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TRANSFORMATIVE SPIRITUALITIES

FOR THE PILGRIMAGE OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

Fernando Enns, Upolu Lumā Vaai,
Andrés Pacheco Lozano and Betty Pries (Editors)

World Council of Churches

Globethics.net

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Introduction

It was early 2020, just prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the international Reference Group of the World Council of Churches Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace was hosted by churches and communities in the liquid continent, the Pacific region. As during previous years, this ecumenical and interreligious group of pilgrims travelled to visit, learn from, and share gifts with other pilgrims in a particular region. This year we travelled to Fiji.

It has become our routine that upon arrival, we spread out to different locations to practice the three dimensions of our spiritual journey. In "celebrating the gifts (*via positiva*)," we meet with local communities: we pray and worship together, singing and dancing, enjoying the inspiring beauty of encounter among pilgrims and hosts, who have never met before. In "visiting the wounds (*via negativa*)," we carefully listen to the pains of our hosts caused by climate change, economic injustices, exploitation of natural resources and bodies; and also, pains caused by churches and authorities discriminating against their own members, based on ethnic or gender identities. The lament we hear and the tears we share gradually become encouragement, as they guide us to the serious questions of our theologies and our different responsibilities for each other in the one household of God. The third dimension of our pilgrimage, "transforming the injustices (*via transformativa*)," invites us to witness the courageous and creative ways communities have developed to confront the violent behaviour of people toward each other as well as toward Mother Nature. The common discernment of our team and our hosting communities allowed us to discover the enormous potential of the global ecumenical family, with all people of goodwill, to make a real change.

After our diverse encounters, we assembled at the beautiful site and inspiring academic community of the Pacific Theological College to deliberate and pray with each other. One impression resonated deeply with us pilgrims from our visits to the communities: this was the feeling of authenticity we found in the art of engaging critical political analysis with a faith that is deeply rooted in the biblical narratives as well as in traditional wisdom received from the ancestors of these places. As we were invited to sit on different mats, sharing impressive rituals and drinking *kava* together, we were privileged to experience the power of a spirituality that was transformative. Our hosts

guided us gently to this inspiration. As we departed, one of us expressed the feelings of us all: "If we do not allow the (indigenous) spiritualities we have witnessed here to take the lead, there is no hope for us, nor for our Mother Earth."

Moved by the Holy Spirit, the principal of the Pacific Theological College, Upolu Lumā Vaai invited Fernando Enns and Andrés Pacheco Lozano for a final discussion in his office. There was no specific agenda; we were simply talking about where this pilgrimage might lead us as scholars and how it might impact our diverse contexts. During that meeting, the idea for this publication was born. Some of us had been thinking for a while of a way to communicate to a wider circle the breath-taking experiences of transformative spiritualities during the different stations of our pilgrimage. Writing, we know, is a very humble way to try doing that; yet, it is one way. So, immediately upon arrival at our different home communities, we began contacting people in different regions of the world to help in this effort. We knew that we would need at least one more editor to help us in this task. We were grateful that Betty Pries—who had recently defended her PhD thesis, "Bridging the Self-Other Divide: Conflict Transformation and Contemplative Spirituality in Dialogue" at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam—was willing and able to serve.

It has been a wonderful journey in and of itself to collect the inspiring texts that are assembled in this book. They are as diverse as our different spiritualities, coming from different regions and cultures, representing different faith traditions and Christian denominations, as well as different genders and ethnicities. All the contributors were invited to choose their own content focus, their own style of writing, and their specific way of expression, which might be narrative, descriptive, intuitive, theological, biblical, or historical. The one common experience we share as authors is that our spiritualities—deeply rooted in our own faiths and handed down to us by so many before us—have the gentle power to transform us and our relationships with one another, guiding us to find our appropriate space within God´s miraculous creation, in order to pursue a life of justice and peace. In fact, it is God´s pilgrimage with creation that invites us to participate actively in this spiritual journey—making space for each other on the great "mat" (like the ones we sat upon in Fiji) of loving companionship.

The reader will notice that we have grouped the chapters in sections, which is, of course, an artificial distinction. Every essay is unique, valuable, soaked with experience, and a resource for inspiration, able to stand on its own. Our hope is that as many as possible will feel encouraged to share their

own spiritual journey with the global ecumenical family, as we continue our common Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

We are deeply grateful that so many of our co-pilgrims immediately responded to our invitation to contribute to this volume. There was no doubt among the staff of the World Council of Churches that such a collection should be published. So many hands have helped to bring this volume together. A very specific thanks for the detailed editing work on each text goes to student interns at the Amsterdam Center for Religion and Peace and Justice Studies at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in the Netherlands: Samuel Abeka, Luza Bedet, Anna Gass, Susanne Schwickart, and Laura Waardenburg. Without the guidance of Lyn van Rooyen (WCC publications), and the careful copy-editing of Anna Speicher we could not have reached this goal.

