftar* is the evening meal eaten by Muslims after the sun has gone down during the fasting month of Ramadan. In May 2019, for instance, about 60 people of different faiths got together for a breaking of fast event to promote unity, peace and harmony among Malaysians. The occasion, jointly organized by the Global Unity Network (GUM) and Christians for Peace and Harmony in Malaysia (CPHM), was held for the fifth consecutive year.[61] Similarly, about 100 Malaysians celebrated an interfaith *iftar* at a mosque in Petaling Jaya (Selangor) in June 2018. It was co-organized by four non-profit groups: Community Action Network (CAN), Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM), Popular Communications Centre for Human Rights (Pusat KOMAS) and FGIS in collaboration with the Church of the Assumption.[62]

Community Service Projects

An interfaith organization, the Sathya Sai Central Council of Malaysia, has initiated an informal gathering of the major religious groups under the banner of Friendship Group (FGIS) to undertake community service projects for the needy and underprivileged as well as to promote the consciousness of human values in society. The

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[59] Sam Yeoh Koay Seng, "World Interfaith Harmony Week Observed in Malaysia," *Universal Peace Federation*, February 7, 2015, accessed November 9, 2019, https://www.upf.org/united-nations/interfaith-harmony-week/2015/6325-world-interfaith-harmony-week-observed-in-malaysia.

[60] Bernama, "'Harmony visit' among activities to mark world interfaith week," *Borneo Post Online*, February 4, 2016, accessed November 9, 2019, https://www.theborneopost.com/2016/02/04/harmony-visit-among-activities-to-mark-world-interfaith-week/.

[61] "Interfaith groups break fast together," *The Star Online*, May 17, 2019, accessed November 9, 2019, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2019/05/17/interfaith-groups-break-fast-together.

[62] Anith Adilah, "PJ mosque celebrates unity with interfaith iftar," *Malay Mail*, June 4, 2018, accessed November 8, 2019, https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2018/06/04/pj-mosque-celebrates-unity-with-interfaith-iftar/1638374.

participating religious groups in this endeavor are: Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM), Buddhist Maha Vihara, Catholic Church, Council of Churches of Malaysia, Malaysia Hindu Sangam and Malaysian Gurdwaras Council.[63] Where faith groups share a common concern there is much value in addressing community needs together. Volunteers can work on joint projects where religious groups can support each other by taking a stand against racial discrimination and religious intolerance.

Social Media Interaction

ARTICLE 19 is an organization that works for a world where all people everywhere can freely express themselves and actively engage in public life without fear of discrimination. ARTICLE 19 has launched a social media project to facilitate discussion about issues surrounding religious intolerance in Malaysia, in partnership with the website *Projek Dialog*. By supporting the website, ARTICLE 19 hopes to promote greater interfaith and intercultural understanding in the country. Thomas Hughes, Executive Director of ARTICLE 19, said: "The internet is a tool that can and should be used to build bridges between different religious communities."[64]

Bible Sessions

Many of the perceived difficulties in interfaith relations have to do with ignorance and fear, particularly fear of the unknown and fear of causing offence. One Penang state assembly person, Norlela Ariffin, has been organising religious lessons, including "bible sessions" to dispel this anxiety. She believes this is one way to help her Muslim constituents live in harmony with others in a multiracial and multireligious country.[65]

It can be said that instances of harmonious interfaith relations and activities mentioned above are few and far in between. Such examples should in fact be multiplied and stimulated across

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[63] Sathya Sai International Organisation Malaysia, "Friendship Group," accessed November 8, 2019, http://saicouncil.org.my/transformation-e-zine/friendship-group/.

[64] "Malaysia: Building interfaith bridges online," Article 19, January 24, 2014, accessed November 7, 2019, https://www.article19.org/resources/malaysia-building-interfaith-bridges-online/.

[65] Susan Loone, "'Bible sessions' to dispel fear of Muslims under siege, says Penanti's Norlela," *Malaysiakini*, November 7, 2019, accessed November 8, 2019, https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/498601.

Malaysia. These types of positive and inspiring events must also be actively publicized, promoted, and celebrated in public discourses and practices of the state, civil society groups, political parties and religious organizations. It is necessary that they are projected as examples of communal peace and harmony. As a way forward, the government should also seriously consider promoting interfaith discussion and perspectives in schools, universities and in the mainstream media to foster and strengthen interfaith understanding of issues facing the country.

The Way Forward in "New Malaysia"

Although the many creative activities and initiatives undertaken by Muslims and Christians are highly commendable and should be appreciated and promoted more widely, Malaysians should learn to understand one another better. Malaysia is often acknowledged as a unique model of tolerance and accommodation.[66] However, by being tolerant we are implying that we will tolerate the other's presence enough not to be aggressive or assault the "other." But in reality, we do not like the "other" and do not make an effort to understand the "other." As people move forward in "new" Malaysia this kind of attitude should change.

There have also been various efforts and policy recommendations promoting and advancing religious tolerance.[67] However, there needs to be a concerted effort at moving beyond tolerance. Diana Eck, when defining pluralism, says it is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require Christians and Muslims to know anything about one another. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotypes, the half-truths, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence.[68]

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66 Peter G Riddell, "Malaysian Christians and Islamisation," in *World Christianity: Politics, Theology, Dialogues*, ed. Anthony O'Mahony and Michael Kirwan (London: Melisende, 2004), 226–56.

67 Osman Bakar, "The Evolving Face of Religious Tolerance in Post-Colonial Malaysia: Understanding Its Shaping Factors," *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* 2, no. 4 (July 2011): 621–38, https://icrjournal.org/index.php/icr/article/download/602/587.

68 Diana Eck, "What is Pluralism?," *The Pluralism Project Harvard University 2006*, accessed December 17, 2019, http://pluralism.org/what-is-pluralism/.

Furthermore, there are ample teachings mandated by scriptures, both in Islam and Christianity, about acceptance and harmonious living that people of faith should adhere to.[69]

If Christians and Muslims in Malaysia do not put into practice the benign spirit of accepting and showing mutual respect for one another, the ugly venom of discrimination, ridicule and hate would persist. And this, in turn, would destroy the peace and tranquility of the society and the nation. So, how can Malaysians move beyond tolerance? In what ways can Malaysia, an exceptional example of multiculturalism and rich diversity of religions be a beacon of hope for a world mired in extremist and bigoted attitudes? The following are some pointers for Malaysia and the wider world.

Rediscovering the Rukun Negara

At present, there exist numerous barriers, obstacles and hindrances that affect harmonious communal living. And so, there is an urgent need today to address the sparks ignited and manipulated by polarizing politicians and religious zealots. If the country is to move forward, Malaysians need to rediscover the core values, objectives and aspirations embedded in the national ideology, Rukun Negara. The Rukun Negara should become the overarching guiding principle for the continued shaping of the nation's future.[70] This has been further emphasized by the King when he urged the people to appreciate plural society and abide by the five principles of the Rukun Negara.[71]

Work for the Common Good

While it is laudable that the government has launched a new vision called "Shared Prosperity 2030" and aspires to be a fully developed industrialized society, several common concerns have to be resolved. The two main issues that need urgent attention are eradicating poverty and maintaining social justice. Poverty is often

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[69] For instance, in the Qur'an Surah Al-Baqarah 2:256 and in the Bible Gospels of Mark 12:30–31 and Luke 6:27.

[70] Zainah Anwar, "I've Rediscovered the Rukun Negara," *Sisters in Islam*, n.d., accessed December 17, 2019, http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/news.php?item. 354.6; "Rukun Negara a guide for all M'sians – Ewon," *Borneo Post Online*, September 8, 2019, accessed December 17, 2019, https://www.theborneopost.com /2019/09/08/rukun-negara-a-guide-for-all-msians-ewon/.

[71] Bernama, "King urges people to appreciate Rukun Negara," *New Straits* Times, October 10, 2019, accessed December 16, 2019, https://www.nst.com.my/news/ nation/2019/10/528627/king-urges-people-appreciate-rukun-negara.

a consequence of political and economic injustice. In identifying poverty, income alone is not enough. There is a need to look at access to education, healthcare, stable jobs, savings and social security. Human life should be defended in all stages and conditions.

Christians and Muslims should pursue new ways of engaging with people of faith in seeking the common good. Since they have love for the country in common, they are expected to cooperate to resolve pressing matters. They should unite against those demonizing religions in order to create hatred. One way to deal with this problem is to emphasize religious literacy and interreligious study. However, any involvement should be free from motives of proselytization or conversion and should be sincere and holistic.[72] The surest ground on which to build trust, friendship, and cooperation is when Christians and Muslims can acknowledge that they are people of faith. Then all Malaysians can be engaged in a wonderful journey towards a bright collective future.

Revisit Parliamentary Interfaith Commission

The formation of the Interfaith Commission of Malaysia was initiated by the Human Rights sub-committee of the Bar Council in 2005. Its main objective was to act as an independent advisory, conciliatory, and consultative body. At the time of its establishment there was no formal process for interfaith dialogue in existence. Neither was there a mechanism for the shaping of coherent interfaith policy in the country. However, this initiative was shot down accusing it of being anti-Islamic.[73] The commission was intended to promote awareness of the tenets and beliefs of the diverse religions and faiths of the world and to act as a conductor to highlight problems to the relevant authorities for a solution. The idea of an interfaith commission died a natural death although there had been efforts to resurrect it by rebranding it as the Committee to Promote Understanding and Harmony Among Religious Adherents

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[72] While the Federal Constitution ensures the right of every person to "profess and practice one's religion," there are state-level enactments that control the propagation of non-Islamic religions to Muslims. It is an offence for any person to proselytize non-Islamic religion to a Muslim. Only Muslims are allowed to propagate their religious doctrines and the government itself is actively engaged in *dakwah* or proselytization programs to non-Muslims through various organizations.

[73] Malik Imtiaz Sarwar, "We are committed to dialogue: A response to criticism of the Interfaith Commission Initiative," *Aliran Monthly* 25, no. 6 (2005), accessed December 17, 2019, https://aliran.com/archives/monthly/2005a/6g.html.

(JKMPKA) in 2016, but to no effect or impact.

After the regime change in May 2018, extremists and radicals are determined to play the deadly race and religious card to destabilize political harmony in Malaysia. As such, the time is ripe to revisit and re-establish an independent Parliamentary Interfaith Commission for greater interfaith dialogue and to act as a catalyst for nation-building in a new Malaysia.[74]

Need Better Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is commonly used in building peace and understanding among religious groups. Very often those involved in such dialogue activities are religious leaders and scholars who inadvertently display a high degree of cautiousness in their public comments. Such cautiousness springs from the atmosphere of fear in Malaysia —fear of being charged with sedition. Government-sanctioned and funded religious leaders do not care to enter into, let alone promote interfaith dialogue. As such, interfaith dialogue must move away from the cloistered worlds of NGOs and urbanites. It cannot be the domain of the intellectual and power elites, and the stakeholders alone. It should involve laypeople at the grassroots level—a dialogue of life from below.

Dialogue is a living process—a way of living in co-existence and pro-existence. And so there is a need to move beyond dialogue to diapraxis—dialogue as action. Diapraxis is cooperation across differences. On the basis of a common life, diapraxis urges Christians and Muslims to work together on common projects and activities, to exchange services and friendship.[75] By participating in activities and solving problems together, diapraxis creates shared experiences that destroy stereotypes and builds positive feelings towards each other.

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74 Kasthuri Patto, "Revisit the Parliamentary Interfaith Commission to foster interfaith dialogue," *Malaysiakini*, May 29, 2019, accessed December 16, 2019, https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/477889.

75 Lissi Rasmussen, "From Diapraxis to Dialogue," in *Dialogue in Action - in honour of Johannes Aagaard*, ed. Lars Thunberg, Moti Lal Pandit, and Carl Vilhelm Fogh-Hansen (New Delhi: 1988), accessed November 20, 2019, http://ikstudiecenter.dk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/DIAPRAXIS.pdf; Lutheran World Federation, "Diapraxis for Peace and Reconciliation," *Lutheran World Information* 4 (2005), accessed November 20, 2019, https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/LWI-200504-EN-low.pdf.

Making National Schools Great Again

With the dawn of a new Malaysia, the people hope to see a more vibrant, neutral and secular education system that will bring all the races together. Efforts towards this should start at the primary school level.[76] An effective measure is to ensure parents of all races choose to send their children to national schools, and make it the school of choice for all Malaysians again.[77] The most viable solution to generate genuine racial unity is for the country to gradually do away with the different types of schools for different races. The education system must be fully revamped so that children of all races are taught to live together, treated equally, and share the same ideals in life for the good of the nation. Ralph Ellison, an American writer once said: "Education is all a matter of building bridges."[78]

Furthermore, in a context that is becoming increasingly religious, it is vital that children and youth have knowledge of the fundamental beliefs of other groups, understanding why they do what they do, understanding there are essential similarities in spirituality, devotion and the desire to be good.[79] It is time to realize that a country's education system either builds or destroys a nation.

Celebrate Diversity

Interfaith engagement and understanding is about seeing differences as values, as something to celebrate, something to reflect upon, and something to learn from. As a mature 62-year-old nation, Malaysians should embrace the differences and accept the multiple realities among the peoples. Malaysians must celebrate the diversity of a multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious country. The different religious beliefs should not be used as a divisive force but they should enrich the nation thus transforming it into a better model of interfaith harmony.

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[76] Moaz Nair, "The education system and the beginning of a new Malaysia," *The Malaysian Insight*, July 6, 2019, accessed December 17, 2019, https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/72819.

[77] Audrey Vijaindren and Teh Athira Yusof, "Educationists: Make national schools great again," *New Straits Times*, April 20, 2019, accessed December 17, 2019, https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2019/04/481236/educationists-make-national-schools-great-again.

[78] Ralph Ellison Quotes, accessed December 21, 2019, https://www.azquotes.com/author/4468-Ralph_Ellison.

[79] Aidila Razak, "Whither Integration?" How our children are growing up in separate bubbles," *Malaysiakini*, August 30, 2019, accessed December 17, 2019, https://pages.malaysiakini.com/integration/en/#.XWiNr5sKhkw.gmail.

In fact, East Malaysia holds the key to the future of the country. Sabah and Sarawak represent states with people of various and diverse ethnic backgrounds. Their harmonious and close cooperation has often become a role model in every segment of the society, from the highest level to the person on the street. This proves that ethnic groups can live together in peace, engaging with each other with mutual respect even though they are from various races, cultures and religious backgrounds. To arrive at this level of peace and harmonious living, real life dialogues play a major role in building bridges and joining the inspirations of the people from diverse religious backgrounds.

Conclusion

The uniqueness and distinctiveness of Malaysia's history, multiracial population, religions and languages are not only assets but have become creative challenges in a pluralistic society. In such a context, religious plurality should not be seen as something to be fearful about or to shy away from but rather to be celebrated, investigated and understood. Encounters between Christians and Muslims are taking place in the midst of a rapidly changing environment and this article has attempted to identify and discuss some of the major practical issues affecting Christian-Muslim relations in Malaysia in recent decades. Despite the many difficulties and challenges facing Christians and Muslims, both communities have endeavored and are still struggling to overcome these barriers and are managing to build bridges of understanding and cooperation.

This essay has shown that the relationship between Muslims and Christians, though affected by political manipulations and discriminatory policies, has continued to remain strong and positive. There is no doubt that both Christianity and Islam have much to contribute and will continue to exert considerable influence on the peoples in Malaysia. As such, promoting sustained interfaith relations for the wellbeing of the human community should continue to be a necessary way forward. At the same time, Christians and Muslims in Malaysia should be concerned with discerning the changes and challenges that globalization, modernization, secularization, and other contemporary developments bring to the two religious communities. Consequently, Muslims and Christians must consciously develop new and meaningful ways of facilitating a human community that will strive to live together in peace and

harmony.[80]

In May 2018, Malaysians voted for change. Change is good and necessary for the growth of a society. But change must be based on constant interpretation of past experiences and opinions, present requirements and existing ground realities and future prospects. And so there is still much hope and a real sense of anticipation and expectation that "new" Malaysia with its new vision of "shared prosperity" will truly be a united nation of harmony, peace, opportunity, equality and affluence.

The Christians, together with Muslims and other people of faith, are called to build better bridges and not more walls. Whether in politics, race relations, economic crises or disputes among the various communities, Christians and Muslims are challenged to be peacemakers, to find common ground and to engage in respectful engagement. Every citizen should play a role in building strong bonds of unity among the various races and religions while ensuring that fair-play forms the cornerstone of Malaysian society. Muslims and Christians must learn to trust, unite and journey together with fellow Malaysians. After all, they are on the same boat traveling together with peoples of every race and religion, facing challenges together. It is time to cast the oars in the same direction and continue to plant the seeds of unity, maintain peace and reconciliation and build up the nation and its peoples.[81]

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[80] S. Wesley Ariarajah, "Interfaith Dialogue: Milestones of the Past and Prospects for the Future," *Current Dialogue* 71.5 (December 2019): 614–27, https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12467.

[81] Asia News, "Malaysian Bishops on Independence Day: Celebrate Diversity," *Herald Malaysia Online*, September 16, 2019, accessed November 12, 2019, http://www.heraldmalaysia.com/news/malaysian-bishops-on-independence-day-celebrate-diversity/49406/5.

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PART III

Missiology, Practical Theology and Christian Education

Hybrid and Hybridising
Malaysian Identity, Presence and Mode in Theology, Theologising and Mission

John Cheong

Malaysian Christian identity has been hybrid and hybridising due to its geographical location between West and East Asia as well as a socio-cultural straddle between Asia and the West. This in-betweenness facilitates a hybrid identity and cross-pollination that exposes Malaysians towards degrees of hybridisation in their theologies, theologising, ministry and missionising that not only draws from their socio-cultural heritage, it also emplaces them towards other relationships and dialogues that allows for flexible ministry. The strength of these networks, degrees of socio-cultural relationships and types of contexts with others often determine the focus of their theology, theologising, ministry and mission. Due to its status as a minority religious community, Malaysian Christians and their projects will likely journey into a future that will become increasingly split along Western, Indian and Chinese trajectories amidst twenty-first century globalising forces.

Introduction

Anthropologist Néstor García Canclini defines hybridisation as:

> socio-cultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects, and practices. In turn, it bears noting that the *so-called discrete structures were a result of prior hybridizations and therefore cannot be considered pure points of origin* (italics added).[1]

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[1] Néstor García Canclini. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xxv.

Historically, Malaysia[2] has long been a hybrid country with a religiously plural population and ethnically diverse people. In this essay, I argue that Malaysia's traits have not only shaped her people but also theologians and missiologists in their own hybrid identity and mode of theologising and theology. To do so, I explore the nature and processes of hybridity[3] with some remarks about globalisation and Malaysia's postcolonial condition as well as its notable Christian leaders.

I examine hybridity via anthropological-sociological frameworks and by interviewing some Malaysian writers to understand their life stories, particularly socio-religious and cultural elements that influenced their identity, mode of theologising, writings and/or leadership directions today (some of whom contributed to this volume)[4] to help us better understand the context of hybrid influences in our world today with regards to the nature of theologising, as well as our Christian identity. My thesis is that this hybridised identity among Malaysian Christian writers result from their double minority Christian migrant/diasporic status, which produced interreligious, intercultural, interethnic and/or international sensitivities that characterises Malaysian writers and theologising. I begin with a short historical introduction, discuss Malaysian identity and presence, and finally elucidate their mode of theologising and missionising. It concludes with some summative remarks on the future of Malaysian writers, theologising and missionising in relation to their place in world Christianity.

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[2] Malaysia and Malaya are used interchangeably in my essay, noting that 'Malaya' refers to the pre-1963 formation of the present federation.