May this book become an inspiration to keep walking together, gently yet courageously, against all odds, on God´s path of just peace—both to be transformed and to become agents of transformation.

Fernando Enns, Upolu Lumā Vaai, Andrés Pacheco Lozano, Betty Pries

I

Indigenous Transformative Spiritualities

1

ʻIke Kai Hohonu

Oceanic Spirituality: Difference Is What We Have in Common

Manulani Aluli Meyer

Ma kēia kaiākea pūlama mai i loko o kuʻu naʻau.

This vast ocean expanse, which has nurtured me in its depths, fills my heart.

—Native Hawaiian expression

Pua mai au ka lipo o ka mālamalama.

I come forth from the void into the light, from gestations into a vast space of affirmation.

—Morrnah Simeona, Kanaka ʻŌiwi o Hawaiʻi, Native Hawaiian

Spirit is forever.

We are charged to find the best way to pursue our lives so that Spirit can express itself.

—Jim Dumont, Anishnabek Nation

Introduction

Blue is the ancient color of love. It expands and absorbs our island horizons and teaches us about the effulgent coherence of beauty. As Moana people, our oceans, waves, and blue skies guide us differently. This beauty educates us, and our attentiveness keeps pace with tides and *moa'e* tradewinds.[1] A relationship of this nature allows Spirit to be expressed in tangible and mythic ways.

Inspired names for awareness of beauty and nature include essence, *wailua*, God, *aloha*, *Kapō'ulakina'u, pono, 'aumakua,* consciousness, *na'au* (spirit, God, compassion, pre-dawn light, truth, family guardian, consciousness, heart).[2] They are found in different ways throughout *Moana-nui-ākea*. For example, we learn *from* our environment, not simply *about* land, sky, and ocean. We have taught ourselves lessons we repeat with each other of how to expand and *include.* Expand. Include. Here is open-ocean clarity, Spirit-guided, moving us toward our next evolutionary phase. We learn from and within our island milieu—our love and devotion to land and people. *'Ike kai hohonu* is wisdom expanding toward awareness.[3]

What is Oceanic spirituality? And what does it have to do with our movement for peace and justice throughout *Moana-nui*? Why is this chapter located in a book dedicated to transforming spiritualities? *'Ike kai hohonu* is fundamentally a dive into indigenous epistemology and ontology—the what, why, and how of our knowing, being, and essence. This inquiry offers a transdisciplinary approach to awakening and meaning-making that will then, hopefully, inspire policy changes and a collective collaboration for a reimagined Oceania.

In this space we find content for a revival of a more profound capacity for peace and collective transformation. It begins first with me. Here are some "popcorn ideas" dropped into the dark woods of my own despair and overwhelmedness, so that we can walk out together in this pilgrimage of justice, peace, and healing. Here are some thoughts for a collective transformation because Oceanic perspectives matter. Our healing is, thus, our own choice and our own *kuleana* (responsibility). It then becomes our job to simply be clear, kind, and courageous.

1. Moa'e is the Hawaiian word for north/northeast tradewinds in Hawai'i.

2. In this chapter, Hawaiian words are defined either in parentheses after the Hawaiian word, or within the context of the following sentence. The goal of the author is a seamless process that engenders contextual understanding and personal interpretation of words and ideas, not only their literal definition.

3. Ike is a Hawaiian word for knowledge; Kaihohonu describes the ocean depths. 'Ike Kaihohonu implies an infinite and expansive knowledge resource we cannot fully fathom.

Lonoikamakahiki!—A Hawaiian Makahiki Season

Spiritual renewal can be found in rituals that mark the *Makahiki* season.[4] *Makahiki* observes winter and honours *Lonomakua*, our expression for harvest, abundance, and peace.[5] We find joy in this relationship. *E Lono e! Lono* is found as elemental forms of nature. As we begin to witness winter rains, clouds, and cooler weather, a growing sense of gratitude arises because rain rejuvenates soil; with healthy soil comes the miracle of food, and thus a *sharing economy* is made possible.[6] Synonyms for the *Makahiki* period include sharing and abundance. In this way of gifting, abundance keeps growing and there is a sense of loving continuity based on relationality. As we read in Galatians 6:7 (KJV): "As you sow, so shall you reap."