[3] For further discussions on types of hybridity, i.e., creolisation, mélange or *mestizaje*, see García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, xxxiii; Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 66; and Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2009).

[4] For my purpose, I selected English-speaking theologians/missiologists, interviewing Judy Berinai, Edmund Chia, Hwa Yung, Jeffrey Kuan, Ng Kam Weng, Tan Kang San, T. V. Thomas and Albert Walters. For others, I surveyed some of their writings, particularly attending to their autobiographical sketches: e.g., Hwa Yung, "The Gospel is the Power of God for the Salvation of Everyone Who Believes," in *Shaping a Global Theological Mind*, ed. Darren C. Marks (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 65–76; Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2014), 18–32, and his *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 19.

Historical Backdrop

Malaysia's hybrid nature was influenced positionally, sitting astride the civilizations of India and China, exposing it towards the flux and flows of their commerce, culture and religion. For most of Malaysia's pre-modern history, Indians were the among the earliest arrivals, bringing Hinduism as the main religion, infusing the culture with Hindu rulership, migrants and Sanskrit words.[5] Besides Hinduism, Persian Christianity arrived in the seventh century[6] but no additional records survive explaining their later historical disappearance. Islam only came around the late thirteenth century, creating a hybrid with Hinduism.[7] This accommodation retained Hindu auras of power for the Malay sultans whilst maximising trade to Islam's Ottoman and Mughal empires. Later Chinese influence arrived when Cheng Ho (or Zheng He), a Muslim, built many mosques in Southeast Asia[8] as China greatly supported Malaccan power, trade and prestige.[9] China's many arriving workers also intermarried with the locals, originating the first *Peranakan*[10] people. Finally, the first Western power (the Portuguese) came in 1511, creolising with locals via more intermarriages, commerce and Christianity. Because the Portuguese (and later the Dutch in 1641–1876) had aggressive crusading and conquest mentalities, they were less successful localising themselves and the faith into the culture.[11]

Besides distancing most Malay[12] people from Christianity, British colonialism (1786–1957) created administrative structures in

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[5] T.V. Thomas, "Malaysian Malayalis," in *Malayali Diaspora: From Kerala to the Ends of the World*, ed. Sam George and T.V. Thomas (New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2013), 23–24; Tan Ta Sen, *Cheng Ho and Islam in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2009), 134. Malacca's first sultan was Parameswara, a Hindu moniker. Contemporary Malay historians, favouring an Islamic past now refer to him as Iskandar Shah. The Malay words, *dukacita* (sadness), *sengsara* (suffering), *puja* (worship), *dewa/dewi* (god/goddess) have Hindu/Sanskrit origins. Contemporary food and customs still use many other terms.

[6] B. E. Colless, "The Traders of the Pearl," *Abr-Nahrain* 10 (1970): 102–21.

[7] Anthony Milner, *The Malays* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 24.

[8] Tan, *Cheng Ho and Islam*, 195–98.

[9] Tan, *Cheng Ho and Islam*, 175–77.

[10] *Peranakan* means hybrid Malay-Chinese child. Communities still survive today in parts of Malaysia-Singapore; Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1400–1830* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2015), 148.

[11] Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia*, 144–45.

[12] The "Malay" is an anachronism; in the fourteenth century, a Chinese or Indian could become a "Malay" by coming under a sultanship; Milner, *The Malays*, 81–83.

the late nineteenth century, racialising the division of labour after bringing in Indians (from India) and Chinese (from China) into Malaya.[13] The British later influenced Malaya's nationalists to constitutionally define the Malays as one who is a Muslim, speaks Malay and practices its customs, ignoring the existence of *Peranakan*s and the *Chitty* (Indian *Peranakan*s) who were considered immigrants. When Malaya achieved independence, a land that was already a "plural peninsula" of many intermixed peoples,[14] the Chinese and Indians had to work hard to become one with the nation while at the same time experiencing an in-betwixt identity or hybrid one. They were neither here nor there because the homeland either became communist (in China) or had changed considerably (in post-independence India).[15]

Even though considered (double-)minorities, these migrant Chinese and Indians in mid-twentieth century Malaya could still fortify their identity by unifying their religious heritage with their language and ethnicity, e.g., Chinese Buddhist or Indian Hindus. However, those who converted to Christianity became triple minorities.

When Malaysia tried to unify its diverse people, ethnicity and language under an ethnonationalist agenda,[16] there still occurred significant cross-pollination of culture, language and people to produce a hybridised and adaptive society; most Malaysians can converse in two or more languages while sensitively relating to cultural and religious others. These elements all form the backdrop and material-cultural mix from which Malaysia's theologians and writers inhabit as grounds of their theology and theologising.

Malaysian Theological Identity and Presence

Due to the near absence of Christian writings among the Malays,[17] Malaysian theology and theologising comes mostly from

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[13] Milner, *The Malays*, 119–20.

[14] Anthony Reid, "A Plural Peninsula," in *Thai South and Malay North: Ethnic Interactions on a Plural Peninsula,* ed. Michael J. Montesano and Patrick Jory (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 27–38.

[15] Ien Ang, "To Be or Not to Be Chinese: Diaspora, Culture and Postmodern Ethnicity," *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 21, no. 1 (1993): 7–8.

[16] Charles Hirschman, "The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An Analysis of Census Classifications," *Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 3 (August 1987): 555–82; Husin Mutalib, *Islam and Ethnic Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[17] In Malaysia, Malay Christians and converts are invisible due to the socio-

the second and third generation Chinese and Indian diaspora.[18] Born and raised in the 1950s–1970s, they are children or grandchildren of the Chinese and Indian colonial migrants. In this section, I discuss four elements that have stimulated their writings and/or leadership focus. I limit my survey here to those who have either made an (outsized) impact internationally and whose theological/ missiological contributions have been so recognised.[19]

English-language Schooling

In Malaysia's post-independence march, "[f]ormal education has been a central tenet in the quest for modernity and nationhood across post-colonial societies in the twentieth century."[20] Among schools, mission-established ones gained popularity among many first generation Chinese and Indian migrants. Sending their children to them exposed them towards English,[21] a collateral benefit because such schooling are also markers "of higher status, regardless of subethnic boundaries, open to more connections with 'Europeans,' transnational opportunities, and social advancement."[22]

Consequently, learning English became empowering for those who achieved linguistic competence. However, migrant adoption of English was not easy because of the potential loss of a traditional migrant identity troika: ethnicity-language-religion; when Chinese youths converted to Christianity in urbanising Malaysia in the

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political and religious context that deter Christian conversion. An exception is Hilmy Nor's *A Circumcised Heart* (Petaling Jaya: Kairos, 1982).

[18] Two exceptions of indigenous theologians/writers are Judy Berinai and the late Stemmah Sariau from East Malaysia. Berinai earned her doctorate at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, now teaches at Sabah Theological Seminary and has written articles and translated many books while Sariau produced many lay Christian discipleship books in Malay.

[19] With regards to writers, theologians or missiologists with "outsized" or "international influence," I chose those who have published at least ten articles and/or books with an international reach or those leading a prominent Christian/religious organisation with global recognition.

[20] Mette Louise Berg, "Transnational School-based Networks: Diaspora, Mobilities and Belonging," *Diaspora Reimagined: Spaces, Practices and Belonging*, ed. Nando Sigona, Alan Gamlen, Giulia Liberatore and Hélene Neveu Kringelbach (Oxford: Oxford Diaporas Programme, 2015), 136.

[21] Even so, the "[e]ducation policies of Malaysia and Singapore have in different ways militated against hybridity and overarching civic nationalism" as vernacular schools became a key choice for Chinese and Indians (Reid, "A Plural Peninsula," 62).

[22] Judith Nagata, "Christianity Among Transnational Chinese: Religious Versus (Sub)ethnic Affiliation," *International Migration* 43, no. 3 (2005): 125.

1970s–1980s, fewer youths spoke their mother tongue or kept their religion. Even so, English fluency laid a foundation for Christians that could appropriate its advantages when it became "the *koine* of the emerging global culture" from the 1980s and beyond.[23]

When English-medium schooling coincided with either a Christian parent heritage or their toleration of Christianity, a path towards higher overseas education *with* strong motivations towards Christian commitments became possible. This fueled a spiritual growth and intellectual advancement that retained their local roots whilst connecting them towards global Christian movements or theologies. Albert Walters and Judy Berinai (both Anglicans) would later pursue further studies in like-minded seminaries while Edmund Chia (from La Salle Catholic School) continued his Catholic heritage, serving at the Catholic Theological Union (Chicago) and now at the Australian Catholic University.

Missionaries or Theologians and Mission-established Church Connections

Churches from mission movements or denominations with international connections helped jump-start Malaysian Christianity by building many mission schools.[24] When great numbers of schoolchildren became Christians, it later opened an option towards future full-time ministry within these denominations locally but also globally through their international connections. Transnational missionaries, theologians or religious workers also facilitated such movements. Ng Kam Weng was recommended to Cambridge University for further studies through Wayne Grudem when he first studied in the United States. Albert Walters was drawn to India through an invitation of a priest there. Judy Berinai arrived at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies through a meeting with Chris Sugden who visited Sabah. Amos Yong's later spiritual growth and identity matured when his parents were sponsored by an American missionary, migrating to California.[25] For Joy Tong, education in Malaysia's Chinese vernacular school system later opened deeper Christian commitments through her exposure to Campus Crusade's

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[23] Peter L. Berger, "The Cultural Dynamics of Globalization," in *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World*, ed. Peter L. Berger and Samuel P. Huntington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

[24] Maureen K.C. Chew, *The Journey of the Catholic Church in Malaysia: 1511–1996* (Kuala Lumpur: Catholic Research Centre, 2000).

[25] Yong, *Future of Evangelical Theology*, 19.

ministries in Taiwan.[26]

A Rising but Discriminated Malaysian Middle-class

Since Malaysia's independence until the last decade, Malaysians have mostly enjoyed a relatively stable socio-political situation. This benefitted many theologians and missiologists, enabling them to raise funds locally and embark overseas to study using their personal savings and/or the support of individual churches. This helped Hwa Yung study at Asbury Theological Seminary while enabling Ng Kam Weng to proceed to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and later Cambridge University.

However, when Malaysia's Islamisation movement joined with Malay ethnonationalism[27] and discriminatory socio-economic policies emerged, increased numbers of English-speaking Malaysians began emigrating (choosing Australia, New Zealand, the U.S. or U.K.) where it became a new context for theologising and ministry. Ethnonationalistic discrimination existed in racialised quotas for school admissions, selective job promotions or unfavourable government loans affecting those such as myself. I was seventeen when I left for the U.S. to study due to such structural inequalities. This resulted in my residing overseas for over twenty years (returning only in 1993 for a year, and then in 2012 to the present time) to serve in ministry. Nagata writes:

> "[W]hereas the transition from the colonial period to the present did not entirely eliminate a state-imposed divide-and-rule, plural society policy …. [p]art of the appeal of Christianity is as a conduit to a 'modern' cosmopolitan lifestyle with a potential for global outreach and sometimes emigration to perceived Christian host countries."[28]

An Emerging Religious and Ethnic Surge

Malaysia's 1970s Islamisation resurgence was sparked by the 1973 Gulf oil crisis (and later the 1978 Iranian Revolution) which emboldened Muslim students in Malaysian universities towards *dakwah* (Islamic proselytisation/apologetics). Ng Kam Weng, Albert Walters and Judy Berinai experienced *dakwah* in varying degrees

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[26] Joy Tong, *Personal Interview*, March 14, 2020.

[27] Husin Mutalib, *Islam and Ethnic Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1987).

[28] Nagata, "Christianity Among Transnational Chinese," 110.

first-hand while state socio-political pressures challenged the Malaysian church. My own encounter was with a new Malay Christian believer that showed up in my church (in 1985) for a month and then later disappeared. These incidents were sobering, raising our self-awareness and costs of the personal and socio-religious stakes in any interreligious encounters.

In a sense, Malaysian Chinese and Indian Christians' double minority status under Islam later helped in our theologising, not dissimilar to minority Christians living under Islam's shadow from the ninth to eleventh century.[29] Unsurprisingly, we were obliged to respond, leading us to further study and analyse the socio-political and/or theological dimensions of Islam so as to understand its presence, power and penetration into Malaysian life and society.

Malaysian Theological Mode, Theology and Mission

Given these surrounding elements in Malaysia's context, hybridity is "a matter of necessity… a pragmatic response, making the best of given (often bad) situations. The cultural inventiveness at stake is a matter of specific juxtapositions, selections, and overlays offered and imposed in limited historical conjectures."[30] The motivations and processes of hybridisation can thus be understood as the "deliberate effort to synthesise foreign and native cultural traits" which can produce creativity and innovation in the face of cultural challenges; this creativity however depends on the strength and resources of particular contexts and communities.[31] For example, the creative potential of individuals to access resources such as people, ideas and money may be censored, filtered, monitored or resisted because how one obtains them is socially contingent on external forces. There also exists pain in being hybrid, particularly with postcolonial issues of power and identity among double minorities associated with Christianity but unable to address matters with political Islam.[32]

If Islam or ethnonationalism are dominant elements in Malaysia experienced by Christians, they become constitutive of

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[29] Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church Under the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[30] James Clifford, quoted in Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture*, 93–94.

[31] Berger, "Cultural Dynamics of Globalization," 10–11.

[32] Albertus Bagus Laksana, "The Pain of Being Hybrid: Catholic Writers and Political Islam in Postcolonial Indonesia," *International Journal of Asian Christianity* 1, no. 2 (2018): 225–49.

one's identity in some manner and in turn potentially becomes a *source* of meaning-making. However, for those living overseas, the diaspora or transnationals create "'hyphenated identities' and "balance integration within the new country of origin with private maintenance of ethnic affiliation."[33] Even so, whether local, transnational or diasporic, a sense of Malaysian culture and identity seems to extend over time and space.[34]

Below, I identify four common theological/missiological themes found among Malaysian writers (but dedicate greater attention to the first two). These categories are not bounded in themselves but have some degree of overlap with others.

Theologising and Missionising about Interethnic Identity and National/Diasporic Belonging

In postcolonial Malaysia and elsewhere, many Asian Christians realise that "criticism of their own or other Asian governments posed a problem to many churches, as most of them were in a minority situation in their own country and had—in their respective processes of decolonization—adopted an emphasis on non-interference from abroad."[35] Additionally, following Malaysia's 1969 race riots, interethnic strife and communal violence remained a spectre in the national psyche; local believers had to tread wisely when writing and maintaining a prophetic stance towards ethnic discrimination and other religious injustices towards them as double minorities.

One acceptable outlet was to draw ideas from other Asian Christians (e.g., Kosuke Koyama, C. S. Song and Archie Lee) to contextualise their responses that their compatriots faced but in consonance with nationalist, aspirational projects. Perhaps due to this, Malaysian conciliar theologians were pioneers in developing such hybrid/contextual theology, e.g., Thu En Yu's *Ethnic Identity and Consciousness in Sabah: A Christian Perspective in the Management of Communal Conflicts in Malaysia*, Sadayandy Batumalai's *A*

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[33] Robert J. Holton, *Making Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 145.

[34] Dale Irvin, "Changing the Religious Paradigm" (lecture #2 presented at the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia Teacher's Academy, Seremban, Malaysia Theological Seminary, June 24–27, 2016).

[35] Tobias Brandner, "The Political Contexts of Religious Exchanges: A Study on Chinese Protestants' International Relations," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 42, no. 3 (2013): 155.

Malaysian Theology of Muhibbah and his concept of "neighbourology"[36] and Albert Walters's *We Believe in One God? Reflections on the Trinity in the Malaysian Context.*

For Malaysians residing in Western nations, themes that emerged were diaspora missiology, pan-Asian history and interreligious identity,[37] interethnic identity and migration.[38] For Malaysian missiologists, such theologies of belonging and body-in-motion raise questions about how identities (national or diasporic) are formed and the degree to which we relate to the homeland versus the diasporic.[39]

For example, both T. V. Thomas and myself share a concern for those that must navigate their life and identity between global cities[40] and their potential as agents for God's blessing.[41] Such life experiences potentially open up new theological and theologising horizons:

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[36] Jonathan Y. Tan, *Christian Mission Among the Peoples of Asia* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2014), 161 notes that Batumalai's theology "undergirds a theology of mission among the peoples, the foundation for any intercultural and interreligious interaction, as well as mutual dialogue between different ethnic and religious communities."

[37] Edmund Chia and Michael Fitzgerald, *World Christianity Encounters World Religions: A Summa of Interfaith Dialogue* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press Academic, 2018).

[38] John Cheong, "The Three-in-one God: A Mirror for Inter-ethnic Relations in the Church," *Society of Asian North American Christian Studies* 3, no. 1 (2010): 37–60; Gary Fujino and John Cheong, "Emerging Global Mega-regions and Globalization: Missiological Implications," in *Reaching the City: Reflections on Urban Mission for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Gary Fujino, Timothy R. Sisk and Tereso C. Casiño (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey, 2012), 53–75.

[39] Diasporans may identify first and foremost as someone belonging to a particular family or lineage, or as someone from a specific village, region, or city rather than as nationals of a country or imagined homeland. Or they may think of themselves primarily as members of a particular religious group or a profession. According to Berg (2015, 137–38), Nick Van Hear proposes a disaggregation of three different spheres of diaspora engagement, namely the household or extended family sphere; the known community sphere; and the imagined community of the nation. Disaggregating diaspora engagement in this way can help us understand not only the connections and disconnections between diasporans and those 'at home,' but also the social texture of the engagement.

[40] John Cheong, "Globalization and migratory processes in the socio-religious, economic and political context of the Malay Muslims of Malaysia," *Transformation* 25, no. 4 (October 2008): 207–23.

[41] T.V. Thomas, "Conclusion," in *Malayali Diaspora*, 219.

Since diasporas are fundamentally and inevitably transnational in their scope, always linking the local and the global, the here and there, past and present, they have the potential to unsettle static, essentialist and totalitarian conceptions of "national culture" or "national identity" which are firmly rooted in geography and history. But in order to seize on that potential, diasporas should make the most of their "complex and flexible positioning ... between host countries and homelands", as it is precisely that complexity and flexibility which makes out the vitality of diaspora cultures … But the productivity I am referring to precisely fills that space up with new forms of culture at the collision of the two: hybrid cultural forms borne out of a productive, creative syncretism.[42]

Jeffrey Kuan, a diaspora Malaysian who hails from Perak state, explains that his diasporic life is:

… a kind of hybrid space that allows me to be quite comfortable moving [across] the continents … I'm crossing boundaries all the time [and] there is really no home for me anymore. I'm in Asia but Asia is no longer a permanent home; the U.S. can never be a permanent home in terms of identity because of my origins. So it's a very interesting

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[42] Ang, "To Be or Not to Be Chinese," 13. Jackson Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey, 2015), 292–93 goes further, claiming that being cross-cultural/bicultural helps one overcome theological naiveté. However, this is only true insofar as Malaysians who have actually engaged with other faiths and critically reflected on that can engage others respectfully and creatively without demonising or essentialising them. The fact that many Malaysians *are* hybridic in their identity (e.g., Chinese or Indian descent and English-speaking), does not guarantee such respectfulness as any casual observer of contemporary Malaysian culture knows. However, hybridity does not equal parity. For example, Eu Kit Lim, "The Hybrid Spirit Animating Chinese Pentecostals in Malaysia" (PhD diss., University of Denver/Illif School of Theology, 2013), iii, observes: "Even as this hybridity has enhanced and benefitted Malaysians, where "conversion to Christianity affords church members access to cultural capital, it is limited and unequal capital. In particular, the 'Chinese Chinese,' who church members have demarcated as backward and traditional, are unable to gain access to this capital because they lack fluency in English and knowledge in modern, westernized worldviews." In addition, poor migrants or diasporans residing in a nation as minorities are "particularly aware of their need to survive—politically, economically and culturally—in worlds that others have made" for any productive or creative syncretism is "never enough for them to create autonomy and self-determination" (Anna Tsing, "The Global Situation," *Cultural Anthropology* 15.3 [2000]: 344. Thus, we should be sober about the limits of hybridic optimism.

space but it is also a very creative space for me. I can negotiate in both spaces and interpret both spaces. When I do theological education in the U.S. I can speak with some authority about theological education in the context of Asia because of how connected I am and I can bring the same conversation to Asia from my US context … I've been doing [this] for twenty-seven years already.[43]

For Kuan, his long overseas sojourn led him to interrogate the insider (homeland)/outsider (Israelite) paradox in Old Testament studies.[44] Amos Yong, who left Malaysia permanently before twelve but still retains strong memories growing up there, proposes that Christians embrace a "hybridic identity" in Christ as a consideration for a new evangelical/theological identity.[45] However, for Hwa Yung, locals grappling with the hybridity that is within Malaysia must root themselves deeper into the nation's soil so it might embrace an identity that is fully Asian and Christian.[46]

Theologising and Missionising about Intercultural Identity, Community and Asian Ethics

What is theology that is fully Asian yet Christian? For many Malaysian theologians, this means interculturality, Christian community and Asian ethics. In Malaysia's context, the concern is to draw from an Asian cultural heritage that can engage with Malaysian Malay-Muslim culture but does not privilege a Western (evangelical) theology that is overly individualistic nor one that dichotomises the gospel as evangelism versus social concern. Such concerns come from theologians with strong traditional Chinese upbringing or those drawn towards classical Chinese texts and ethics but who are also English-educated. For Hwa Yung (recognised from his classic book *Mangoes and Bananas* and a key

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[43] Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, *Personal Interview*, September 14, 2018.

[44] Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, "Diasporic Reading of a Diasporic Text: Identity Politics and Race Relations and the Book of Esther," in *Interpreting Beyond Borders*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 161–73; Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan and Mai-Ahn Le Tran, "Reading Race Reading Rahab: A 'Broad' Asian American Reading of a 'Broad' Other," in *Postcolonial Interventions: Essays in Honor of R. S. Sugirtharajah*, ed. Tat-Siong Benny Liew (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 27–44.

[45] Yong, *Future of Evangelical Theology*, 32. Along these lines, Yong proposes "10 axes of *creative* and hybridic tensions" (Yong, *Future of Evangelical Theology*, 238), among them, to live in tension with other religious faiths (243).

[46] Hwa Yung, *Personal Interview*, December 2, 2019.

figure in the Lausanne Movement), his parental influence and respect of Confucian ethics met up, and culminated in Christ.[47] Unsurprisingly, Hwa's writings include dimensions of ethics and personhood, the gospel as evangelism with strong ethical and socio-political aspects, e.g., bribery and corruption.[48] Another in Malaysia is Elaine Goh, who has published two books on Ecclesiastes.[49] In the United States, K. K. Yeo (at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary) has explored Confucius, Chinese culture and community in dialogue with Scripture and theology in his writings.[50] Here are examples of such hybrid combinations of Malaysian Chinese culture/ethics critically engaging Christianity to produce theology that is Asian/Chinese yet biblical.

Theologising and Missionising about Interreligious Identity and Christian Truth

In Muslim-dominated Malaysia, all religious minorities have always had to relate to Islam as a key to one's (inter)religious identity and understanding of Christian truth.[51] When many mission schools started losing their Christian character and leadership with gradual government ownership from the post-independence 1960s–1970s period,[52] many Chinese and Indian Malaysians inevitably encountered more Islam, Malay teachers and students.

This affected Malaysians such as Ng Kam Weng, Tan Kang San, Edmund Chia, Albert Walters, Judy Berinai and myself in varying degrees where exposure to the Malay language and Islam was widespread. For Tan, early primary schooling in Kedah (a supermajority Malay Muslim Malaysian state) and interactions with Islam almost drew him to embrace the religion in the 1960s. Only a desire to avoid dishonouring his family prevented him from

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[47] Hwa, "Gospel is the Power of God," 66.

[48] Hwa, "Gospel is the Power of God," 67–68; Albert Sundararaj Walters, "Malaysian Theology," in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, ed. Virginia Fabella and R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000), 135.

[49] Elaine Wei-Fun Goh, *Cross-textual Reading of Ecclesiastes with the Analects: In Search of Political Wisdom in a Disordered World* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2019) and 变数中的生活智慧：传道书研读 (Singapore: Armour/Genesis, 2013).

[50] K. K. Yeo, *Musing with Confucius and Paul* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2008), and *What Has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing? Biblical Interpretation Form a Chinese Perspective* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity International Press, 1998).

[51] Hwa, "Gospel is the Power of God," 74.

[52] Chew, *Journey of the Catholic Church.*

conversion.[53] Ng's experience was at the university, where he faced *dakwah* (Muslim evangelism-apologetics) against Christian students in the 1970s.[54] Not coincidentally, Ng later developed Malaysian Christian apologetics that address Muslim theological criticisms.[55] For Walters, two unsettling experiences with Muslims in the university occurred—being questioned over the coherency of the Trinity and a prohibition to stop greeting Muslim friends "*Assalamualaikum*" (when it was previously acceptable).[56] For Berinai, she encountered painful separations of Christian friends that entered Islam after marrying Muslims.[57] This later led her to reflect and write on Anglican witness vis-à-vis Islam.[58] For Chia, secondary school duties organising co-curricular activities that included Muslims and other non-Christians obligated him to consider interreligious inclusion and create communal spaces for interaction. This experience consequently led him to study religion to overcome stereotypes of religious others and writing about interreligious dialogue.[59] My own encounter with Islam was to meet a Malay Muslim convert attending my church youth fellowship in the 1980s. However, a month later, she disappeared and was never heard from again (which has haunted me since).

These intense encounters with Islam/Muslims later stimulated the five of us to write on interreligious identity and Christian truth,[60] Christian community and education vis-à-vis Islam[61] and a Christian

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[53] Tan Kang San, *Personal Interview*, November 29, 2019.

[54] Ng Kam Weng, *Personal Interview*, December 3, 2019.

[55] Walters, "Malaysian Theology," 135.

[56] Walters, "Malaysian Theology."

[57] Judy Berinai, *Personal interview*, March 30, 2020.

[58] Judy Berinai, "Anglican Women Witness in a Muslim Context," in *Contextual Reflections from Asia*, ed. Cheong Weng Kit, Eleanor Perry, Roselyn Nelson, Philip Cao and Kusam Yontok (Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia: Sabah Theological Seminary, 2013), 283–97.

[59] Edmund Chia, *Personal interview*, December 18, 2019.

[60] Tan Kang San, "Dual Belonging: A Missiological Critique and Appreciation from an Asian Evangelical Perspective," *Mission Studies* 27, no. 1 (2010): 24–38.

[61] John Cheong, "Christian Education as Mission in Islamic Malaysia: A Survey of Contextual Approaches," *Asia Journal of Theology* 25, no. 1 (April 2011): 59–81; John Cheong and Peter Riddell, eds., *The Church Under the Shadow of Shariah: A Christian Assessment* (Melbourne: MST Press, 2017); Albert Sundararaj Walters, *Knowing Our Neighbour: A Study of Islam for Christians in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Council of Churches of Malaysia, 2007); Albert Sundararaj Walters, *We Believe in One God? Reflections on the Trinity in the Malaysian Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002).

political theology.[62] However, because of the globalised nature of religion today, such issues are no longer confined to Malaysia; one example is seen in Amos Yong's two early works[63] that addressed broader issues of relating to the spirits (and religious insights) of others.

Yet, in all of these, common themes may be discerned—a sense of neighbourly ethics and a missional approach in Malaysian theology in dealing with interreligious identity and Christian truth. Malaysian writers and leaders not only knew, but had also experienced many interactions with other faiths, implicitly or explicitly influencing them toward more focused and sustained critical thinking and leadership on these matters.

Theologising through International Connections on Global Concerns

In Southeast Asia (besides Hong Kong, Philippines and Singapore), Malaysian adeptness in English and another local language not only enabled them to understand Western writings, they could communicate and articulate their issues in ways that the global church could understand. In addition, their bi- (sometimes tri-) lingual capability also predisposed them to also be sympathetic, conversant and better situated to comprehend the thought-worlds and linguistic nuances of their people as well.

When pre-existing friendships with international colleagues (e.g., missionaries, famous professors) or connections to renowned institutions (e.g., Catholic Theological Union, Claremont School of Theology, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), and movements around the world (e.g., Global Diaspora Network, the Lausanne Movement, World Evangelical Alliance) called on them, it raised their profile and voice to greater prominence.[64]

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[62] Ng Kam Weng, *The Quest for Covenant Community and Pluralist Democracy in an Islamic Context*, ed. Mark L.Y. Chan (Singapore: Trinity Theological College, 2006), 1–107.

[63] Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); and his *Beyond the Impasse*.

[64] E.g., see Hwa ("Gospel is the Power of God," 71–72) on how OCMS friends encouraged him into further ministry; Joy Tong (a sociologist who has written and researched on the sociology of Christianity and Islam) gained greater evangelical visibility, church and speaking connections while teaching briefly at Trinity. One of her publication is Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong and Allan H. Anderson, eds. *Global*

When they were recommended or invited by Westerners to speak on matters of importance, they reached a wider international audience. Serendipitously, already existing Malaysian themes seemed well-positioned to speak to twenty-first century global Christian challenges, such as the postmodern turn towards hybridity and liminality, the globalised diasporas and religious pluralism. Anthropologist Judith Nagata summarises such dynamics well:

> Some of the more mainstream religious affiliations afford access to global social and moral communities, as one node in a transnational institutional church network. For the more mobile, webs of interpersonal relationships reinforce their networks of faith. *Where the universalistic religion is superimposed on a more traditional kin or ethnic base, it inevitably adds a new dimension, and helps to expand the scope and morality of ethnicity to another level, with new meanings, to a broader reference group and a wider range of resources* (italics added).[65]

Lastly, self-initiated emigration overseas also enabled more cross-pollinations of theology, theologising and later, towards leadership. T. V. Thomas, a Malaysian Indian now residing in Canada, is an example of an interconnected global Malaysian leader. In addition to being a catalyzer and mobiliser for diaspora missiology, Thomas co-edited a book on diaspora[66] and was a section editor for a 2013 compendium on diaspora, *Scattered and Gathered*. Thomas also serves on numerous national and international boards, most prominently chairing the Board of Ethnic America Network, the Lausanne Global Diaspora Network (GDN) and Global Mobilization Network (GMN).[67]

Conclusions

I began this essay with the early history of Malaysia and her contacts with great civilizations. Malaysia was then considered one of those ends of the earth. Today, the world is thoroughly interconnected where there seem no ends. Rather, the ends are the

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Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2016).

[65] Nagata, "Christianity Among Transnational Chinese," 102–3.

[66] Sam George and T. V. Thomas, eds. *Malayali Diaspora: From Kerala to the Ends of the World* (New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2013).

[67] *Dr T.V. Thomas: Biography*, accessed December 19, 2019, https://globalcampus.live/speaker/tv-thomas/.

never-ending stream of potential hybridisation and migrations that occur in our hyperglobalised world. I have argued that the very hybrid milieu and experience that characterises Malaysia and its people have played key influences in the identity-shaping, means and modes of theologising among her theologians and missiologists.

If the world now slowly recognises the theological, missiological and leadership contributions of Malaysian Christians, it may be because many pressing twenty-first century questions had already been met and addressed by them. If Malaysia's writers are lauded for this, it is not because they were prognosticators *par excellence*. Rather, they were obliged to engage specific challenges that called for unique responses in their particular season in the context of her land and her people—whether local or diasporic. If such works are recognised as salient to world Christianity and its quest to understand its present circumstance and to construct better responses to the challenges of the future, we can be thankful for it.

Lastly, though underrecognised, we must appreciate and acknowledge a strong Chinese-speaking population that exists in Malaysia and elsewhere, and the rise of Chinese-speaking Christianity as the fastest growing religious demographic.[68] With China's global rise and the increased flows of Chinese-language Christian literature from Hong Kong and Taiwan into Malaysia, another source of hybrid and hybridising mode of theology is now occurring independent of Western English-speaking transnational connections and support. Here, Malaysia's Chinese-educated theologians and missiologists may be poised to become the next key contributors to world Christianity, if not Majority World theology. At present, the most recognised is Chinese (and English) writer K. K. Yeo (at Garret-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL) who has published many books in both languages. However, there remain talented others (e.g., Samuel Ooi at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong; Elaine Goh at Seminari Teologi Malaysia) who are underrecognised in world Christianity because it still primarily runs on the structures of an English, globalised network. For now and potentially in this century, Malaysian theology and theologians can be said to occupy a spectrum, if not a bridge, between Asian versus Western (evangelical) theology, but also

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[68] Lim Yue Chuen, "An Analysis into the Growth Factors of the Chinese Churches in the Assemblies of God Malaysia," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 10.1 (2007): 88–90.

between liberal versus conservative Christianity.

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What Might a Practical Theological Reflection on Religious Freedom and Social Engagement Look Like in Light of a Resurgence of Islamization in Malaysia?

Arch Chee-Keen Wong

This essay uses Richard Osmer's four core tasks of practical theological interpretation as a way to structure the essay, but more importantly, as a way to do theological reflection on the religious freedom and social engagement of the church in Malaysia as it relates to the resurgence of Islamization. The first two core theological tasks, the descriptive-empirical and the interpretive tasks, examines the literature in the resurgence of Islamization in many sectors of Malaysian culture touching a bit on the historical antecedents and addressing the limits of religious freedom. The normative task looks at theological concepts of justice and righteousness and ethical reflection that can be used to understand and give a considered response to Islamization's limits on religious freedom in Malaysia in light of political involvement and the Allah controversy. In the final section of the essay, the fourth core theological task, the pragmatic task, considers how the church might respond using the concept of trauma as a theological basis to move forward within the church and outside of the walls of the church.

Introduction and Description of the Practical Theological Reflection Tasks

Many social, educational, and political commentators are expressing a concern with the rise of Islamization in the political, religious, educational, and social fabric of Malaysia. Founded as a secular state (with Islam as the religion of the Federation) that allowed for freedom of religions, these commentators have highlighted the shift to a type of indoctrination as a way to address the role of Islam in everyday life. This growing influence of Islam is a reason for much apprehension to many in Malaysia. For example, some have questioned and spoken out on the dominant role that Islamization has played in the educational system such as public schools and institutions of higher education. From the backdrop of this broader social context in Malaysia, how might the theological

reflection on religious freedom and social engagement look like in response to the resurgence of Islamization?[1]

Many Malaysians, Christians in particular, have experienced the impact of Islamization in their daily lives. As a result, this has left in many Malaysians feelings of anger and hurt, and for others trauma.[2] For those who experience trauma, many often feel as if they are in a liminal space with breakdowns in trust and meaning in life. Trauma is not just a widespread devastating occurrence that produces death and damage, such as mass murder or displacing indigenous people groups away from their language and culture, but also as Bong states in the context of 1Malaysia, "the protracted ethnic tensions, exacerbated by political, economic, national and ethnic differential treatment, are akin to an open wound that does not need to be mended as it is made invisible by the state rhetoric of '1Malaysia' that shore up national harmony — peace at all costs."[3] Trauma understood in this way is ontological by nature. That is to say, by rethinking the trauma from Islamization that takes a cultural and ethnic identity viewpoint, it necessitates a recognition that there is an uneasiness and friction vexing all relationships, particularly those among Malays and the non-Malays.

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[1] Although there are many ways to define Islamization (see Chandra Muzaffar, "Malaysia: Islamic Resurgence and the Question of Development," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 1, no. 1 [1986]: 57–75; Joseph Liow, *Deconstructing Political Islam in Malaysia: UMNO's Response to PAS's Religio-Political Dialectic* [Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore, 2003]; Beverly Milton-Edwards, *Islam and Politics in the Contemporary World* [Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004]; Timo Kortteinen, "Islamic Resurgence and the Ethnicization of the Malaysian State: The Case of Lina Joy," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 23, no. 2 [October 2008]: 216–33; Gordon Paul Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia* [Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009]; Julian Lee, *Islamization and Activism in Malaysia* [Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010]) and to not participate in the debate and arguments over the term for this essay, I will use a modified definition from Jason Abbott and Sophie Gregorios-Pippas, "Islamization in Malaysia: Processes and Dynamics," *Contemporary Politics* 16, no. 2 (June 2010): 135–51, as the intensification of Islamic influence on social, cultural, religious, economic, and political relations.

[2] Sharon A. Bong has given a textual analysis of media representations of the ways trauma and memory are used to keep the peace from the Allah controversy. See Sharon A. Bong, "In the Name of Allah: The Containment of Trauma and Memory in Malaysia," in *Trauma, Memory and Transformation: Southeast Asian Experiences*, ed. Sharon A. Bong (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2014), Kindle.

[3] Bong, "Trauma, Memory and Transformation."

In this essay, we will begin by proposing a way to move forward by using Richard Osmer's core tasks of practical theological interpretation that will provide a framework for this essay and, more significantly, a method to do theological reflection. Practical theology frequently starts with questions that derive from daily or common experiences. Swinton and Mowat poignantly states, "Practical Theology takes human experience seriously. One of the things that marks practical theology out as distinct from other theological disciplines is its beginning point within human experience."[4] Osmer argues that pastoral leaders and teachers of practical theology work through four theological tasks each time they face demanding situations: the descriptive-empirical task, the interpretive task, the normative task, and the pragmatic task.[5] The four tasks correspond to four interpretation questions: (1) What is happening? (2) Why is this happening? (3) What ought to be happening? (4) How might we respond?[6]

For Osmer, the descriptive-empirical task of practical theological interpretation is "the gathering information that helps us discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, or contexts."[7] Again, the interpretive question that the descriptive-empirical task is attempting to answer, "What is happening in this situation or context?" The main function of this task is to collect as much data or information as possible about a situation or context so as to describe the situation from a range of perspectives. The way that this is done is to produce thick descriptions by formally attending to and by "investigating particular episodes, situations, and contexts through empirical research."[8]

The interpretive task of practical theological interpretation derives its theories from sources from the social science, science, humanities, theology, and so on to better comprehend and elucidate why these patterns and dynamics are occurring, "to explain our multifaceted depiction of societal practice or ecclesial practice."[9] Put

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[4] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2006), 5.

[5] Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008).

[6] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 4.

[7] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 4

[8] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 38.

[9] Thersea Latini, *The Church and the Crisis of Community: A Practical Theology of Small-Group Ministry* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), Introduction, Kindle.

another way, these various theories from different disciplines might help better understand and explain the patterns and dynamics around practice and provide possible answers to the interpretive question, "Why is this happening in this situation or context?" Oftentimes, the interpretive and descriptive-empirical tasks are linked together. Latini describes the linking of these two tasks this way, "Though conceptually distinct, the descriptive and interpretive operations of practical theology are not easily divisible."[10] However, Osmer argues that the use of theories from other disciplines can only take pastoral leaders and teachers so far, "As members of the Christian community, they face further questions: What ought to be going on? What are we to do and be as members of the Christian community in response to the events of our shared life and world?"[11] These kinds of questions are the center of the normative task of practical theological interpretation.