Our winter is a time for reflection. We connect to metaphors found in our natural world (wind, rains, shifting tides) to recognize and study the seasonal nature of our humanity. In doing so, our cultural essence is renewed. The practice of focusing on the needs of others and showing gratitude for our ancestors' teachings creates insights into how we have always lived on islands. To ritualize and honour a new year in Hawaiian cultural households, we say three times: "*Lonoikamakahiki! Lonoikamakahiki! Lonoikamakahiki!*" Thus begins our winter season in Hawai'i *nei.* The rising of *nā huihui o makali'i* (the Pleiades) in the east at sunset marks the beginning of *Makahiki*. Thus starts four months of intentional focus and practice of three significant ideals: peace, gratitude, and excellence.

Peace

reigns during high surf months. *I ka wā kahiko* (in our ancestors' time), all war ceased, and disputes dissolved. At the start of our Hawaiian winter, we infuse peace into our thinking and behaviour—at least for the duration of those designated months of the year. The short rainbow, dark grey, thick clouds, and gusty gale winds—all signs of *Lono*—mark a change of seasons. These elements remind us that we, too, are made of seasons.

4. The Makahiki season is winter in Hawai'i. It is marked by natural phenomena like rains, clouds, rainbows, and historically it stopped all wars and brought peace to the Islands. It remains a time dedicated to the deity of peace, Lono.

5. Lono is one of the main Hawaiian deities representing natural phenomena such as winter rains, clouds, and food.

6. An economy of sharing resonates with native knowledge systems interested in care of land and people. It can be found in Hawaii's 'Āina Aloha Economic Futures Declaration, accessed 9 January 2021, https://www.ainaalohafutures.com. It also synergizes with the Sacred Economics movement, accessed 9 January 2021, https://sacred-economics.com.

For my family, focusing on peace brings forth peace. Focusing on love brings forth love. Energy begets energy. Years of practice brought us to this realization and to its synergistic ties to Hawaiian cultural knowing: As you sow, so shall you reap.[7]

Gratitude

is the second critical component of our *Makahiki* season. In ancestral times, we thanked those who allowed us to live on lands and to prosper by our own hands, intention, and creativity. People gave food, carvings, feather work, weavings, implements, *kapa* (pounded bark cloth), and other artistic goods to our *ali'i* and *konohiki*, our hereditary chiefs. Today, thanks are given to show *aloha* and gratitude and display the bounty of our *'āina momona* (abundant lands). This reflection allows us to pause to take in the broader purpose of our lives. The *Makahiki* is a time to communicate gratitude for life. We share this in common with the Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations in North America. We also use this time to gather as a wider family, and to make and give food and crafts. We spend time renewing relationships, and Spirit fills our hearts.

Excellence

is the third ideal practiced during the *Makahiki* season. In the old days, competitions were held to show who performed best at surfing, wrestling, running, dancing, or leaping off high cliffs. Who did indeed demonstrate exceptional strength or accuracy at stone-rolling or spear-throwing? The art of riddling with opponents was contested through wit, wisdom, powerful oracy, and charisma! The *Makahiki* draws out unique and radical ways to show distinction. This same excellence is also a medium for humility. It has remained in our culture's fabric for a reason.

We also know excellence when it paddles into a line-up or walks on a field of other players. We can identify the expert placement of stones in a fishpond, in the stitch of quiltmakers, or in the layering of beloved flowers in a *lei po'o* (head lei). We know who can organize a gathering and ritualize discussions of healing. Songs are written about the best *imu* (underground oven) makers. We cluster around falsetto voices singing about beloved landscapes. Excellence is the main engine of our cultural evolution. It remains an appreciated space that gives Spirit a medium in which to express infinite possibilities.

7. The repetition of this phrase is meant to link us with an expanding spirituality inclusive of both Christian and Oceanic beliefs and values. There are many indigenous ways to describe this idea of simultaneity the energy that results from it.

The *Makahiki* season is thus the form, and the ideals we practice are the essence. While the form may change, Spirit remains as an enduring force, an energy of our own choosing. Annually, we return to these ideals with renewed awareness. Our winter season is thus filled with omens (*hō'ailona*) and elemental instructions guiding us toward an inward-seeking time to reflect and practice peace, gratitude, and excellence. This form of Oceanic spirituality makes us better people. It gives us places to practise the principles found within all our cultures of the Moana.

'Ōlelo No'eau—Hawaiian Wise Sayings

Three *'ōlelo no'eau*, Hawaiian proverbs, are explored now to highlight some prominent points of Oceanic spirituality relative to the creation of justice and peace in our world. *Kupuna* (elder) sayings are time-honoured instructive expressions. They give meaning to the purpose of life and the continuity of culture. I have learned to apply *'ōlelo no'eau* as they give us clear interpretations of Spirit, love, life, and God.