Before moving on and describing Osmer's last two theological reflection tasks, it is important to briefly pause and consider how Asian theologies might hopefully intersect with Osmer's first two theological reflection tasks to create a helpful and fruitful dialogue. Osmer's first two tasks of practical theological interpretation ask the questions: "What is going on?" and "Why is this going on?" speaks to the heart of practical theology in that it provides a framework to express clearly the concrete contexts and the lived experiences of trauma from Islamization in all its complicated emergent and stratified realities. This lived experience of trauma is the starting point described by Root for "Practical theology, whether it starts with a crisis, established practice or lived belief, is placed first and foremost on the ground."[12] The starting point for many Asian theologies begins with context and experience. Chan states, "contextual theologies emerge as the church lives out its given script in new situations. In other words, theology is first a living experience of the church before it is a set of ideas formulated by church theologians."[13] In a similar fashion, Clarke asserts that "Asian theology is personal but not private. Both in its reception by the community of the faithful and in its faithful expression in Church

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[10] Latini, *The Church and the Crisis of Community*.

[11] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 144.

[12] Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), chapter 2, Kindle.

[13] Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 15, Kindle.

and society, theology interacts with other voices, beliefs and experiences . . . This commitment to include ordinary people in theological reflection is an important aspect of Asian theology."[14] If this is one of the features of Asian theologies, then one of the broad themes that needs to be addressed is religious pluralism. Clarke poignantly maintains, "theologizing in Asia has sought to forge solidarity between Christians and their neighbours of differing religious faiths by creating spaciousness in God."[15] Kwok Pui-lan, who comes from a postcolonial feminist theological perspective, argues that Asian feminist theologizing must give precedence to the lived experiences of women, especially as "[women's] experiences have been left out of theological reflection."[16] Kwok goes on and makes a further qualification, "since women's experience is always shaped by a complex interaction of factors, such as class, race, colonialism and sexual orientation, a woman's viewpoint will always reflect her situation and perspective."[17] These ways of theologizing by Chan, Clarke, and Kwok are a helpful start in understanding "What is happening?" and "Why is it happening?" in connection to Islamization between Malays and non-Malays. As a consequence, Asian theologies, in their own theological reflection, reinforce and remind practical theological methods like Osmer of this: who does practical theology? Is it something done by pastoral leaders, academic theologians, and/or congregants?

Moving back to describing the last two theological reflection tasks, the normative task of practical theological interpretation strives to answer this question, "What ought to be going on?" This is done by way and use of theological concepts to understand specific episodes, situations, or contexts in order to discover possible ethical norms to direct responses and learn from best practice. Osmer suggests three approaches to the normative task:

> The first is a style of theological reflection that I call here theological interpretation: the use of theological concepts to interpret episodes, situations, and contexts, including those in which we are the actors . . . A second way of approaching

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[14] Sathianathan Clarke, "The Task, Method and Content of Asian Theologies," in *Asian Theology on the Way: Christianity Culture and Context,* ed. Peniel Jesudason and Rufus Rajkumar (London, UK: SPCK, 2012), 4–5, Kindle.

[15] Clarke, "The Task, Method and Content of Asian Theologies," 7.

[16] Kwok Pui-lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2000), 39.

[17] Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology,* 39.

this episode normatively [is] the use of ethical norms to reflect on and guide practice . . . A third approach [is] offering examples of good practice.[18]

In this essay, I will use theological concepts of justice and righteousness and the method of ethical reflections to better understand the Christian response to the Islamization process.

Osmer maintains that the pragmatic task of practical theological interpretation centers on "forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable."[19] This encourages conversations that direct or guide action. The pragmatic task answers the question, "How might we respond?" or, to put it more precisely, "How can we put normative guidelines into practice?" The formation of these strategies is to guide the implementation of practice which is not intended to be followed rigidly or blindly, but adapted aesthetically to the particularities of each context.

Osmer's last two tasks of practical theological interpretation ask the questions: "What ought to be going on?" and "How might we respond?" is a way for practical theology not just to be descriptive and interpretive, but also not to forget its pragmatic and performative mandate. With the resurgence of Islamization and the trauma that it causes in the Malaysian context, Osmer's last two tasks of practical theological interpretation is an important reminder that change needs to happen. A change that is grounded in the use of theological concepts and language, thoughtful ethical reflection, and also renewed and reimaged forms of strategic actions in the context of practice.[20] Root captures this change well and states:

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18 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 131–32.

19 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 176.

20 Osmer's core tasks of practical theological interpretation is a helpful paradigm because it takes seriously the notion of reflective practice. This paradigm for reflective practice is not only valuable for pastoral leaders, but at a second level or at a metatheoretical level of research, it generates theory construction in the field of practical theology. He calls this reflective equilibrium (Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 240–42). Reflective equilibrium allows for a vast spectrum of perspectives in practical theology, especially for Asian practical theology, to be able to talk with others in the field instead of talking past each other. Further, Osmer points out that practical theologians need to deal implicitly or explicitly with at least four metatheoretical issues: (1) the theory–praxis relationship; (2) sources of justification; (3) models of cross-disciplinary work; and (4) theological rationale. See Richard Osmer, "Practical Theology: A Current International Perspective," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 67, no. 2 (2011): 3, for more details of these four metatheoretical issues. This chapter uses three of these metatheoretical issues: the

Therefore, from my perspective, it may be better to see Osmer's normative question, what ought to be happening? not solely in an ethical frame, but also in a revelatory one, that is, asking, what ought to be happening (what ways should we perceive of reality, ourselves, the church, our practice, and conceptions of God) now that God has encountered us? What ought to happen now that we have experienced the event of God's encounter? I might change this question to, now what? After we've had an experience with the living Christ, now that the divine presence has come to us in whole or dream, in our very concrete and lived experience, ministering to us. Now that we've called these experiences real, now what?[21]

For those Malaysian Christians that have experienced the trauma from Islamization, Osmer's last two tasks, "Now what?" and "How might we respond?" is a reminder that change is possible and needs to occur in the hopeful darkness.

We now turn our attention to the details of theological reflection on the religious freedom and social engagement of the church in Malaysia. Although these four theological tasks do not necessarily have to be undertaken in linear stages, for the sake of analysis in this essay I will use a linear process beginning with the descriptive-empirical and interpretive tasks to look at and unpack the effects of Islamization on religious freedom and social engagement in Malaysia.

The Descriptive-Empirical and Interpretive Tasks: The Effects of Islamization in Malaysia

As mentioned above, the descriptive-empirical and the interpretive tasks oftentimes are linked together—this section of the essay will do this. To begin, much of the literature has pointed to a resurgence of Islamic worldview that has permeated all aspects of Malaysian life in regard to practices, values, and institutions such as law, religion, politics, and education. Muzaffar simply states that the "signs of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia are everywhere."[22] One of the most obvious playing grounds of Islamic resurgence is in the

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theory–praxis relationship, sources of justification, and models of cross-disciplinary work.

[21] Root, *Christopraxis,* chapter 2.

[22] Muzaffar, "Malaysia: Islamic Resurgence and the Question of Development," 57.

political arena. Historically, the politics of Malaysia has been mainly based on race and religion. The Federal Constitution in Article 160 (2) defines a Malay as a Muslim who speaks the Malay language and practices the Malay customs.[23] Since 61.3% of the Malaysian population practice Islam, 19.8% practice Buddhism, 9.2% Christianity, 6.3% Hinduism, and 1.3% practice Confucianism, Taoism and other traditional Chinese religions,[24] longstanding Malay-Muslim political parties such as United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and Persatuan Islam Se-Malaya (PAS) have traditionally attract the Malay-Muslim votes based on Islamic credentials.[25] In law, the Malaysian legal system is built on English common law joined with statutes passed by Parliament. These laws are administered by civil courts. Seng states, "the Federal Constitution of Malaya is the *grundnorm* of the Malaysian legal order, the ultimate norm against which the legality of all other norms (or laws) must be measured. It is the supreme law of the nation."[26] However, the amendment of 1988 to the Federal Constitution was amended to explain that the High Courts were to have no authority as it relates to any matter that pertains to the jurisdiction of the Shari'ah courts.[27] Although this amendment was to clarify the relationship between the High and Shari'ah Courts, in effect this amendment puts Shari'ah law parallel and not

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[23] Abdullah Saeed and Hassan Saeed argue that the two distinctions of language and customs are quickly disappearing which leaves the third marker of a Malay as being Muslim. See *Freedom of Religion, Apostasy and Islam* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 123–31.

[24] "Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristics 2010," Department of Statistics Malaysia, last modified May 8, 2011, accessed March 10, 2020, https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemeByCat&cat=117&bul_id=MDMxdHZjWTk1SjFzTzNkRXYzcVZjdz09&menu_id=L0pheU43N WJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09#.

[25] For an history of the UMNO and PAS parties see Noor Farish, *Islam Embedded: The Historical Development of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS (1951–2003)* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 2004) and John Funston, "Malaysia's Tenth Elections: Status Quo, 'Reformasi' or Islamization?," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 22, no. 1 (2000): 23–59.

[26] Lim Heng Seng, "The Federal Constitution, Islamisation, and the Malaysian Legal Order," June 16, 2016, accessed March 21, 2020, https://www. mondaq.com/Government-Public-Sector/500882/The-Federal-Constitution-Islamisation-And-The-Malaysian-Legal-Order.

[27] Critics contend that this produces tensions with Article 11 (freedom of religion) and that the Federal Constitution is not clear in the exact scope of the Jurisdiction of the Shari'ah Court; see Joseph Fernando, "The Position of Islam in the Constitution of Malaysia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2006): 249–66.

subordinate to the Malaysian judicial system.[28]

Since the May 1969 racial riots, one of the ways the Malaysian government has attempted to redress the economic and wealth imbalance between Malays and non-Malay citizens is through the New Economic Policy (NEP). According to Jomo, the two purposes of NEP was the reduction of poverty irrespective of race and the restructuring of society to eliminate the identification of race with economic function.[29] Chin points out that it is this second purpose that has become the main agenda of the NEP:

> In 1970, Malays comprised nearly 50 per cent of the population and held less than 3 per cent of the country's wealth. This inequity rendered Malaysian society inherently unstable, with its principal ethnic group holding an insignificant share of the economy. The restructuring sought to give the Malay community a minimum of a 30 per cent share across all economic and social spheres and ensure that the Malay community was represented in all occupation groups. . . . Since the introduction of the NEP in 1971, the Malaysian Government has injected billions of dollars in direct subsidies into the Malay community. The aim was to create a competitive Malay community— officially termed the Bumiputera Commercial and Industrial Community (BCIC).[30]

In the education sector, by the 1970's Islamic religious education had decrease as a result of the promotion of religious education in National Schools, linked with the opportunities that the NEP provided, directed many Malay parents "to see the advantages of sending their children to national schools rather than religious schools."[31] Nevertheless, the Islamic resurgence in the 1980's that brought back more "purer" forms of Islam meant that Islamizing the education system became a priority and thus increase religious

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[28] Donald Horowitz, "The Qur'an and the Common Law: Islamic Law Reform and the Theory of Legal Change," *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 42, no. 2 (1994): 233–93.

[29] Kwame Sundaram Jomo, *Growth and Structural Changes in the Malaysian Economy* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990).

[30] James Chin, *"New" Malaysia: Four Key Challenges in the Near Future* (Sydney, AU: Lowy Institute, 2019), 2–3.

[31] Lee Hock Guan, "Globalisation and Ethnic Integration in Malaysian Education," in *Malaysia: Recent Trends and Challenges,* ed. Saw Swee-Hock and K. Kesavapany (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), 230–59.

schools' enrollment.[32] Abbott and Gregorios-Pippas poignantly states, "By 2000 there were 24,000 children attending government-backed Islamic schools and a further 53,000 children attending private religious schools. By 2003 the combined figure had risen to 125,000 whereupon the government ended state funding accusing the schools of breeding hatred."[33] Further, with the introduction of the National Educational Philosophy (NEdP), this positioned the idea that devotion to God was at the core of the educational curriculum. The NEdP straightforwardly led to the introduction of moral education into both primary and secondary schools. As a result, both formal Islamic education for Muslims, and moral education classes for non-Malays became core subjects at public and private schools.[34]

In post-secondary education, the Malay community were provided additional incentives such as quotas in university intakes and scholarships that stemmed from the New Economic Policy.[35] More specifically, public universities in Malaysia earmarked at least 55% of their intake for bumiputera (Malay and indigenous) students. Kenayathulla candidly puts it this way:

> All public universities were required to reserve 55% of their student places for Bumiputera students. Quotas also allowed admission for the best Chinese (35%) and Indian (10%) candidates. . . . The introduction of the quota system was a response to the Majid Report in 1971, which pointed out that Malay students were under-represented in local universities, particularly in science and engineering fields.[36]

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[32] Zainah Anwar, *Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Dakwah Among the Students* (Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 1987).

[33] Abbott and Gregorios-Pippas, "Islamization in Malaysia: Processes and Dynamics," 145.

[34] Rosnani Hashim, *Educational Dualism in Malaysia: Implications for Theory and Practice* (Malaysia: The Other Press, 2004).

[35] Suet-Ling Pong, "Access to Education in Peninsular Malaysia: Ethnicity, Social Class and Gender," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 25, no. 3 (1995): 239–52.

[36] Husaina Banu Kenayathulla, "Ethical Issues in the Malaysian Education System," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47, no. 5 (2015): 442. Since 2002, a shift in post-secondary university admissions has been based on merit irrespective of ethnicity. However, some commentators still believe there still exists an ethnic quota system that favors Bumiputera students in the sciences. Most recently with the tenth Malaysian Plan (2011–2015), the Malaysian government declared a plan to provide better entry points and quality of education to the bottom 40% of households for places in boarding schools, matriculation, universities and

In respect to religious freedom, the Federal Constitution states that Islam is the religion of the state, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony. This means that every religious group has the right: to manage its own religious affairs; to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes; and to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with the law. However, in recent history, religious freedom has been contested, for example, in the case of the *Allah* controversy in which the Ministry of Home Affairs ordered a Roman Catholic newsletter called the *Herald* to stop using the word *Allah* in their Malay language publication. This was perceived as a severe limitation on the religious freedom of Malaysian Christians. Although the word *Allah* has been used in the Bible in the Malay-language from the nineteenth century onward, the word *Allah* is used in liturgy and prayers in the Malay language. The Roman Catholic Church opposed the ministerial order and contended that the order violated the Roman Catholic Church's constitutional right to profess and practice its religion, as well as the right to oversee its own religious affairs, and teach and disciple its congregations in the Christian faith. Abbott and Gregorios-Pippas remarks that the *Allah* controversy has highlighted two competing ideologies embedded in Malaysia's constitutional system: ethnic nationalism and plural nationalism. For them, ethnic pluralism is based on the ideology of

> one race, one language, and one religion . . . emphasiz[ing] ethnic identity as the central organizing principle of government and society. It sees ethnicity as the primary mode of engaging in law and politics such that defending this ethnic principle becomes crucial to upholding and maintaining an entrenched way of legal, political, and social life."[37]

By contrast, plural nationalism based on plurality and equality "aspires to a pluralistic and multiethnic nation capable of accommodating many races, many languages, and many religions . . . society and government are premised on ethnic, linguistic, and religious equality."[38] The national discourse seems to focus on ethnic

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scholarships, irrespective of ethnicity.

[37] Abbott and Gregorios-Pippas, "Islamization in Malaysia: Processes and Dynamics," 753–54.

[38] Abbott and Gregorios-Pippas, "Islamization in Malaysia: Processes and Dynamics," 753–54.

nationalism. As a result, as Choong succinctly states, "More often than not, such discourses on national wholeness tend to be grafted in ideologies that emphasize on exclusionary identity based on ethnicity, language and religion."[39] If this is the case, then in what ways do Malaysian Christians reflect and respond to the limits of religious freedom imposed by the government? Put another way from a sociological perspective: in what manner do Christians employ faith as a way to create space to deal with the government's intensifying influence into everyday life? As George and Willford put it: "Individuals and groups can be quite calculating or complicit in using the state (and its internal contradictions) in advancing their interests, religious or otherwise, in an effort to find some kind of political footing in relation to the state."[40] Such actions do not indicate that Christians are choosing an oppositional or resistant position against the government—but it may.

The Normative Task: Theological Reflection on Theological Concepts and Scripture

For Osmer, the normative task asks, "What ought to be going on?," is a way to seek out God's will for present realities.[41] Osmer expresses the normative task in terms of "prophetic discernment,"[42] which employs three possible methods to discern God's Word for the existing context: theological interpretation, ethical reflection, and good practice. More specifically, theological interpretation "focuses on the interpretation of present episodes, situations, and contexts with theological concepts."[43] "Ethical reflection refers to using ethical principles, rules, or guidelines to guide action towards moral ends."[44] This is needed because "present practices are filled with

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[39] Chong Eu Choong, "Modernity, State-led Islamisation and the Non-Muslim Response: A Case Study of Christians in Peninsular Malaysia" (PhD diss., University of Malaysia. 2010), 1.

[40] Kenneth George and Andrew Willford, "Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia" in *Introduction: Religion, the Nation, and the Predicaments of Public Life in Southeast Asia*, ed. Andrew Willford and Kenneth George (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2005), 11.

[41] Kevin Gary Smith, review of *Practical Theology: An Introduction* by Richard Osmer, 2010, accessed December 11, 2019, https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ae7f/113987f3b9d2330f3fae532c332abb8b5daf.pdf?_ga=2.191758314.1954718012.1586450801-1071186222.1586450801.

[42] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 131–32.

[43] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 139.

[44] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 161.

values and norms,"[45] that are frequently in conflict with one another. Further, in respect to the role of practice in discerning God's will for the existing context, Osmer states, "good practice from [the] present or past can serve as a normative model offering guidance to contemporary congregations."[46] However, for some practical theologians and pastoral leaders, Osmer needs to emphasize the role of Scripture more emphatically. Smith's minor criticism of Osmer's normative task is the use of Scripture:

> I would like to see greater emphasis on the scriptures, especially in the normative task. To be fair to Osmer, there is a reasonable focus on scripture, and his model is certainly usable even by those who hold more conservative theological views. However, he relies more heavily on theological concepts and on theories from the arts and sciences to guide practical theological interpretation than on in-depth study of scripture. For anyone with a high view of scripture, even practical theology must be exegetical theology.[47]

Regardless of this minor criticism, what theological concepts or Scriptural exegesis can be used to understand and give a considered response to Islamization in Malaysia that might lead to thoughtful practice? Before answering this question directly, Choong[48] has given a recent historical overview of the various Christian responses to Islamization in Malaysia. Two responses have mainly represented the voice of Malaysian Christians in regard to Islamization: the mainline tradition and the conservative Protestant (evangelical) tradition. One of the ways that Islamization has affected Christians is the government's increasing intrusion into the non-Malays religious freedoms. I will use two examples to demonstrate the responses that these two ecclesial traditions have taken to the limiting of their religious freedom: political involvement and the *Allah* controversy.

The mainline tradition is best represented by the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) made up of Christians mainly from mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, and evangelicals which

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[45] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 149.
[46] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 153.
[47] Smith, Review of *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 112.
[48] Choong, "Modernity, State-led Islamisation and the Non-Muslim Response," 224–74.

represented the majority of Christians in Malaysia.[49] The first example is political involvement. One of the objectives of CFM is "to look after the interests of the Christian community as a whole with particular reference to religious freedom and rights as enshrined in the Federal Constitution."[50] One of the strategies to fulfill this objective is to involve Christians in the democratic process in electing government officials. For instance, CFM in a 2012 press statement connected the significance of a Christian's democratic right to vote to the doctrine of dominion and stewardship of the earth found in Genesis 1:26–28 and Jesus' teachings of a Christian being the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world in Matthew 5:13–15. These two scriptural texts—to rule over and subdue the earth with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount—are used as texts to justify the Christian response to electing government officials who will bring forth justice and equity to all. Although a notable objective, Lau finds this to be a peculiar position to take:

> Whilst CFM asserts that Christians have a God-given duty to protect and safeguard the earth, it nevertheless does not translate this into a commandment for Christians to participate in the nation's democracy; the CFM merely "invites and encourages" God's people to exercise their political rights. This is bizarre, for if God has commanded the Christian to "rule over and subdue the earth" and CFM has translated this into the Christians' responsibility to stewardship which, in turn, includes being politically conscientious, how then is it not a duty for Christians to vote? Merely "encouraging" Christians to go to the polls hardly reflects the importance of a divine commandment to bless the earth; it sounds almost as awkward as a pastor simply 'encouraging' his members not to sin.[51]

In essence, Lau's critique is focused on the apolitical nature of the CFM position that encourages a Christian to vote for the political party that bring forth the most justice and to refrain from voting if

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[49] Sivin Kit has given a social critique of CFM's ways of addressing religious freedom through public statements. See Sivin Kit, "Speaking the Truth in the Midst of Divisiveness: The Merdeka Day and Malaysia Day Statements of the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM)," *Hong Kong Journal of Catholic Studies* 9 (2018): 449–87.

[50] "Christian Federation of Malaysia Constitution," Christian Federation of Malaysia, accessed March 14, 2020, https://cfmsia.org/constitution.

[51] Alwyn Wing Wang Lau, "Intimating the Unconscious: Politics, Psychoanalysis and Theology in Malaysia" (PhD diss., Monash University, 2016), 13.

any party does not meet the Christian's standard of justice: "If justice demands that specific political parties be removed from power, is it right for churches to continually declare their partisan neutrality or for individual Christians to elect whichever party they wish to, based entirely on personal judgments"?[52] Although Lau points out the inconsistencies of the CFM position, the theological thrust centers on justice. The focus is also on the individual's response to the issues of justice: in this case Christian involvement as a matter of political involvement as it pertains to justice.[53]

Although Scripture speaks broadly to the idea of justice, I would like to focus on justice, particularly social justice, and its connection to personal righteousness or piety. This succinct examination of biblical texts on justice and righteousness will give a flavor of how biblical authors approach the issues of justice. The prophetic literature is bathed with various uses and meaning of justice depending on contexts. Hays points out that justice can mean a variety of things: a value that God presumes Israel to live by (Isa 1:21–23; 5:1–7; Mic 6:8; Amos 5:15), as a characteristic of God (Isa 5:16; 30:18; 61:8; Jer 9:24; Hos 2:19), and as a feature of the eschatological restoration by God (Isa 16:5; Jer 23:5; Ezek 34:16).[54] Further, the prophetic literature often links justice to righteousness (Isa 1:21; 5:16) and humility (Isa 58:1–8). In Isaiah and from the other prophets, two significant elements standout. First, how rulers deal with the needy is the way God will deal with them. This type of reciprocal relationship between the care for the needy and rulers does not start from the prophets but is a theme that is predominant in Deuteronomy (10:17–19; 15:1–11; 26:12–13). In other words, the prophets simply referred back to this standard of justice and appeal for repentance from the injustices in their time and place.[55] The

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[52] Lau, "Intimating the Unconscious," 14.

[53] Although Lau's critique might have validity, other Christian voices believe the CFM stance is too confrontive. See Lee Min Choon, *Return to the Golden Land* (self-pub., Petaling Jaya: Malaysia, 2017) quoted by Sivin Kit, "Speaking the Truth in the Midst of Divisiveness," 475.

[54] Daniel J. Hays, "'Sell Everything You Have and Give to the Poor': The Old Testament Prophetic Theme of Justice as the Connecting Motif of Luke 18:1–19:10," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55, no. 1 (2012): 43–63.

[55] Terence Fretheim, "The Prophets and Social Justice: A Conservative Agenda," *Word & World* 28, no. 2 (2008): 159–68; Bryan R. Dyer, "Good News to the Poor: Social Upheaval, Strong Warnings, and Sincere Giving in Luke–Acts," in *The Bible and Social Justice: Old Testament and New Testament Foundations for the Church's Urgent Call*, ed. Cynthia Long Westfall and Bryan R. Dyer (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick

second element of justice has to do with the caring for the less fortunate such as orphans, widows, the oppressed, and the poor (Isa 41:17; 61:1; Zech 7:10). All these groups have one thing in common as Gowan writes, "The worst problem, that which these groups have in common, is powerlessness and its consequences: lack of status, lack of respect, making one an easy mark for the powerful and unscrupulous."[56] More specifically, not only do the prophetic literature speak for justice for these groups but also warns those who inflict injustice (Isa 10:1–3).

How does justice and righteousness come into play? Justice arises on the scene when something has gone wrong with God's original vision of shalom and restoration is needed. Hoang and Johnson put it this way:

> When a situation is not going according to the way of life God intends for his people or creation—when injustice of any kind is present—judicial intervention may be needed to help make things right (in this way, the word mishpat [justice] also has legal connotations and is sometimes translated "judgment"). Once the situation has been set right, then justice is in place. Without this restoration, injustice remains. Mishpat can also be defined as the restoration of a situation or environment so that equity and harmony are promoted in the community. Simply put, mishpat means setting things right.[57]

Further, Hoang and Johnson argue that justice and righteousness has to do with relationship that is both personal and communal. Achtemeier writes of the Old Testament sense of justice: "That which is right in a legal sense is that which fulfills the demands of the community relationship, and the sole function of the judge is to maintain the community, to restore right to those from whom it has been taken."[58] Righteousness has to do with living faithfully in each relationship. Malchow comments, "There is no norm of righteousness outside of that of personal involvement.

Publications, 2015), 102–24, Kindle.

[56] Donald E. Gowan, "Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament: The Case of the Widow, the Orphan, and the Sojourner," *Interpretation* 41, no. 4 (1987): 344.

[57] Bethany Hanke Hoang and Kristen Deede Johnson, *The Justice Calling: Where Passion Meets Perseverance* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 20.

[58] Elizabeth R. Achtemeier, "Righteousness in the Old Testament," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia,* vol. 4, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 81.

When people fulfill the conditions imposed on them by relationships, they are righteous."[59] Like justice, there is a connection to community.

In the New Testament, the justice and righteousness theme continues with how rulers deal with the needy and will be judged accordingly by how the needy are cared for. Like the Old Testament, the New Testament speaks broadly to the theme of justice in the other Gospels and in Paul's writings. For the purposes of this essay, I would like to resume the focus on justice in its connection to personal righteousness or piety from the Lukan perspective using the prophetic literature. In the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, Luke uses the theme of justice and righteousness from Isaiah and other prophets and Deuteronomy as the foundation for Jesus' public ministry. At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, Luke 4:18–19 states, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus quotes Isa 61:1–2 and a line from Isa 58:7.[60] What is important for our purposes is the way Luke uses the word "the poor." Who are the poor as found in Luke 4:18, 6:20, 7:22, 14:13, 14:21, and 16:20 and 22? Marshall points out the poor as "the people who are most in need of divine help and who wait upon God to hear his words."[61] Morris thinks, "Jesus saw Himself as coming with good news for the world's troubled people."[62] For Bock, the poor are those who "most often responded to Jesus" and who are "open to God."[63] Fitzmyer says the poor "represent generically the neglected mass of humanity."[64] In summary, the poor have low social status

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[59] Bruce V. Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 16.

[60] There is dispute how these verses are punctuated and constructed. See I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 83; and Darrell Bock, *Luke*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 404–11.

[61] Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke,* 183.

[62] Leon Morris, *Luke*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 106.

[63] Bock, *Luke,* 408.

[64] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. The Anchor Bible, Vol. 28 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 250.

and/or are physically destitute. Dyer puts it this way: "it is apparent that in Luke–Acts, references to 'the poor' signify persons with economic and/or physical need. Further, the common association of 'the poor' with other terms of low status and marginalization significantly connects them as a group to those on the outside of the social order."[65] Thus, most commentators think that "the poor" have low economic means, while at the same time, permitting a more flexible interpretation of its meaning. Luke 6:20–26 continues to follow the prophetic literature's harsh words to those who bring about injustice (Luke 6:20–26; 11:37–54) or who neglect to reply properly to injustice. According to Dyer,

> The rich and the well-fed are similar to the rich and the fat mentioned in Jer 5:27–28. Jesus does not accuse these groups of directly bringing about great injustice, but the parallels connecting the woes to Jesus' beatitudes indicts them for failing to respond properly to injustice. Instead, Jesus warns them that the comfort they enjoy in this age—at the expense of those in need—will be reversed in the age to come."[66]

In Luke 11:37–54, Jesus aims the sets of woes to the Pharisees and experts in the law. Again, Jesus carries on the prophetic tradition of calling out rulers for their empty rituals and lack of justice. To put it another way, "the leaders have failed to uphold justice and they do not care for the poor. They are interested in empty rituals and having a religious appearance, but they ignore the important things of God. Jesus' rebuke calls for them to instead give alms to the needy and practice justice and love."[67]

The evangelical tradition is the second voice that has spoken out on the limits to religious freedoms. I would like to focus on two organizations: the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) and the Kairos Research Centre. One of the NECF objectives is "to represent the Christian community on issues and matters affecting the Church and society at large, in consultation and joint action with other Christian and religious bodies in the country."[68] One of these issues is religious freedom. Historically, evangelical

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[65] Dyer, "Good News to the Poor," chapter 5, Kindle.
[66] Dyer, "Good News to the Poor," chapter 5, Kindle.
[67] Dyer, "Good News to the Poor," chapter 5, Kindle.
[68] "The National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Aims and Objectives," The National Evangelical Christian Fellowship, accessed March 15, 2020, http://www.necf.org.my/index.cfm?&menuid=5.

churches were apolitical. The former secretary-general of NECF, Wong Kim Kong, puts it this way:

> [The] Church's main concern is spiritual rather than political. Also, the church, as a whole, does not have a common political agenda to bind them together. I think the separation between the government and religion is a very clear doctrine of Christians. . . . The church is a neutral institution; we cannot take any political inclination towards any particular party or candidate. However, the biblical value of good government can be taught.[69]

For most evangelical churches, the theological and polity emphasis has been placed on eternal life and the mission of the church: the spiritual care and discipleship of its members and evangelism. However, in recent times this is beginning to change. The Kairos Research Centre (KRC) through its blogs, *Krisis & Praxis,* has provided a response as it attempts to address the *Allah* controversy. How has the KRC responded to the *Allah* controversy?

Before addressing this head on, Osmer reminds us that the normative task can be addressed by three possible methods to discern God's word for the existing context: theological interpretation, ethical reflection, and good practice.[70] With the Allah controversy, the normative task will be addressed by the method of ethical reflection.

In providing an evangelical response to the *Allah* controversy, Ng Kam Weng, through KRC's blog, *Krisis & Praxis*, proposed four a priori propositions in his response to PAS, which highlight the incongruities and discrepancies that the word *Allah* is exclusive to Muslims:

> Proposition 1: We respect the right of PAS to spell out clearly its theological position on Allah.
> Proposition 2: We respect the right of people of different faiths to interpret their holy books and profess their faith in their mother tongues.
> Proposition 3: We must go beyond polemics in addressing the Allah controversy.
> Proposition 4: We invite Muslim leaders to engage in constructive dialogue with Christian leaders to resolve the

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[69] Wong Kim Kong, "The Christian Perspective," January 20, 2008, accessed April 2, 2020, http://teresakok.com/2008/01/20/the-christian-perspective.

[70] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 139–60.

Allah controversy.[71]

In these four propositions, Ng argues for an ethical and respectful way to move forward for the Malaysian church. He first proposes a rational argument to the *Allah* controversy. Ng begins with a natural right libertarian perspective that all human beings by nature have rights: "PAS is entitled to hold the view that only Muslims have understood and used the word Allah accurately. But by the same token Christians are also entitled to hold to their view of God and to use the word Allah accordingly. . . . The issue is whether we are prepared to respect the right of people of other faiths to uphold their own religious conception of God."[72] Proposition 2 states that one religious group's right to believe in God should not be imposed on another group's right on what to believe regarding that same issue, "Muslims have every right to interpret the Quran and profess their faith in any mother tongue, whether it is Arabic, English or Malay. Likewise, Malay-speaking Christians should have the same right to interpret the Malay Bible (Alkitab) and profess their faith in Malay in their mother tongue."[73] Propositions 3 and 4 are the results of the ethical reflections of Proposition 1 and 2. As a result, Malaysian Christians have the right to employ the name of God as understood from the Christian tradition and that Allah is not restricted to Islam alone. The benefit of such a rationalist-foundationalist approach of the four propositions, as stated by Lau:

> is no doubt invaluable for resolving socio-political gridlocks, especially when coupled with a call for peaceful dialogue and rational discussion. Apart from a fidelity to reasoned argumentation which exposes contradictions and unhelpful rhetoric, it also helps the public focus on the key issues and be wary of passionate concerns which may often be red herrings. In addition, the exercise also promotes restraint, not least when it comes to controversial issues prone to extremist positions.[74]

Although these four propositions sound rational and reasonable, Lau also argues that Ng's theological-political method is

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[71] Ng Kam Weng, "Resolving the Allah Controversy: Going Beyond Polemics and Call for Constructive Dialogue," *Krisis & Praxis Blog*, January 17, 2013, accessed April 3, 2020, https://krisispraxis.com/archives/2013/01/resolving-the-allah-controversy-going-beyond-polemics-and-call-for-constructive-dialogue/.

[72] Ng, "Resolving the Allah Controversy."

[73] Ng, "Resolving the Allah Controversy."

[74] Lau, "Intimating the Unconscious," 24.

flawed in respect to assumptions held by both parties in the controversy. That is to say, the starting point for dialogue (especially in Proposition 4) might be different and already determined. By determination, what are the non-negotiable criteria held by the proponents that might not be self-evident? Lau states:

> . . . the interests of the proponents of reason have already determined the trajectories of the dialogue. It is clear, for instance, from Ng's proposals that certain non-negotiable criteria must apply and be accepted by all parties without which dialogue becomes virtually impossible . . . The problem is certainly not that these axioms [propositions] are inherently foul (indeed, far from it) but that they are foisted as an unquestioned starting point upon the religious or political Other. But what if my interlocutor rejects my axioms or has others I may not accept? Who is to decide? If applied uncritically, such a *modus operandi* ends up disavowing the non-rational at its core, that is, the various non-negotiable criteria arrived at independently of reason that are already at play.[75]

Lau's point is this: frequently religious disagreements, like the *Allah* controversy, begin more or less from a non-rational approach and from personal opinions. These religious disagreements should not be minimized in favor of a more rational approach that focuses on the commonality of abstract principles of reason. Ultimately, what results is a detraction from what is of the utmost importance to the opposing religious communities.

The Pragmatic Task: How Do We Move Forward?

Osmer asserts that the pragmatic task gives attention to "forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable."[76] This welcomes dialogue that leads to action. The pragmatic task answers the question, "How might we respond?" or, to put it more technically, "How can we put normative guidelines into practice?" The pragmatic task generates strategies for carrying out practices or for taking particular types of action in the church. How might Christians move strategically forward on the issue of Islamization? What might "normative guidelines into practice" look like? I would like to consider how a framework

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[75] Lau, "Intimating the Unconscious," 24–25.
[76] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 176.

around trauma might help in providing guidance towards practice.

Normative guidelines into practice have both an internal and external component to it. Internally, as a way to move forward, the church might want to consider this framework around trauma. Briefly, guidelines into practice might need to consider the role of trauma in the life of the church as it pertains to Islamization resulting in a transforming spirituality for social engagement. That is to say, if Islamization is the intensification of Islamic influence on social, cultural, religious, economic, and political relations, trauma is the suffering that does not go away. If trauma is described as the suffering that does not go away, Rambo then further paints a picture of the effects of this trauma and raises an important question: "When trauma destroys our basic assumptions about the world, what remains?" She declares that the experience of trauma is a ". . . crisis of remaining or a crisis of the middle," in which the middle necessitates living in between life and death.[77] Trauma creates a death of a kind, but it is not a finality of death; it is rather an experience of remaining, living beyond a death or in the middle of life and death. Theologically, it is this space between the cross and resurrection that bears "witness" to trauma that helps in seeing the complicated relationship between death and life. Thus, "witness" becomes the pivot between death and life that is experienced through being present to trauma and traumatic survival.[78]

What might bearing "witness" look like? Bearing "witness" seems to point to the development of a transforming spirituality. Rambo calls this the "middle Spirit":

> . . . a unique pneumatology arises. I call this the "middle Spirit." This understanding of Spirit is not so clearly aligned with life. Instead, this Spirit occupies a more tenuous position between death and life. The Spirit remains and persists where death and life defy ordinary expression; death is neither completed nor in the past, and life is neither new nor directed toward the future. This middle Spirit is often elided in the association of the Spirit with new life and resurrection. I aim to retrieve it, developing the contours of this Spirit by reviving biblical concepts that speak to pneumatology in this different key.[79]

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[77] Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. 2010), 25.

[78] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 40.

[79] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma,* 114.

For Rambo, the "middle Spirit" is the remaining of God's presence in the liminal space that is neither fully life nor fully death. In taking Rambo's notion of trauma and the "middle Spirit" from the individual and placing it into the context of social engagement, how might the church live between life and death as it develops a transforming spirituality? To put it another way, how might a community of believers turn theological belief into tangible action leading to transformation? Rowan's empirical study among evangelical churches (Methodist, Presbyterian, Sidang Injil Borneo, and Pentecostal) is helpful to think about how the church might be involved in social engagement in response to Islamization. Rowan surveyed 3,042 Malaysian Christians across East and West Malaysia to understand their attitudes toward politics, race, identity, and the role of the church in the Malaysian society.[80] In the eighteen-item questionnaire, the questions pertinent to this essay are those that deal with social engagement and religious freedom. For example, on the question, "Does your local church help you apply your faith to issues facing society," most respondents (70%) agreed with this statement. However, in looking at the overall responses, Rowan points out and concludes that:

> The survey saw most of the respondents agree that their local church helped them apply their faith to the wider issues of society, and yet, most churches are not multiracial even though respondents agreed that they should be; few congregations are involved in local initiatives that promote national unity; almost 60 percent said 'no' or 'not sure' to whether their church had been a driving force for reconciliation and national unity since independence; and over half said they were uncommitted citizens of the country.[81]

Further, Ng has pointed out that the church has not done well in participating in social engagement:

> Sometimes, a church may launch into some form of social services for reasons of conscience. But no sooner have such steps been taken, nervousness sets in. Fears arise that these activities would dilute the Church's evangelical commitment. Its reputation will be tarred with the 'Social

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[80] Peter Rowan, *Proclaiming the Peacemaker: The Malaysian Church as an Agent of Reconciliation in a Multicultural Society* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2012).

[81] Rowan, *Proclaiming the Peacemaker,* 146.

Gospel'. Whatever remnants of social concern is quickly abandoned in the event of any pressures (real or imagined) from the government. The result is one of halting and occasional incursions by the Church in the world. Such ineffectiveness underlines the difficulty of the church to be the salt and leaven for civil society. It is clear that our churches need to exercise a strong, determined and purposeful social responsibility that springs not from unstable impulses of piety, but from a clear and comprehensive theological understanding of the mission of the Church. Only then will the Gospel be seen as having a positive contribution to nation-building.[82]

Ng concludes that the church is imbalanced between the work of the Spirit and social engagement. As a result, Ng argues for a more comprehensive interpretation of the missiological facet of the work of the Spirit and for a more of a uniting between Spirit and Kingdom, "The Spirit is the inner power of the Kingdom and the Kingdom is the outward expression of the Spirit."[83] For Ng, this will aid the church in developing a transforming spirituality that strongly shapes social engagement.[84] Thus, a suggested guideline for practice is to acknowledge that Islamization has produced trauma in the life of the church, and in spite of the trauma (that needs to be dealt with), the church should not retreat from social engagement. This balance between the work of the Spirit and social engagement needs to be incorporated more intentionally into the life of the church through, for example, its discipleship process and religious education programs. As Rowan aptly puts it, churches should be these "contrasting communities"[85] that are attractive and viable alternatives to the dominant culture.