- *Ua 'ikeā i ka mauli ola.* All is known through Spirit.
- *Ulu a'e ke welina a ke aloha.* Loving is the practice of an awake mind.
- *Ho'okahi la'au, he mihi.* The first medicine is forgiveness.

Ua 'ikeā i ka mauli ola—All is known through Spirit.

Spirit is found in all things, all beings. Expressions of goodness are signs of Spirit's presence. The natural world is evidence that Spirit exists. She encourages us to believe in something beyond one cultural story. Spirit is an animating force that is synonymous with God. In nature, we can experience this through the touch of water, wind, beauty, and dreams, and even in conflict and hardship. Spirit thus animates all things and is beyond a single lifetime. Because Spirit is found in all things, it is the *wailua* or enduring energy we seek to understand.

Even our daily pre-dawn moments hold the capacity to inspire. We have ways to engage with Spirit through elemental forms such as *Kapō'ulakina'u*—the resonating dark red glow at the ocean's horizon before dawn. She is the deep psychology of elder sisters: moody, profound, hidden, exposed, and transformative. *Kapō'ulakina'u* represents a new day and an opportunity to be animated by its potential. We walk toward another chance to know something, to practice something, to share something. Here, perhaps, is why

I wake long before dawn to begin my day. My own solitude, my own elder sister, is bringing me another day to know God.

Oceanic knowing is drenched in Spirit. Some synonyms are joy, care, connection, and awareness. When caring and interest in another is expressed and enacted, Spirit is present. Spirit is also beyond mystery. For example, Spirit is fantastically mundane and found in the hot tea you give your wife, who is sewing another bag for a project dedicated to bringing *niu* (coconut) back to our daily lives. When Island people talk of Spirit, we refer to the animating energy of life, the spark of divine insight, and the mover of principles into real-life application. Spirit is found in dreams and in ways we chant and gather energy for healing. Spirit is how we start and finish a meeting; it is how we define a problem and recognize solutions.

Spirit is life and all the trillion ways moving us forward to help us collectively love, live better, and serve. *Ua ʻikeā i ka mauli ola*. Spirituality in this discussion is the grandmother of religion. In a symbolic sense, if religion is the pot, Spirit is the grandmother stirring the pot. As special ingredients are added, memories and flavours of the pot marinate with joy, connection, and awareness. All is known through Spirit.

All actions have principles. Our walk toward justice within *Moana-nui-ākea* begins with thinking, first, that it is possible. The non-separation of life signals a more profound process in which to engage with Spirit. This is the notion of simultaneity and what it entails within a spiritual discipline. It is the cornerstone of Indigenous, Christian, and Buddhist ideals: it is a practice of dependent co-arising and mutuality. Conflict then becomes the whetstone of our potential, where we sharpen spiritual understanding through direct experience. Here is an example of why Oceanic understanding is needed for our times. *Ua ʻikea i ka mauli ola.* All is known through Spirit.

Returning to Island stories and principles is the purpose and process of this chapter. We have conflict in public and private sectors of our Island worlds. We are now in the process of approaching them with an awakened sense of cultural principles, thus maturing beyond missionary fundamentals and colonial economics. Spirit guides us.[8]

8. For more information on the interconnection of Spirit and physical reality, see Manulani Aluli Meyer, "Holographic Epistemology: Native Common Sense," *China Media Research* 9, no. 2, 2013: 94–101, https://education.illinois.edu/docs/default-source/default-document-library/hereca256a3980b76a29a33dff4b008a8698.pdf.

Ulu a'e ke welina a ke aloha—Loving is the practice of an awake mind

The *aloha* spirit is Hawai'i. We affirm our beliefs in this actualization because we understand the function of this excellence. *Aloha* is found in how we meet, greet, and befriend others. *Aloha* is how we love land and serve people. There is a real sense of function concerning this priority. When it is not present, everyone knows it and a reset is inevitable. In this context, Spirit and *aloha* are interchangeable. They become mutual causal agents of Oceanic spirituality, because when one practices what loving entails, especially during dark and difficult times, Spirit is present. Spirit and *aloha* are the same. When we understand simultaneity, our Island world transforms. As you sow, so shall you reap.

To link loving with our awakening mind helps us articulate what Spirit means. As in all languages, meaning does not merely "sit" on the text's surface, and it is much more than the cognitive accumulation of its literal definition. Here is where schooling ends and education begins because loving is a *practice*, a discipline, an expressible excellence we *embody.* It is not bound by time or compared to others—nor is it scarce.