In respect to the external component that guides and informs practice, the church needs to deal better with its cultural and ethnic identity especially within the context of Islamic resurgence. Lau proposes a useful step forward by using trauma and depicting trauma as ontological.[86] From a Žižekian-Lacanian view, trauma is

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[82] Ng Kam Weng, "Spirit and Kingdom: Power and Manifestation in Mission," *Poimen* (January-March 1994): 20–21.

[83] Ng, "Spirit and Kingdom," 31.

[84] See Kam Weng Ng, *Bridge-Building in a Pluralist Society: A Christian Contribution* (PJ: Pustaka SUFES, 1994).

[85] Rowan, *Proclaiming the Peacemaker,* 149–50.

[86] Lau, "Intimating the Unconscious," is certainly aware of seeing the problems of the cultural and ethnic identity perspective through the lens of trauma, "In some

at the core of ethnic and cultural identity. This essential core element of trauma is "neither a positive essence (which conveniently favours powerful groups) nor a socially constructed 'performance' (which lacks adequate grounding). Instead, the universality is an anti-essential split or shattering which defines yet renders awry everything."[87] By reconceptualizing trauma from a cultural and ethnic identity perspective, it means an acknowledgement that there are incongruities and friction troubling all relationships, particularly those among ethnic groups. Lau believes for peaceful ethnic co-existence to happen, "they must first encounter and accept the 'inhuman' or the 'monster' in each other. To recognize that the ethnic Other is a 'monster' in a psychoanalytical sense is to see in him an inhuman force which rages against the façades of personality and sociality."[88] What happens when this process of ontological trauma is considered and embraced? Again, Lau lucidly states:

> Seeing the trauma and weaknesses which constitutes the other person(s) may, in other words, inspire ethical benevolence and serve as an antidote to mutual blaming. To fully believe that failure by both sides is imminent is the first step towards mutual forgiveness, a desire to work for greater understanding and support. We will stop blaming each other once we accept that relationships, especially those of great ethical and political significance, are extremely difficult and that, we all fail.[89]

For Lau, the ethical command is to reprove different communities "to see the abyss of limitations and vulnerability in *both* their own communities *and* that of others."[90] Lau believes that this idea of shared trauma will better bring about a Malaysian ethnic and cultural identity for all Malaysians of all faiths. Accordingly, this guideline into practice recognizes, empathizes, and provides a connection towards the Other. The hopeful result is a deeper theological vision and understanding of the church's self-identity

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sense, this perspective tends to ignore altogether the question of *how* any particular ethnic group is positively constituted and merely focuses on what threatens it or other groups vis-à-vis itself. Furthermore, is there any specific form of trauma required? Does trauma *always* make community? Does it not also, as one would intuitively think, unmake it?"

[87] Lau, "Intimating the Unconscious," 108.
[88] Lau, "Intimating the Unconscious," 110.
[89] Lau, "Intimating the Unconscious," 112.
[90] Lau, "Intimating the Unconscious," 111.

and its ongoing witness inside the church and to the broader society.

Conclusion

The resurgence of Islamization in Malaysia is based on historical and racial/ethnic factors. These factors seem to be deeply ingrained in the national identity of its citizens that affect all areas of daily life, especially political and religious life. This is evident in the church's response when attempts on its religious freedoms are being limited by the Islamization process. Moreover, the church's response from various ecclesial traditions has often been theologically and pragmatically uneven and inconsistent in its social engagement practice and thus not making it a credible and viable "contrasting community." However, a transforming spirituality that understands justice and asks individual Christians and the church body to look more deeply into itself may provide a way to move forward that helps the church to flourish. One possible way is to look at how the limiting of religious freedom from Islamization and its effect has had on the church, causing trauma. By looking at trauma within the life of the church in its construction of self-identity, it might open up possibilities for a more thoughtful practice of social engagement that is productive. One way to see this productivity is to bring to surface those hard and real conversations that need to happen within the church, but also outside the walls of the church with the ethnic and religious Other. If this can happen without blaming one another, this may be a significant step in moving forward to nurture better ethnic/racial relationships and a more robust social engagement of the church.

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"Does Learning Style Matter?":
Primary Lessons for Asian Theological Education from a Case Study of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Seminary Students in Malaysian Borneo Using the Felder-Soloman Index of Learning Styles

Joy Oy-Mooi Saik and Siaw Fung Chong

For far too long, theological education in the multicultural context of Sabah in Malaysian Borneo, and in Asia in general, appears not to have paid much attention to the issue of the learning styles of the students they teach. A brief survey of the literature on learning styles reveals that not much has been done particularly in the context of theological education, especially in relation to the learning styles of people groups in multicultural settings. We conducted a preliminary investigation of the learning styles of various people groups through a survey administered to seminary students in Sabah. The 44-item Index of Learning Styles (ILS) questionnaire developed by Richard Felder and Barbara Soloman was used to assess the learning styles of 50 participants in this study — thirty from indigenous ethnic backgrounds and twenty non-indigenous. In general, the participants perceived the results of the ILS regarding their learning styles to be accurate. Further analysis using Pearson's Chi-Squared test revealed that participants with similar learning styles from different ethnic backgrounds (indigenous or non-indigenous) may opt for different instructional or study strategies. This observation from the study suggests that theological educators working in multicultural contexts, such as Malaysia itself, and in many other parts of Asia would do well to pay attention to the learning styles and ethnic origin of the learners — in order to improve instructional and learning effectiveness.

Introduction

Students all over the globe learn and process information in different ways: some learn by seeing and hearing; others by reflecting and reasoning logically and intuitively. Anita Woolfolk defined learning styles as the "characteristic ways a person

approaches learning and studying . . . most of the research on learning styles assess students' learning preferences for particular environments and modalities."[1] In the same note, preferred learning styles are individual preferences for "liking to learn in a particular way," and preferred instructional and study strategies are individual preferences for how one prefers to be taught and how one prefers to study.[2] While no one learning style is preferable or inferior to another, each comes with its own characteristic strengths and weaknesses.

Teachers all over the globe teach differently: some lecture and emphasize memory; others spend more time on activities and focus on application. According to Richard M.Felder, "when mismatches exist between the learning styles of students and the teaching style of instructors, students may become bored, inattentive in class, do poorly on tests or assignments, and get discouraged about the course, and themselves."[3] How students learn, how they prefer to learn, and how they perceive themselves to be learning appears to be a neglected area of inquiry in theological education. According to Rogers B. Donald, this is surprising since it influences the effectiveness of any curriculum.[4] While helping various theology students in a particular theological school become aware of their personal learning and cognitive styles, Rogers found that where theological educators considered student learning styles in their instructional design, it significantly enhanced the teaching-learning process and learning outcomes were more productive.[5]

Since the late 1970s, extensive research and writing has been carried out on learning style preferences. The number of instruments for assessing student learning style preferences has steadily increased.[6] A review of the literature suggests that the concept of learning styles has its proponents and critics.

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[1] Anita Woolfolk, *Educational Psychology*, 14th ed. (New York: Pearson Education Inc., 2019), 139–40.

[2] Woolfolk, *Educational Psychology*, 141, 171.

[3] Richard M. Felder, "Learning Styles and the Index of Learning Styles," *Richard Felder's Legacy Website*, STEM Education Resources, accessed January 12, 2019, https://www.engr.ncsu.edu/stem-resources/legacy-site/learning-styles/.

[4] Donald B. Rogers, "Enhancing Learner Awareness through Feedback Instruments," *Theological Education* 13.3 (Spring 1977): 158.

[5] Rogers, "Enhancing Learner Awareness," 158.

[6] Anita Woolfolk, *Educational Psychology*, 8th ed. (Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon, 1995), 128.

Proponents and developers of Learning Style Inventory believe that awareness of learning style differences can help both students and instructors. Students whose preferences were measured reported that it helped them discover the strengths and weaknesses of how they learn. Instructors have similarly reported using knowledge of learning styles to good effect.[7] According to Nancy Csapo and Roger Hayen, "understanding learning styles and the role of learning styles in the teaching-learning process is a key component in effective teaching."[8]

Critics of learning style theory believe it is highly over-rated and does not need to be considered when designing instruction. Cindy May's recent study investigating the validity of taking learning styles into account found no credible evidence that matching teaching style to students' learning preferences leads to improved learning. May cites three reasons: a) there is scant scientific evidence to support the idea that students' learning outcomes are better when instructional strategies match with students' learning style preference, b) in an era of online classrooms or distance learning, students master the information on their own in the absence of a teacher, thus, a more important consideration might be to match a student's individual learning style to study strategies matching their learning style preference, c) factors other than learning style preference influence student learning outcomes, for example: planning, scheduling study sessions, and the student's effort.[9]

While the application of learning style theory in academic institutional settings, and critical analysis of its usage, is rapidly acquiring a solid research base in social science literature, little has been done to extend this to the field of theological education. This

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[7] Richard M. Felder, "Are Learning Styles Invalid? (Hint: NO!)," *On-Course Newsletter* (September 27, 2010): 1.

[8] Nancy Caspo and Roger Hayen, "The Role of Learning Styles in the Teaching-Learning Process," *Issues in Information System* 7, no. 1 (2006): 129.

[9] Cindy May, "The Problem with Learning Styles," *Scientific American*, May 29, 2018, accessed October 10, 2019, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-problem-with-learning-styles/. May cites Polly R. Hussman and Valerie Dean O'Loughlin, "Another Nail in the Coffin for Learning Styles? Disparities among Undergraduates Anatomy Students' Studies Strategies, Class Performance, and Reported VARK Learning Styles," *Anatomical Sciences Education* 12, no. 1 (2019): 6. The empirical results of the 400 undergraduate students who participated in Hussman & O'Loughlin's study showed that no particular learning style resulted in better learning outcomes than another learning style.

study wishes to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by investigating whether learning, teaching, and study styles matter with reference to the instructional and study strategies preferences of a diverse student population made up of indigenous and non-indigenous people groups in the context of theological education in Malaysia, and to the wider context of theological education in Asia and beyond.

Research Questions and Instruments

This study is conducted to answer the following research questions:

1) What are the learning styles of the participants of the study, and is there any relationship between their ethnic origin (indigenous or non-indigenous) and their learning styles?
2) Is there any correlation between the participants' learning styles and their preferred instructional and study strategies?
3) Among participants of similar learning styles, is there any relationship between their ethnic origin and their preferred instructional and study strategies?

To collect the data needed for this study, we used a standardized instrument to assess the learning styles of the participants and administered a survey questionnaire to gather other related information. The standardized instrument used was the Index of Learning Style (ILS) and the survey questionnaire was given the title "Learning Style, Teaching & Study Strategies Survey Questionnaire" (LS-TSSSQ).

The Index of Learning Styles

The Index of Learning Styles (ILS) is a 44-item forced-choice instrument developed by Richard Felder and Barbara Soloman based upon the four scales of learning dimensions in the Felder-Silverman Learning Style Model.[10] The four scales (active/reflective,

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[10] The Felder-Silverman Learning Style model was originally applied to engineering education but is now applied to diverse disciplines of inquiry. The ILS is an online survey instrument to assess preferences in four dimensions of a learning style model formulated by Richard Felder and Linda Silverman in 1988. Online users work through 44 a-b questions and submit the survey. The results are reported back to immediately be copied or printed out. It can also be taken in the format of a pencil-and-paper instrument that can be more easily administered and scored. A

visual/verbal, sensing/intuitive, and sequential/global) are represented in the format of a continuum with one learning preference on the far left and the other on the far right. It attempts to respond to four elements in the teaching-learning process: 1) What type of information does the student preferentially perceive: external through sights and sounds or internal through insights or hunches? 2) How do students prefer information to be presented: visual through pictures or auditory through words or sounds? 3) How do students prefer to process information: actively through engagement in physical activity or reflectively through introspection? 4) How do students progress toward understanding: through sequential steps or globally in large jumps? Felder and Spurlin summarized the four scales as follows:[11]

Active/Reflective Learners. Active learners learn by doing something with the information they have learned. They prefer to process information actively either by talking it out or trying it out. Reflective learners learn by thinking about the information and understanding it before acting on it.

Sensing/Intuitive Learners. Sensing learners learn by solving problems through established scientific methods. They are oriented towards details, facts, and figures. Intuitive learners prefer getting the big picture first through discovering the possibilities of how information relates to other information.

Visual/Verbal Learners. Visual learners prefer visual presentations such as pictures, diagrams, graphs, charts, films, and demonstrations. Verbal learners prefer explanation through written or spoken word.

Sequential/Global Learners. Sequential learners organize information in an orderly or sequential manner with each step following logically

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new modified ILS instrument (2007) makes two changes to the original 1991 scale, it introduces a neutral response option for those who feel they have no preference and now offers two levels of strength of preference (moderate and strong). See Thomas A. Litzinger et al., "A Psychometric Study of the Index of Learning Styles," *Journal of Engineering Education* 96, no. 4 (2007): 309.

[11] Richard M. Felder and Joni Spurlin, "Applications, Reliability and Validity of the Index of Learning Styles," *International Journal of Engineering Education* 21, no. 1 (2005): 103.

from the previous step. Global learners organize information in a big-picture way, randomly, often without seeing connections or relationships between sets of information, and "are often able to solve complex problems quickly, but may have difficulty explaining how they did it."

In this study, the ILS was selected for four reasons:

1) Since its inception in 1991, several studies have tested the reliability and validity of the ILS and of data collected using the ILS across several study disciplines (Engineering, Liberal Arts, and Education).
2) Undergraduates and graduates were included in the samples.[12]
3) Research is ongoing, but results from several studies have concluded that, generally, the ILS meets accepted reliability standards for instruments of this type.
4) Although its reliability and validity are routinely challenged, it has frequently been successful in helping students better understand how they learn, and helping teachers design effective instruction.[13]

Although designed primarily for engineering students, the ILS has been used by academic institutions in different parts of the world, including by a Malaysian polytechnic to assess learning style differences in technology students.[14]

Few learning style theorists include instructional and study strategies with their research. Felder and Silverman have proposed a parallel teaching and study-style model classifying instructional methods and corresponding study strategies according to how well they address the proposed learning style components in their

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[12] Maria Platsidou and Panayiota Metallidou, "Validity and Reliability Issues of Two Learning Style Inventories in a Greek Sample: Kolb's Learning Style Inventory and Felder & Soloman's Index of Learning Styles," *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 203 (2009): 324. Also, Litzinger et al., "A Psychometric Study of the Index of Learning Styles," 309.

[13] Felder, "Are Learning Styles Invalid?," 1. Since its inception, the ILS has received more than 100,000 hits a year and has been translated into half a dozen languages. Also Felder, "Learning and Teaching Styles in Engineering Education," 674.

[14] Che Ghani Che Kob et al., "Amalan Gaya Pembelajaran Pelajar Cemerlang di Politeknik Seberang Perai: Kajian Pelajar Malaysia berdasarkan Model Felder Silverman." *Geografia. Malaysian Journal of Society and Space* 12, no. 3 (2016): 181.

learning style model.[15]

Since the 1970s, the Kolb Learning Style Inventory has been the instrument of choice in several empirical studies in a seminary setting.[16] This is the first time the Felder-Silverman ILS questionnaire has been used to measure the learning style preferences of a diverse seminarian population.

ILS scores for each of the four scales are obtained by subtracting the smaller total from the larger total in each scale. Each of the pairs of items in each scale has a descriptor (a) or (b). So, for example: on the visual/verbal scale, where visual is designated as (a) and verbal is (b), if the total for the visual/verbal scale is 11a (visual) and 2b (verbal), 11a – 2b = 9a, indicating that you have a strong preference for the visual dimension. A score of 1–3 indicates a mild preference or a balance of the two, scores 5–7 indicates a moderate preference; and 9–11, a strong preference.

Learning Style, Teaching & Study Strategies Survey Questionnaire (LS-TSSSQ)

Felder and Silverman also proposed a parallel teaching-style model classifying instructional strategies according to how well they address the proposed learning style components in their learning style model.[17] In keeping with Felder-Silverman's Dimensions of Learning and Teaching Styles proposals, a second research instrument with a 16-item instructional strategy corresponding to their proposals was included in the LS-TSSSQ. Also included in the LS-TSSSQ was a 16-item study strategy section developed from a mirror-reading exercise of Felder-Silverman's four-page handout of

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[15] See the Felder-Silverman Dimensions of Learning Styles Chart in "Learning and Teaching Styles in Engineering Education," 675 and "Learning Styles and Strategies," a separate four-page handout which contains study tips from *Rebecca Brent and Richard Felder's website, Resources for Teaching and Learning STEM.*

[16] Alan Algee, "A Comparison of Learning Styles between Asian and American Seminary Students. Research Methodology" (EdD diss., Nova University, 1993); Anthony Zamble, "A Comparison of Learning Style Differences as Measured by Kolb's Learning Style Inventory between Trinity's Master of Divinity, Master of Arts in Educational Ministries, Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology, and Master of Arts in Christian Ministry Students" (MA thesis, Trinity International University, 2001). Kolb Learning Styles was developed by David A. Kolb in 1984. It consists of a 4-stage experiential learning cycle (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) and four learning styles (diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating).

[17] Richard M. Felder and Linda K. Silverman, "Learning and Teaching Styles in Engineering Education," *Journal of Engineering Education* 78, no. 7 (1988): 674.

study tips to help students learn more effectively in their learning style preference.[18] A seven-point Likert scale with the descriptors "Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree," was used to measure whether a particular instructional strategy or study strategy would aid learning. The teaching strategies and study strategies corresponding to each learning style, based upon the Felder-Silverman and Felder-Soloman proposals, are incorporated in Tables 2 and 3. The LS-TSSSQ served to collect data to be analyzed together with the data collected by the ILS to answer the research questions set for this study.

Procedures

Data was collected at the Sabah Theological Seminary (STS) in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.[19] The 44-item Felder & Solomon ILS Questionnaire was administered to 50 participants who are students of the seminary to assess the type and strength of their learning style preference. This was followed by the 12-item LS-TSSSQ mostly in the form of a Likert scale. This was done with two objectives in mind.

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[18] This handout can be accessed from Rebecca Brent and Richard Felder, "Resources for Teaching and Learning STEM," *Rebecca Brent and Richard Felder's website*, accessed September 10, 2019, https://educationdesignsinc.com/index-of-learning-styles/. Mirror-reading is a method that attempts to make more explicit what is implicit in a given text. Though somewhat controversial, it is used by some biblical scholars to find out what the original authors were responding to, assuming that biblical authors were responding to a situation in their writing; see *Mira Scriptura* (2018), accessed February 12, 2019, https://mirrorreading.com/about/. Dick Wirz, "Students' Learning Styles vs. Professors' Teaching Styles," *Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 2–5, attempted a similar interpretation or mirror-reading of Felder-Soloman's Index of Learning Styles.