When *aloha* is the operating center of culture, there is something different within a collective. People actively listen, seeking understanding, and they express respect in the radical collaboration that will be needed if we are to move forward. The expansion of what Oceanic spirituality can mean when it is brought out into the wider world—yet first reflected within our own—is powerful beyond any description. It is a blue horizon expansion of *aloha*, and it shows us how to heal. When we do, we know the world will follow. We have that *kuleana* (responsibility) as people of the *Moana*.

Ho'okahi la'au, he mihi—The first medicine is forgiveness

The final *pono noe'au* (true saying) from my *kanaka 'ōiwi* (native Hawaiian) ancestors helps animate what has been present in our Island communities. It is yet another ingredient to experience the sublime nuance of Oceanic spirituality that expresses who we are. It is a way to practice and walk toward justice and peace with our *Moana* cousins. We must first embody these principles ourselves so that others will want to participate in reconciliation, change, and healing. There is a longing for justice now, and so we re-enter our languages, values, and stories, because we know there is always more to discuss and understand.

Mihi is one such word, one such idea. *Mihi* in Hawai'i is repentance, remorse, or apology. It is one of the primary expressions found in our Hawaiian practice of *ho'oponopono*.[9] *Ho'oponopono* is when we sit down with a family to heal strained relationships or mend misunderstandings through ritualized discussion and truth-telling. *Mihi* is the outcome and product of *ho'oponopono*. A *mihi* is forgiveness given, and forgiveness received. When forgiveness is enacted, this brings us back to loving. Forgiveness energetically lightens the room and strengthens families. In Hawai'i, *mihi* is known through this practice, mostly as an expression of healing.

Mihi for our Māori cousins is something entirely different. I can recall with vivid detail the first time someone said it to me, at the end of a speech I gave in Aotearoa, New Zealand, during a one-year sabbatical. I heard the words: "I'd like to mihi you." My first thought was: What have I done? What did I do to warrant this form of repentance from a stranger who stood up so that the whole assembly could hear his words? Then I listened and experienced something. The student stood up to give clear and vibrant ideas of what the talk meant to him. He connected me to his grandmother, and I witnessed what happens when two hearts touch through ritualized gratitude within an oracy practice. Someone would stand and give a mihi at the end of all speeches, and I always felt something: loved, grateful, humbled, quiet, connected, empowered, and changed. When I asked my partner—a speaker of te reo Māori—what mihi meant, it was explained in one word after a few days of silent reflection: mentoring.[10]

I would never have used that word, even though that is precisely how I felt. I felt *mentored by truth.* Returning to a *ho'oponopono* context, that is precisely what forgiveness does. That is what forgiveness is—it helps us to return to a loving state through truth-telling that we can hear with an open heart. It is the inside essence of an outside form. Here is one of many life-changing understandings. Our Polynesian cousins returned to this present moment to offer us a new understanding of the idea of *mihi*. Even as their *tuakana,* their elder sibling, I felt humbled and grateful for this lesson.

For Māori, a *mihi* is also the oracy practice to begin an event, conference, or gathering with a clear and coherent understanding of why we gathered,

9. Ho'oponopono is a ritualized way to resolve conflict between individuals, usually within a family.

10. Mihi also is an oracy practice that allows the audience to know specific things: 1) who is in the audience; 2) the history of the event; 3) the purpose of the gathering; and 4) people, alive and past, who have made the event happen.

who is present, and what is the shared purpose of our day. A *mihi* is also the way to close and summarize an event, conference, or gathering. A good *mihi* brings a heightened understanding of all parts so that wholeness, clarity, and vision move forward. I have always marveled at a good *mihi*. It is an oracy practice that nurtures the crisp and rigorous qualities of trust, vision, and *aloha*.

So, I brought it home to Hawai'i. It is summed up as *love mentors.* It is at the absolute core of what *'ike kupuna* (knowledge from wise elders) and Hawaiian knowledge systems pivot around: *Ho'okahi la'au, he mihi*—the first medicine is forgiveness. And when we forgive, we mentor ourselves and those around us. The beauty of an Oceanic intelligence steps from the intimacy of family gatherings into the public realm to express Spirit. This essence helps connect to all forms of life to help us bring forth what is best about life and the purpose of indigenous cultures—that is, continuity. Indeed, relationality strengthens us, and we collectively evolve.

Conclusion: *Hā'ina mai ka puana*—Let the Story Be Told

This relation with Spirit marks our mutual emergence with peace/justice, essence/form, healing/conflict. They are all linked and bound to each other. They are sparks that help each other move. These ideas extend discussions of how we heal throughout Pasifika. There *is* an Oceanic spirituality. These ideas of site-specific, culturally rejuvenating, and *aloha 'āina* (loving land) practices activate our distinct peoples and cultures throughout our vast and interconnected land masses. It is part of a larger movement to articulate a justice-seeking process that works toward economic reclamation, land relationality, and the empowerment of our peoples through our own cultural systems.

There *is* a grounding in the love of land and service to people that must have resonated with all religions that made landfall on our shorelines. What remains clear is how Oceania is rising, not despite our differences, but because of them. *Difference is what we have in common,* and it remains a strength of the *Moana* peoples. We then can understand the outside form as an expression of our inside essence.

What then is our inside essence? How do we walk toward a more just and fair society within *Moana-nui-ākea*? How does loving, trust, collectivity, and respect for life help us to write and inspire policies to protect our lands, oceans, and peoples? Our evolution within the *Moana* is about loving, and loving is about inclusion, forgiveness, clarity, and mentoring. Here is peace

that is not separated from justice, especially now in the COVID-19 pandemic. Peace, love, truth, justice—they all help us to expand and include. The *mo'o*, or continuity, of Spirit is graceful, and it is why Oceania will play a role in the worldwide awakening. Evolution depends on *our* clarity—no one else's. Here is why so many different religions exist within our own families. God dwells in everything, and Oceanic spirituality is everywhere. Why? Because it has always been about the inside essence of form. It has always been about love.

Always.

Amama ua noa.

Let the prayer be lifted.

2

Eco-Relational Spirituality: A (K)new Story for the Earth from a Pasifika Perspective

Upolu Lumā Vaai

A (k)new moment is a moment of relational renaissance that summarizes the wisdom of the ancient/new.[1] It is a renewed realization that our *becoming* in the new epoch is dependent upon appreciation of the old: what we already knew and experienced as life-affirming. Eco-relationality is a cosmic-based integrated spirituality, an ancient/new spirituality about the realization that everything exists in a dynamic, spiritual, relational whole that forms the basis of a balanced ecological life and well-being. In many Pasifika communities, this eco-relational integration is the concomitant orientation of life—the *mana* that directs life and forms the basis of existence in grassroots communities. This is a relational consciousness of the mutual connectedness of all of life and co-inherence of all dimensions, such as material and spiritual, visible and invisible, living and dying, cosmology and anthropology, economy and ecology, communality and individuality. These are inextricable and relational. There is separation and constant movement between each other.

How can we revive this (k)new knowledge in our Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace? How can we revive an old/new spirituality that forms the basis of the relationships in the cosmic *Aiga* (the cosmic extended family)?[2] The world today is collapsing, empty not only of spirituality, but also of the embrace of ecological relationality, due to the compartmentalization narrative. This

1. See Manulani Aluli Meyer, "Holographic Epistemology: Native Common Sense," *China Media Research* 9, no. 2 (2013): 94–101, https://education.illinois.edu/docs/default-source/default-document-library/hereca256a3980b76a29a33dff4b008a8698.pdf.

2. *Aiga* in the narrow sense refers to a social unit in the village comprised of immediate family members and kinship. In the broader symbolic sense, it is a holistic Pasifika concept that refers to the cosmic extended family, inclusive of land, ocean, peoples, ancestors, and spirits/gods, that constitutes wholeness of life. See Ama'amalele Tofaeono, who covers the Aiga concept extensively in *Eco-Theology: AIGA—the Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa* (Erlangen: Erlangen Verlag für Mission und Okumene, 2000).

negatively impacts the grassroots and the poor communities who mostly depend on the land and ocean as the everyday basis for livelihood and sustainability. This chapter attempts a (k)new story from a Pasifika eco-relational perspective that puts the Earth at the centre. It retrieves the (k) new spirituality of eco-relationality that has guided Pasifika grassroots communities for centuries in relation to protecting the Earth. Hence Pasifika people do not speak *for* the Earth; rather, they speak *as* the Earth, as Earth relatives.

Relationality in Our Blood

In the beginning there was relationship! Thus, relationality is the original primordial consciousness that forms the basis of life and well-being. It is original because it goes back to the primordial *vavau*, "the forever before," and extends to the *faavavau*, "the forever beyond," as Tui Atua puts it.[3] *Vavau* here does not refer to the origin or beginning of time. Rather, in the light of what Catherine Keller defines as the beginning-in-process,[4] *vavau* is a boundless and endless opening that operates in a non-linear circular system, an unoriginated process of becoming that finds its very source in the life of God. *Faavavau* does not refer to end of time either, but rather to the continuation of this endless process that finds its constant fulfilment in God. Hence, life is an open cycle of becoming that finds its source and constant fulfilment in relationship with the self, the others, the Earth, and with God.