[19] STS started in 1980 as a Bible Training Centre in response to the needs of mission outreach among the indigenous people groups of Sabah with the help of the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia (BCCM). Its initial purpose was to provide a year of elementary theological education in Malay to prepare lay leaders from rural areas to assist in evangelism and pastoral work. As the church in Sabah experienced rapid growth, this created a shortage of indigenous pastors and pastoral workers in remote villages. A vision for the Bible Training Centre to offer more advanced theological education came to fruition in 1988, after a concerted effort between the BCCM, the Anglican Diocese of Sabah, and the Protestant Church of Sabah (PCS) when it began to operate as the Sabah Theological Seminary offering DipTh and BTh degree programs in Bahasa Malaysia. In 1990, a Chinese department was set up and accredited by the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA). *STS 25th Anniversary Thanksgiving Celebration Bulletin* (2013): 40–43

First, to find out how well the ILS results matched with their own perception of preferred learning style when given three response options: Very well/just like me, Fairly well/somewhat like me, and Poorly/not at all like me.[20] Second, to ascertain how the sixteen instructional strategies and the sixteen study strategies listed in the LS-TSSSQ would match with the participants' learning styles.

Twenty-seven (27) male and twenty-three (23) female participants completed the two questionnaires. The sample comprised undergraduate and graduate, indigenous and non-indigenous, Year-1 to Year-4 students enrolled in various programs—Certificate and Diploma, Bachelor's degree, and Master's degree. The indigenous sample consists of 30 participants who are tribal people from Sabah and Sarawak in Malaysian Borneo—classified as Kadazan-Dusun, Rungus, Iban, Murut, and other smaller tribes. The 20 non-indigenous participants were all Chinese. The paper-and-pencil version of the ILS was used as it was easier and faster to administer than the online version.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the data included description of the participants' responses and correlation analysis using Pearson's Chi-Squared Test to evaluate correlations between learning styles and preferred instructional and study strategies for participants in the indigenous group (I-Group) and the non-indigenous group (NI-Group).[21]

Participants' Learning Styles

The ILS measures learning styles on four scales—Activist-Reflector, Sensing-Intuitive, Visual-Verbal, Sequential-Global. Scores for each scale range from –11 to 11, negative values being on the left of and positive values on the right side of the scale. Distribution of participants on the four scales is displayed in Table 1. All participants felt that the description provided by their ILS scores matched them fairly well or very well.

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[20] The LS-TSSSQ also gathered demographic data from the respondents: indigenous/non-indigenous, gender, age-range, number of years in STS, and degree program.

[21] As the sample size is small, a non-parametric test such as the Pearson's Chi-Squared Test is appropriate as it does not involve any assumption that data is normally distributed.

TABLE 1: Distribution of Learning Styles

	Strong −11 to −9	Moderate −8 to −4	Mild −3 to -1	Mild 1 to 3	Moderate 4 to 8	Strong 9 to 11	
Activist	0	6	13	21	8	2	Reflector
Sensing	3	16	19	9	2	1	Intuitive
Visual	10	12	10	10	7	1	Verbal
Sequential	0	3	15	18	11	3	Global

The distribution of participants on the learning styles index was as follows: Activist 19 versus Reflector 31; Sensing 38 versus Intuitive 12; Visual 32 versus Verbal 18; and Sequential 18 versus Global 32; yielding a general learning style profile of Reflector-Sensing-Visual-Global for the participants of the study. Other than a relatively high number being Strong Visual (10), most participants are located in the Mild and Moderate zones of the scales. In general, Pearson's Chi-Squared test revealed insignificant correlation (at $p=0.05$) between ethnic origin and learning style. However, it is worth noting that there may be significant correlation between ethnic origin and the Visual-Verbal domain if the significance level is set higher at $p=0.10$ (χ^2 (1) = 3.704, $p=0.054$), in that the NI-Group seemed more inclined to be Visual learners than the I-Group. This suggests a possible ethnic difference (indigenous versus non-indigenous) in learning style, particularly in the Visual-Verbal domain.

Learning Styles and Preferred Instructional Strategies

Participants entered scores on a 7-point Likert scale to indicate the extent to which the 16-item instructional strategies would be helpful or not. Generally, this yielded high scores—6 for "agreed"; 7 for "strongly agreed." Pearson's Chi-Squared tests were conducted to assess the relationship between learning styles and the extent to which instructional strategies were considered helpful for learning by the overall group (all participants). Table 2 displays the results of these tests.

TABLE 2: Correlations Between Learning Styles, Preferred Instructional Strategies, and Ethnic Origin

No.	Instructional Strategies	Learning Styles	Overall	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
1	Lectures with lots of explanation.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal @	Sig. p<0.05 Verbal	Sig. p<0.05 Verbal	
		Sensing-			

#	Description	Dimension			
		Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global			
2	Lectures with visual presentation.	Activist-Reflector #			Sig. p<0.10 Reflector
		Visual-Verbal @	Sig. p<0.05 Visual	Sig. p<0.05 Visual	
		Sensing-Intuitive #			Sig. p<0.10 Sensing
		Sequential-Global			
3*	Group discussion and verbal exchange of ideas.				
4	Lectures with live demonstrations.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal @	Sig. p<0.10 Visual		Sig. p<0.10 Visual
		Sensing-Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global			
5*	Course material explained in sequential or logical order.				
6	Learning activities connected to the real world.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal #			Sig. p<0.05 Visual
		Sensing-Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global @	Sig. p<0.05 Global	Sig. p<0.05 Global	
7	Instructor give the big picture before going into detail, shows how it relates to other subjects.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal #			Sig. p<0.10 Visual
		Sensing-Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global #			Sig. p<0.10 Global
8	You can do something with what you have learned.	Activist-Reflector @	Sig. p<0.05 Reflector		Sig. p<0.05 Reflector
		Visual-Verbal #		Sig. p<0.10 Visual	
		Sensing-			

		Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global			
9	Instructor makes students give application of the solution in a wide range of ideas.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal			
		Sensing-Intuitive #			Sig. p<0.05 Sensing
		Sequential-Global #		Sig. p<0.10 Sequential	
10	Instructor relates new topics to what you already know.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal			
		Sensing-Intuitive	Sig. p<0.10 Sensing		
		Sequential-Global @	Sig. p<0.05 Sequential	Sig. p<0.10 Sequential	
11	Instructor gives you freedom to be creative about how to do your work.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal			
		Sensing-Intuitive	Sig. p<0.10 Intuitive		
		Sequential-Global			
12	Instructor helps you to discover possibilities and relationship with the new information or theory.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal #		Sig. p<0.05 Visual	
		Sensing-Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global #			Sig. p<0.10 Sequential
13*	Instructor gives specific examples of how concepts and procedures apply in practice in the real world.				
14	Instructor makes you think about what you are learning.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal	Sig. p<0.10 Verbal		
		Sensing-Intuitive			

		Sequential-Global			
15*	Independent guided study where you can work on your own.				
16	Hands-on activities where you can try things out for yourself.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal			
		Sensing-Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global #			Sig. p<0.05 Global

* Insignificant result; # Insignificant result overall, significant for one subgroup (I or NI); @ Significant result overall, significant only for one subgroup (I or NI).

Only 4 of the 16-item instructional strategies yielded insignificant result (3, 5, 13, 15—marked with *); 12 of the instructional strategies showed a significant correlation with some of the individual and overall group. This suggests that there may be a possible correlation between participants' learning style and their preferred instructional strategies. Interestingly, significant results emerged for one group (I or NI) when insignificant result is observed for the overall group for some domains with reference to a number of instructional strategies in particular (2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 16—marked with #). For example, in item 2, the NI-Group Reflector and Sensing learners seemed to prefer lectures with visual presentation (at $p<0.10$) when no significant result was observed for the overall group and for the I-Group with the same preferred learning styles. Meanwhile, when significant result is observed for the overall group, only one of the I or NI group revealed significant result for certain domains with reference to specific instructional strategies (1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10—marked with @). For instance, in item 10, the Sequential learners in the I-Group appeared to prefer the instructors to relate new topics of learning to what they already know more significantly (at $p<0.10$) than the Sequential learners in the NI-Group. This indicates possible ethnic differences in preferred instructional strategies among participants of similar learning styles. Where an indigenous group and non-indigenous group have similar learning styles, each group may, conversely, opt for different instructional strategies.

Learning Styles and Preferred Study Strategies

Pearson's Chi-Squared tests were also conducted to assess the relationship between participants' learning styles and the extent to which they as an overall group considered the 16 study strategies to be helpful or not. Results are in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Correlations Between Learning Styles, Preferred Study Strategies, and Ethnic Origin

No.	Study Strategies	Learning Styles	Overall	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
1	Study with a partner, quiz each other.	Activist-Reflector #			Sig. p<0.10 Activist
		Visual-Verbal			
		Sensing-Intuitive #		Sig. p<0.10 Intuitive	
		Sequential-Global			
2	Read materials aloud or listen to audio recording of lecture.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal	Sig. p<0.05 Verbal	Sig. p<0.10 Verbal	Sig. p<0.05 Verbal
		Sensing-Intuitive @	Sig. p<0.05 Sensing	Sig. p<0.10 Intuitive	
		Sequential-Global			
3*	Read from textbook, highlight important points.				
4	Study in a group.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal			
		Sensing-Intuitive	Sig. p<0.10 Intuitive		
		Sequential-Global			
5	Study alone, make summaries of readings.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal			
		Sensing-Intuitive @	Sig. p<0.05 Sensing	Sig. p<0.05 Sensing	

		Sequential-Global #		Sig. p<0.10 Sequential	
6	Organize important points into a sequence of steps to be taken.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal			
		Sensing-Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global @	Sig. p<0.05 Sequential	Sig. p<0.05 Sequential	
7	Use flashcards to review.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal @	Sig. p<0.05 Visual	Sig. p<0.05 Visual	
		Sensing-Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global			
8	Make an outline of materials in a logical order.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal @	Sig. p<0.10 Visual	Sig. p<0.10 Visual	
		Sensing-Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global			
9	Find ways to apply or use the information.	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-Verbal #			Sig. p<0.05 Visual
		Sensing-Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global			
10	Review what was read, think of possible questions and applications.	Activist-Reflector @	Sig. p<0.05 Reflector		Sig. p<0.05 Reflector
		Visual-Verbal			
		Sensing-Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global			
11	Get an overview of the course	Activist-Reflector			
		Visual-			

#	Statement	Dimension			
	material before going into specifics.	Verbal			
		Sensing-Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global #			Sig. p<0.10 Global
12	Relate new topics to known things to see the big picture.	Activist-Reflector #		Sig. p<0.10 Reflector	
		Visual-Verbal @	Sig. p<0.10 Visual	Sig. p<0.05 Visual	
		Sensing-Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global @	Sig. p<0.05 Global		Sig. p<0.05 Global
13	Find ways to connect information to the real world.	Activist-Reflector #		All agree or strongly agree	Sig. p<0.10 Reflector
		Visual-Verbal #			
		Sensing-Intuitive			
		Sequential-Global	Sig. p<0.10 Global		
14*	Ask for specific examples of concepts and how these are applied in the real world.				
15	Take time to read the entire question before answering.	Activist-Reflector	Sig. p<0.10 Reflector		
		Visual-Verbal			
		Sensing-Intuitive #			Sig. p<0.05 Sensing
		Sequential-Global			
16	Check work carefully to prevent careless mistakes.	Activist-Reflector	Sig. p<0.10 Activist		
		Visual-Verbal			
		Sensing-Intuitive #		Sig. p<0.10 Intuitive	
		Sequential-Global #		Sig. p<0.10 Global	

* Insignificant result; # Insignificant result overall, significant for one subgroup (I or NI); @ Significant result overall, significant only for one subgroup (I or NI).

Only 2 of the 16 study strategies yielded no significant result (3, 14—marked with *), with the other 14 having a significant correlation with some of the learning styles of individual or overall group. As with the instructional strategies, possible correlation is observed between participants' learning style and their preferred study strategies. Similarly, there were cases where significant results were observed for one of the groups (I or NI) when insignificant result was observed overall or for the other group of similar preferred style (1, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16—marked with #). For example, in item 16, while insignificant result is observed for the overall group, I-Group Intuitive and Global learners appeared to prefer to check work carefully to prevent careless mistakes (at $p<0.10$) when NI-Group learners of the same learning style did not display significant result. Also, when the overall group yielded significant result, only one of the subgroups (I or NI) revealed significant results for some items (2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12—marked with @). In item 10, for instance, NI-Group Reflector learners prefer to review what was read and think of possible questions and applications (at $p<0.05$) when the I-Group learners in the same domain of learning style did not yield significant result. This suggests possible ethnic differences in preferred study strategies among participants of similar learning styles, that it is possible that the indigenous and non-indigenous learners of similar learning styles may incline to different study strategies.

Conclusion

To begin with, we must admit that this study is at a preliminary stage with many basic questions yet to be answered. However, the results from this small sample have already indicated a possible correlation between the learning styles of learners and their preferred instructional and study strategies, and even possible ethnic differences in preferred instructional and study strategies among learners of similar learning styles. It is important, at this juncture, to stress that the possible relationships and differences observed in this study need to be explored and confirmed with further research, before the causes of such patterns can be ascertained. Therefore, the current findings cannot be used to stereotype any group in terms of their cultural values or learning preferences. It only suggests that the teaching-learning process is not "value-free," and that all learners (and teachers) may bring their own distinct values, characteristics, and preferences into the process

which could affect the teaching-learning outcomes. For theological educators worldwide, particularly when teaching in a multicultural context like Malaysia, the findings of this study may provide insights for in-depth consideration.

Recommendations for Theological Education in Asia and Beyond

The findings of this study suggests that perhaps the teaching methods of the instructor may not be all there is in the process of enhancing learning in the dynamics of teaching and learning. As mentioned earlier, Felder and Brunt observed the link between learning effectiveness and the learners' self-awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses in learning.[22] The findings of this study suggests that learning style preferences hold an important place in the process of instructional design and development. This should motivate theological educators to bring some changes to their repertoire of teaching pedagogy, particularly to include a variety of learning experiences that would meet the learning needs of most learner groups rather than heavily favoring the lecture method which may not be the preferred instructional style of all their students.[23]

In relation to learning styles, instructional and study strategies of people groups in multicultural settings, our recommendations are as follows. First, we recommend that theological educators who teach in multicultural settings should consider conducting surveys of the learning styles of the ethnic groups they find in their classrooms, as should those teaching the diaspora in other parts the world. This becomes especially important when preparing student-ministers to lead multiethnic church congregations within Malaysia or diaspora congregations overseas, and, for those who came from abroad, to help them adjust when they return to serve in their home country after studying away from home. Along this line, we

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[22] Richard M. Felder and Rebecca Brent, "Understanding Student Differences," *Journal of Engineering Education* 94, no. 1 (2005): 69.

[23] While the lecture method has dominated theological education, some Asian theological educators are beginning to question whether this one-size-fits-all approach can meet the needs of every student, equips seminarians holistically, and promote intellectual excellence in Asian theological education? See Louise Tam Suk-Ming, "Students' Preferences for Various Teaching Methods in a Graduate Theological Seminary in South-East Asia" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1989); Phillips Koh, "Active Learning and Intellectual Excellence in Theological Education in South-East Asia" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1998).

recommend that it would be beneficial to share the results of the assessment of learning style preferences with them, so that the student-ministers may acquire an insight into their possible learning strengths and weaknesses which will provide clues as to how they can overcome academic difficulties and improve academic performance. Knowledge of their learning style preferences can help them to understand why they face academic difficulties, or why they feel uncomfortable with certain types of courses and instructors but grasp others with less difficulty. Becoming aware of their learning style preferences can help these students reframe their academic difficulties in terms of mismatches between an instructor's teaching style and their learning style where previously they might have put the blame entirely on their own self-perceived inadequacies ("I'm no good") or on their instructor being a poor teacher.[24]

Next, we recommend that learning styles should be taken into account in the process of instructional design and development in order to enhance learning effectiveness. The more aware instructors are of learning style differences and what effects this might have on learner performance and attitudes, the more they can design and develop the instructional processes effectively that would benefit their students.

Finally, we recommend that theological educators who teach in multicultural settings should be aware of and be willing to accommodate possible learner differences in preference of instructional strategies. This means that instructors should endeavor to take a balanced instructional approach that would meet the needs of a broad spectrum of learning styles within each learner group. This "balanced" approach would have a "double-edged" effect on the learning experience of the learners. On the one hand, it would bring about the benefit of matching learners' preferences so that they are comfortable with the familiar, hence more able to learn effectively. On the other hand, instructional methods which do not match their preferred learning styles, though not so familiar, may encourage them to expand their learning horizon and explore other learning style categories, moving them toward a position of greater balance from their original inclinations.[25]

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[24] Felder and Spurlin, "Applications, Reliability and Validity of the Index of Learning Styles," 105, 107, 110.

[25] Felder, "Are Learning Styles Invalid?," 3–5.

No doubt these are huge challenges for the church catholic and for theological educators both in Asia and across the globe; but, could this be one of many valuable contributions that Malaysian biblical scholars and theologians, both those teaching locally and those overseas, can make vis-à-vis training student-ministers how to be culturally sensitive to, reach out to, teach and disciple the diaspora living in their midst? Even as two opposing sociocultural trends appear to be simultaneously at work on the global stage today (nationalism versus transnationalism); multicultural and multilingual Malaysian biblical scholars and theologians appear to be well placed to take the lead in bringing about effective change in the way we develop and execute theological education, so that it remains fit for purpose in an era characterized by the opportunities and challenges of migration and globalization.

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Concluding Malaysian Diasporic Reflections from the Ends of the Earth

Contextuality and Marginality in Hermeneutical and Theological Method for the Third Millennium

Amos Wai-Ming Yong

> *This has been one of the most satisfying editorial projects I have had the joy so far of participating in, and readers will surely guess that this is because this volume foregrounds the Malaysian experiences, perspectives, and voices that are part of my identity.[1] In this book's concluding pages, then, I reflect on our contribution as a whole, and as a systematician by training, and as one rooted ecclesially in the Pentecostal tradition, it will not be unanticipated that the following features two intertwining sets of summary claims: that the preceding essays provide fresh perspective on the notions of contextuality and marginality so important to contemporary biblical studies and theological discourse on the one hand, and that they resound the many tongues of Pentecost in unexpectedly complex ways on the other hand. I unpack these interrelated theses in five steps.[2]*

Malaysian Contextuality and Marginality

Let us begin with the obvious: this is the first book that presents a concentrated harmony of Malaysian contributions to biblical and theological studies. From the perspectives of the established biblical and theological academies, what we find here is

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[1] Which is why with this book, for the first time, I am using my full Chinese given name.

[2] A caveat is important. As of the time of writing, I have been four and a half decades removed from my upbringing in Malaysia, with only minimal visits to my country of birth since; for some reflections on my last time spent with cousins, family, and churches in West Malaysia, see my article, "Renewing Global Christianity: An Asian American Pentecostal Perspective on the Way," in *Spirit Wind: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Global Theology — A Chinese Perspective*, ed. Peter L. H. Tie and Justin T. T. Tan (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 190–211, esp. 199–201.

inconsequential at worst and of curiosity and intrigue at best. The long history of biblical and theological guilds, emergent from out of the medieval European universities and further honed in Anglophone environments, means that there is a Euro-American-centrism to these discourses, and by extension, all other discursive sites are secondary, marginal, and largely incidental to the conversations. The *real* work in biblical and theological studies is normed by Western achievements, while all else—so-called Malaysian tones specifically—are *contextual*, relevant primarily if not only to those minority communities, not for the wider conversation. Unless of course, these non-Western efforts were to engage the Western traditions, learn to speak with Western accents, and make pronouncement relevant to Western interests and issues—but even if attempts were made in these directions, the initial response might be: *how can or even dare they speak to us!* Readers of this volume will sense the struggle: how to articulate Malaysian sensibilities and commitments but have to do so in ways intelligible to the broader (e.g., Western!) audiences who constitute the largest share of our collective efforts' potential market.