Therefore, relationality is cosmic. It is in our blood. We were born of a cosmic womb, not just a human womb, as a child of the cosmos, at least from an eco-relational perspective. Therefore, we did not create relationships. We came into being through relationships. It is through us that relationships will flow and continue. With this comes enormous responsibility, a life shaped and defined by the *deep living connections* of the *Aiga*. Thus, as Pasifika people, we understand according to the rhythms of relationships. We do not only live; we live according to the flow and movement of cosmic relationships from *vavau* to *faavavau* and back again. Hence any human story is a dimension of the larger cosmic story. Therefore, cosmology precedes anthropology; relationship precedes being.

3. Tui Atua, *"Oi aue ua maumau le vasa!"*—"What a pity, such a waste of ocean!": Idiosyncrasy and wisdom in Samoan creation and funeral chants," *Samoa Observer,* 17 June 2018, https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/article/4715.

4. Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), xvii.

The Liquidity of Life

Pasifika is known as a "liquid continent. As Epeli Hauofa reminds us, Pasifika does not refer to "islands in the sea" as explorers had assumed, but rather to "our sea of islands" connected and linked by the liquid flow of the blue *moana*, our Pasifika Ocean.[5] The former views islands as small and isolated dots to be found and named, lost in the blue-coloured map of the Age of Discovery. The latter sees islands as "roomy environments that typify continental spaces,"[6] where the ocean is part of the island spatiality already shared and protected by the Oceanic people for centuries. In this context, life is entirely shaped by movement and liquidity, created and sustained from the perspective of *sea-land* spatiality and drifting cultures. Liquidity and movement are central to eco-relational spirituality. This means therefore that life is fluid for the sake of renewal; it is a pilgrimage with a dynamic flow that is never static.

Let me provide three examples of the liquidity of life within the setup of eco-relational spirituality. First, in the *vavau* and *faavavau* structure of life, dying is not a consummation of life but rather an extension of living to the beyond. The coexistence of day and night are possible only because of their openness towards the other through their relational movements of expansion and contraction increasing and decreasing, made possible by their dynamic co-inherence. Because of its cosmic origin, the *tagata*, the human being has land and ocean traits. This challenges the compartmentalizing way of doing theology in the church, which pushes us to prove whether God systematically fits into categories of being either a priori or posteriori; objective or subjective; substance or relation; male or female; process or solitary. Such a way of thinking is unhealthy for our spirituality. It is the same as trying to prove whether Christ systematically fits into categories of either divinity or humanity, centre or margin, history or faith. The church for many years tended to choose the more powerful categories, such as divine, centre, male, objective, and solitary over anything ordinary and cosmological, in order to conquer and control. Pasifika theologies still revolve around powerful monarchical language of lordship that often falls short when it comes to resisting and transforming unjust social and religious structures.

5. Epeli Hauofa, "Our Sea of Islands," in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering our Sea of Islands*, ed. Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau-ofa (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1993), 2–16.

6. Jione Havea, Margaret Aymer, and Steed Vernyl Davidson, "RumInations," in *Islands, Islanders, and the Bible: RumInations*, ed. Jione Havea, Margaret Aymer, and Steed Vernyl Davidson (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 2.

Second, for Pasifika communities, such as Tuvalu, Tonga, Samoa, Hawaii, and Māori in New Zealand, the notion of separation and joining is manifested in the eco-relational spirituality of the *va*,[7] the *space between,* or the *relational space*. This paradox has been throughout centuries rigorously examined by many Pasifika scholars, including Tui Atua, Albert Wendt, Konai Thaman, Epeli Hauofa, and Melani Anae. Most have agreed that *va* is a space that both separates and joins, connects and disconnects, a space that implies autonomy as well as mutual co-inherence and connection. In the *va*, one could reimagine God as the one who is not stuck in fixed categories of rational systematic theologizing, but rather as one who is both close and distant, part of space and time, yet existing beyond these, both inside and outside of time. In the *va*, there is fluidity and freedom of God to be *in* the world, and to exist *beyond* it. The balance of both c*loseness* and *beyondness* is critical to eco-relational spirituality. Today we see the obvious deterioration of institutions that were initially meant to be dynamic: movements such as ecumenism, for example, which was meant to image the Trinity since the 1961 WCC assembly in New Delhi 1961.[8] In the Pasifika communities, and I believe throughout the world, ecumenism has become institutionalized and professionalized to the extent of being fixed and stagnant, not only losing the dynamic flow of the Trinity but also losing the voices of grassroots communities, neglected or lost in bureaucratic structures.[9] This is also apparent in the recent collapse of regionalism in the Pasifika communities due to geopolitical relations and the struggle to control the region.[10] We miss the fluid *both/and* consciousness that encompasses the relational structure of life, including God's; we become enslaved not only to materiality as we witness it in the current neoliberal capitalist culture, but we also adopt the rigid culture of being too settled for the sake of control.