Yet our bemoaning is not merely one prompted by our sense of marginality outside the Western orbit. Things are even more complicated than this because the non-Malaysian reader will observe that we Malaysian biblical scholars and theologians are representative only of the Malaysian *Christian* demographic, and that includes, because of historical and political reasons, some indigenous Malays, mostly on the Eastern states of Sabah and Sarawak, and small segments of the Indian and Chinese minority communities in the country. If Indians constitute 7% of the overall population and Chinese about another 23%,[3] only approximately a third of these two groups, combined, are Christians (the others being Buddhists, Confucianists, Taoists, and Hindus, among other religionists).[4] Perhaps predictably, then, even as we had hoped to be

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[3] Jean DeBernardi has done more than most to clarify the religiosity of Chinese Malaysians, in two monographs most substantively: *Rites of Belonging: Memory, Modernity, and Identity in a Malaysian Chinese Community* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), and *The Way that Lives in the Heart: Chinese Popular Religion & Spirit Mediums in Penang, Malaysia* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006).

[4] Some personal reflections intersecting with the Buddhisms of my ancestral past can be found in Amos Yong, "The Many Tongues of Pentecost? A Chinese-Malaysian-American Pilgrimage in Christian-Buddhist Encounter," Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship, Frontier Ventures, Pasadena, California, February

more inclusive of Indian writers, we were successful in the case of only one of fourteen contributors, the rest being Chinese.

The result of all of this leads to another set of marginalities. First, that biblical and theological perspectives are part of the minority report in the Malaysian world governed by a Muslim majority. Many of the foregoing pages reflect this Islamic climate in which our thinking reverberates and this reality overshadows our passions and concerns. This ethos is amplified in the wider Southeast Asian context, when we extend the Malay horizon to include our Indonesian Christian compatriots since the latter archipelago is also Islam-dominated. Second, the Indian Malaysian (lone!) voice in this book cannot be representative of the Indian Christian experience in Malaysia and its diaspora, no matter how articulate.[5] We must find ways to elevate the Indian Malaysian perspective, not least for the Malaysian biblical and theological enterprise. Third, although we attempted to secure indigenous perspectives from Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia, we were not successful. This reflects the peripherality of both these Eastern states and of indigenous communities relative to the wider Christian churches. Finally, even when taken together, Indian and Chinese Malaysian contributions will struggle for a hearing above the much more developed South Asian and East Asian blocs in both the biblical studies and theological arenas. As is well known, the growth of *Asian* contributions in these fields is dominated by Indian, Chinese, and Korean efforts, but mostly not those from the Malaysian and Southeast Asian spheres. This means that Malaysian efforts will remain dwarfed by those originating from their "homelands," even if for many if not most Malaysians, East and West Malaysia is home, and they do not generally consider themselves part of neither the wider Indian (South Asian) nor Chinese (East Asian) diasporas.

Diasporic Contextualities and Marginalities

We have now discovered that there are multiple marginalities with which Malaysian biblical and theological endeavors have to navigate. Where we have transitioned from in the previous section, however, names these across multiple axes, including a diasporic

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24–26, 2021, forthcoming in the *International Journal for Frontier Missiology*.

 [5] Some of the complexities can be gleaned from Shanthini Pillai, *Colonial Visions, Postcolonial Revisions: Images of the Indian Diaspora in Malaysia* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007).

one that comes from and extends in multiple directions. Historically, as the introductory essay to this book clearly overviews, aside from the indigenous Christians in East Malaysia, Christian communities have taken root mostly among diasporic peoples, those coming from South and East Asian regions respectively. In that sense, the Malaysian Christian experience is itself a kind of diasporic one, of the Indian and Chinese diasporas, broadly speaking, as these have unfolded in the Malaysian context.[6]

This book's various authors thus can be understood as representing both these Indian and Chinese diasporic views on the one hand, but also then types of diasporic identities proceeding from the Malaysian context on the other hand. So, with regard to the former, almost half of our contributors are Malaysian residents, mostly in the Western side (Chong, Lau, Lim, Walters, and Goh) but also with (minimal) Eastern-region representatives (Saik), even as many among these traverse back-and-forth over the South China Sea (most specifically Cheong) in their work. We have already intimated that our East Malaysian collaborators are further marginalized relative to the power of West in the country's overall political economy, and this is reiterated in the fact that only one of us works out of the Eastern context.

With regard to the latter group who exist *from* the Malaysian diaspora, there are multiple variations.[7] E. Chia is part of the Malaysian diaspora to Australia while P. Chia (no relation) is in Taiwan and F. Wong is in Hong Kong. The three male co-editors of the book are all part of the Malaysian diaspora to the United States, although there are four North Americans when we include A. Wong in Canada. Needless to say, we are all part of the Malaysian *Christian* diaspora more specifically, and this adds an additional factor when considering the multiplicity of diasporic trajectories emanating from Malaysian sites. Those returning to East Asian locations like Hong

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[6] I am most familiar with pentecostal Christianity in the country although the analysis herein—e.g., Timothy Lim Teck Ngern, "Pentecostalism in Singapore and Malaysia: Past, Present, and Future," in *Global Renewal Christianity: Spirit-Empowered Movements Past, Present, and Future*, vol. IV: *Europe and North America*, ed. Vinson Synan and Amos Yong (Lake Mary, Fla.: Charisma House Publishers, 2017), 213–32—provides a snapshot of the nation's Christian community more generally.

[7] We are still awaiting the first study of Malaysian Christian diasporic experiences; a parallel study on the Indonesian Christian diaspora: Christopher M. The and Alexander Purnomo, "Distant Shores: Indonesian Diaspora and Christian Community," in *Journey of Asian Diaspora*, ed. Sam George, Asian Diaspora Christianity Series 1 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 101–20.

Kong and Taiwan are quite different, even within these two destinations, than those crossing the Pacific even as the Malaysian-Canadian route has a feel distinct from the one to the mainland of the U.S.A. The point is that there is a plurality of Malaysian voices, not only that spanning the South China Sea but also those sent forth from the country, both pushed and pulled as globalization has facilitated and charted.

And so far, we have said nothing about the centers and margins internal to the world Christian movement more generally and that maps onto Malaysian Christianity more particularly, both there in the nation and abroad. Whereas Malaysian Christianity was once dominated by Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists, there has been growth among evangelicals and non-denominational types also. Those in the diaspora are even more diversified for all of the reasons related to factors impinging on processes of assimilation into varying national contexts. Then there is the further issue that *evangelical* means quite different things in the U.S.A. compared to other parts of the world, even in its neighboring Canada.[8]

All of this maps on to the multi-ecclesiality of the authors featured in this volume. Our one Anglican (Walters) and two Roman Catholic (Tan and E. Chia) colleagues are complemented otherwise by a range of mainline/ecumenical-evangelical-pentecostal-and-other-nondenominational Protestants. It is more accurate to say further that there are a range of Protestantism*s* reflected in this book, informed and influenced by the history and politics of their churches as these have developed in Malaysia and elsewhere. In any case, these are marginalities exponentially multiplied across various registers: nation, region, church/denomination, and local political, social, and cultural milieus.

In short, to speak about Malaysian Christianity and its diasporas, and to reflect on the potential of these sites to contribute to biblical and theological conversations, is to hold within these categories various marginalities. The geographic, religious, denominational, political, economic, and cultural registers running through each scholarly identity means that the essays of this book speak not with one voice but through many. In fact, it is also surely the case that each contributor writes out of the intersectionality—

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[8] Some of this diversity can be grasped in Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2014).

here understood less in its technical respects than in the broadest applicable sense that includes as much of the preceding discussion as we may be able to accommodate—of his or her own experience.[9] Thus, the various disciplinary and methodological approaches that we see from essay to essay are indicative of the specific constellation of resources and repertoires that each one has been able to adapt and adopt through their own scholarly trek, integrating the many tongues of their own journey together more or less coherently vis-à-vis the multiple dimensions and realities through which they have been forged.

North American Contextualities and Marginalities

I now wish to attend more specifically to my own North American situatedness, but not for its own sake. As also alerted to in the introductory essay to the book, the North American hegemony is unavoidable, but here, I wish to underscore its own contextuality and, in certain emerging respects, its marginality. In fact, let us be clear that from a Malaysia-centric perspective, we are literally on the other (far) side of the world, hence most supremely marginal!

Above, we have already named those of us working in the North American region. Here it simply needs to be further specified that our three American coeditors represent Roman Catholic (Tan), mainline/ecumenical (Kuan), and evangelical (more specifically pentecostal, in my case) proclivities and commitments. When we add in our Canadian counterpart (A. Wong), we have another evangelical, albeit one not easily equated with what has come to mark the American terrain. On the one hand, our Canadian Malaysian evangelical colleague finds himself multiply marginalized (as Canada exists marginal to the U.S.A., as Malaysia exists peripheral to North America, and as evangelical exists relative to its American version or relative to the broader Christian tradition). On the other hand, each of the Malaysian American colleagues are more at the center from some perspectives but more marginal from another set of considerations.

Let me speak for myself for a moment to illuminate this last point. On the one hand, as a pentecostal, I am in a marginalized Christian movement from the mainstream of American Christianity;

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[9] My own elaboration of *intersectionality* in theological identity is in chapter 4 of my *Learning Theology: Tracking the Spirit of Christian Faith* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018).

even further, as a pentecostal theologian, up until recently this was considered to be an oxymoron: pentecostals might be evangelists and missionaries, but theologians?![10] On the other hand, as a pentecostal, I am part of a world Christian movement that is burgeoning and in many parts of the globe the predominant expression of those who claim to be followers of Jesus. When we put these together, my pentecostal perspective is marginal in a variety of respects but emerging more centrally across other horizons.

This presses us in the following direction. There is no doubt that the Christian center of gravity, so to speak, is shifting from the Euro-American West to the majority world.[11] Most if not all of us realize that this is due to the decline of mainline or ecumenical forms of Protestantism in the West and the growth of evangelical and pentecostal versions in the world Christian movement. World Christianity is being revitalized precisely because of explosive growth in the so-called majority world: Asia, Africa, and Latin America. From this perspective, there is no doubt that insofar as the majority of the economic resources remain in the West, to that degree, Western—meaning Euro-American—normativity is not going away completely any time soon. Yet, simultaneously as we have recognized that, there is also no denying that the center and its margins are shifting, and that the global South is more important today than it was yesterday and its influence and strength is only projected to grow.

Of course, none of this is unanticipated and in effect, we have been seeing these developments charted since the mid-twentieth century emancipation of colonial states. The postcolonial world that has since taken shape has meant that the European and American geopolitical potency has been gradually diminishing and other formerly colonized nations have asserted greater and greater degrees of autonomy. Church relations have been similarly restructured over these last two generations. Missionary organizations and offices have given way to local and indigenous

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[10] I "testify" (pentecostals are known for such!) about this in my "The Spirit, Vocation, and the Life of the Mind: A Pentecostal Testimony," in *Pentecostals in the Academy: Testimonies of Call*, ed. Steven M. Fettke and Robby Waddell (Cleveland, Tenn.: CPT Press, 2012), 203–20.

[11] The work of Philip Jenkins in multiple books over the last two decades provides narrative texture to this; those needing graphs and charts can consult Kenneth R. Ross and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

leadership, and national churches have come to the fore. In our present glocal context, local agents are interfacing with those outside their regions in multiple directions, and electronic communication means that so-called south-south or east-east interactions are growing in ways that further displace European or North American standing. Our theological conversations are similarly taking such postcolonial turns.[12]

I make one more set of comments about the emerging sense of North American marginality in global context, that which relates to migration to North America, not least from across the Pacific Rim. My own journey to the U.S.A. was accomplished when my parents, pentecostal ministers, came to northern California in 1976 to take up ministry and mission work among Chinese-speaking immigrants. They were simply living out the apostolic mandate which promise brought with it the capacity to depart one's homeland for the far side of the world: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NRSV). I did not know it at the time, but not only did I shift from being a PK (pastor's kid) to a MK (missionary kid), but overnight I became more specifically a RMK: a reverse-missionary kid.[13] Whereas historically missionaries had gone out from Europe and especially North America to other parts of the world, now those other parts of the world were sending people to the Euro-American West to do mission work. Mission is no longer from the West to the rest, as it was once said, but from anywhere to anywhere and from everywhere to everywhere.[14] The center and margins were being reversed also in this way.

Global Contextualities and Marginalities

Let us now be as brief as possible in summarizing where we are at in our reflections at the close of this book. We are realizing that

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[12] E.g., my own foray is found with Christian T. Collins Winn, "The Apocalypse of Colonialism, Colonialism as Apocalyptic Mission; Or, Notes towards a Postcolonial Eschatology," in *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis*, ed. Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lallitha, and L. Daniel Hawk (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2014), 139–51.

[13] I detail some of this in my essay, "Theological Education between the West and the 'Rest': A Reverse 'Reverse Missionary' and Pentecost Perspective," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 23, no. 2 (2020): 89–105.

[14] See Allen Yeh, *Polycentric Missiology: 21st-Century Mission from Everyone to Everywhere* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2016).

the margins and centers are no longer as clearly delineable as they used to be. Every node is both central from some set of perspectives and marginal from another set of vantage points. Every site is a context, each in fluid and dynamic relationship with other contexts. That is the where globalization and its mechanisms have brought us. What are the implications for thinking about the project that is this volume? Let me elaborate along three lines.

First, hermeneutically and methodologically, we have here in exemplary format the fusion of horizons, all run through a Malaysian set of lenses. From the perspective of biblical hermeneutics, we have the world behind the text, and the world in front of the text; now, the latter involves multiple twenty-first century worlds, shifting worlds, diasporic worlds, not just Euro-American or Western ones.[15] Diachronically, then, we inherit the Christian tradition but do so through inhabiting such across multiple sites and localities, Malaysian and its diasporic ones included. If no retrieval is neutral and every reappropriation is colored by the appropriating context, then any re-reading of scripture, any historical retelling, and any theological re-imagining, is shaped by the reader, story-teller, and theologian. The Malaysian and diasporic perspectives are no more or less important than any other one. Yet just because this may be logically true does not mean our Malaysian perspectives will have wide reception. There is still the sense in which arguments have to be made, attention has to be compelled, and persuasiveness has to be acknowledged. Yet this is precisely the character of a global conversation in which every voice has the opportunity to bear witness by drawing from the common set of scriptural and other theological sources.

Second, then, there is the synchronic dimension of our multidirectional exchange. As has already been mapped above, this book is as much a dialogue between Malaysian along diasporic routes — to and out of the country — as it is with others. Here we have Malaysians considering matters across the South China Sea and then also abroad, as has been described. There is no homogeneity, but only multiplicity.[16] Most of us are concerned with political realities, not surprisingly given the politically and religiously pluralistic Malaysia, while others of us are attempting to think through various

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[15] See further also Yong, *Learning Theology*, chapter 1.

[16] The pluralism signaled in the title of Peter C. Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia* (Malden: Blackwell, 2010), applies also in our context: Christianities in Malaysia.

ethical, educational, practical, and missional aspects of our common effort from out of our Malaysian experiences. My own reflections here are decidedly hermeneutical and methodological in character, yet I am also engaging here in a hermeneutical and methodological dialogue with my co-authors and considering what they are doing in formulating my own thoughts.

Lastly, then (for the moment), there is not only a multidirectional Malaysian dialogue, but this book also exhibits a multilateral and multidisciplinary colloquy. Each of us is engaging in discussions that bridge our Malaysian experiences and perspectives with a variety of intellectual, disciplinary, and methodological resources directed toward various teloi, meaning intended for different audiences and interlocutors. Some deploy biblical-critical tools but toward diverse ends: political strategy, treatment of im/migrants, interrogating nationalism, etc.; others want to think theologically about appropriate forms of nation-building, or more effective means of Christian witness in pluralistic societies, or more specifically of living in shalom with Muslim neighbors, etc.; a third group of us has similar but yet distinctive objectives, for instance related to understanding hybridic identities, to Christian social engagement amid Islamization, or to indigenous empowerment. The alert reader realizes that this very gross generalization of the essays across the three parts of this book does not do justice to their richness; however, the underlying methodological point is that our contextuality brings forth new angles that shine fresh light on our shifting marginalities and renew attentiveness to our continuously expanding-and-contracting historic centers.[17]

Eschatological Recontextuality: When Every Margin Is Centered in Christ

I must now close, and do so by shifting more formally from a generally descriptive into an explicitly theological mode. Yes, the center and margins are shifting, and all is contextual in various respects. Yet if all of this is true, then normativity is effectively undermined and that means that the Malaysian voices, here in this volume and elsewhere, are not more or less expressions of wills-to-

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[17] For more on interdisciplinarity, see my "Instead of a Conclusion: A Theologian's Interdisciplinary Musings on Global Pentecostalism and Its Scholarship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. and Amos Yong (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 313–20.

(political)-power than any others. Is that where we are left?

Even if I embrace this stance from a political perspective, I believe the will-to-violence is ameliorated when the theological frame is reintroduced.[18] By this, I mean that in the end, Christians will need to continue to make arguments, and we do so by revisiting scripture, by reconsidering the claims of Jesus, by attending to the many voices of the various Christian traditions, and by arguing with ourselves and others about what is truly at stake against the horizon of the coming divine *basileia*. To recognize our own contextuality and marginality is only to approach our witness with the appropriate degree of gospel humility. Pentecost involves the Spirit's inspiring speech about Jesus but also enabling hearing about the wondrous works of God (Acts 2:4–11)! All of this facilitates God's redemptive work in Christ which yearns toward the eschatological horizon when what we see now only dimly emerges with greater clarity. In other words, to recognize the partiality of our knowledge and witness is to enable tempering toward a paradoxical humble confidence: one that is emboldened to speak out of our experience but also welcomes, rejoices in, and learns from the witnesses of others.[19]

I close with a Pentecost trope: that this book heralds the many tongues of Pentecost in the third millennium. There are many Malaysian tongues, and the ones speaking through this volume are only a very small fraction of those that can revitalize our hearing of scripture and recover the richness of our theological traditions. These many Malaysian voices are as dense as they are because, to reiterate John Cheong's thesis, they are hybridic: multiple and diverse in all kinds of ways, internally with regard to each author but surely also vis-à-vis the relationality that constitutes each of us as those created in the image of God and have been gifted by the divine spirit to edify the catholic body of Christ in its immense diversity of contextually-emergent needs. The hybridity of each of our voices means that we are irreducibly local in different ways but

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[18] I navigate between the political and theological also in my *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology — The Cadbury Lectures 2009*, Sacra Doctrina: Christian Theology for a Postmodern Age series (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010).

[19] I elaborate on the eschatological posture in my, "From Every Tribe, Language, People, and Nation: Diaspora, Hybridity, and the Coming Reign of God," in *Gospel Diasporas and* Mission, ed. Chandler H. Im and Amos Yong, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 23 (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2014), 253–61.

yet also both global as individuals and collectively. Every one of us is Malaysian in this or that respect but also inclusive of other identities in significant other respects. This means that we speak not one but many Malaysian dialects, each shaped by different forces, and that this book is not about *a* Malaysian experience but about many Malaysian perspectives in and from many local and diasporic contexts. Yet this also means that we speak globally because our Malaysianness is layered through with other regional, geographic, political, and even theological differences, each of which map across our global stage.

What is therefore perhaps also needed are interpreters that can translate our many tongues for the benefit of many other audiences. In a fundamental sense, this book is an initial effort at such translation. May the many tongues resound from and through Malaysia and its diasporas to, from, and at the ends of the earth, all for the sake of the gospel.[20]

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[20] I provide greater scriptural and theological consideration of this theme in my essay, "Diasporic Discipleship from West Asia through Southeast Asia and Beyond: A Dialogue with 1 Peter," *Asia Journal of Theology* 32, no. 2 (October 2018): 3–21.

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Index

Xavier, Francis, 124