7. Melani Anae, *"Pacific Research Methodologies and Relational Ethics," Auckland University* (September 2019), Research Gate, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.529

8. T. K. Thomas, "WCC, Basis of," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed., ed. Nicholas Lossky et al. (Geneva: WCC Publications and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 1238–39. https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/theological-and-historical-background-of-the-wcc-basis .

9. The many factors contributing to the deterioration of ecumenism in the Pacific are outlined in the recent Pacific Theological College publication *Navigating Troubled Waters: The Ecumenical Movement in the Pacific Islands since the 1980s*, ed. Manfred Ernst and Lydia Johnson (Suva: Pacific Theological College, 2017).

10. Damien Cave, "Pacific Islands Most Important Megaphone Falls into Discord," *New York Times*, 5 February 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/05/world/asia/pacific-islands-forum.html; Transform Aqorau, "Pacific Regionalism Forever Changed," Development Policy Centre: Devpolicyblog, 10 February 2021, https://devpolicy.org/pacific-regionalism-forever-changed-20200210-2/.

Third, Pasifika knowledge is considered eco-relational and contextual because it is rooted and formed in a particular *itūlagi*. The term *itūlagi* suggests that knowledge should always be fluid. The term is made up of two words: *itū* is "side" and *lagi* is "horizon" or "heaven." A person has many *itū* or sides that make up our side of the life. These *itū* constitute the baggage that conditions our thinking, including culture, family, religion, land, ancestors, ocean, language, and traditions. These *itū* make up the context out of which we construct knowledge, experience life, and understand the world around us. *Lagi* is symbolic of a sense of openness to what we share with others. As "horizon," we are invited to understand there are other horizons beyond ours. We are not the only ones in the world. We all share the same "heaven," a universal force that connects and links us. Therefore, while *itū* differentiates us, *lagi* connects us. All have different and distinct *itū*, but we all share the same *lagi*. *Itū* is about getting in touch with our contexts and cultures. *Lagi* is about getting in touch with others whose contexts and cultures are different. *Itū* reinforces our potentialities and distinctive qualities; *lagi,* through the wisdom of others, reveals the limitations and boundaries of these. Knowledge therefore is the ability to hold both together in a harmonious fashion; it is always rooted yet dynamic and open; it is culturally and historically conditioned, always able to be tested and corrected. This flexibility can be demonstrated in the Samoan wisdom saying, "the wisdom of the wise is negotiable but the wisdom of the fool is fixed." Hence the fluid and dynamic nature of knowledge could be the key to providing solutions to global racial, ethnic, ecological, and ecumenical issues.

Does not this liquidity of life remind us of the Trinity, a dynamic flow of love and life between Persons within God and outside of God? And if God is a dynamic flow from *vavau* to *faavavau*, should not this caution us not to institutionalize centres in God, as implied in the Christocentric theologies promoted by many? Should not we learn from the de-centred theology of Gregory of Nazianzus who once said, "No sooner do I conceive of the One that I am illumined by the splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them that I am carried back to the One. . . . When I think of any One of the Three, I think of Him as a Whole?"[11] Does this not mean we cannot control or centralize the dynamic flow in God without becoming too institutionalized? Does this not imply that whether we start with the Father, Son, or Spirit, we end up with the whole Trinity? Should not it also caution us against

11. Nazianzus, "Orations 40.41," in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church*, vol. 7:2 (1893), ed. Philip Scharff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), 375.

prioritizing a redemption story that emphasizes human uniqueness and the salvation of souls, which led to the exclusion of everything cosmic in favour of humans being viewed as the object of divine cosmic concern? The point here is that at the moment that we create centres, either God becomes static to the point of being controlled, or we humans become the centre ourselves in order to facilitate control of either God or other people and cultures.

Everything is Flesh, Bones, and Blood

I was raised in a grassroots eco-relational spirituality where everything cosmic and earthy is considered *flesh, bones*, and *blood*. Such spirituality emphasizes deep living connections within the cosmic *Aiga*, embracing its inherent values, and the multidimensional relationships and spirituality that constitutes space and time. *Aiga* promotes a deeply fluid connectedness in which the cosmos is seen as a dimension of everything else. This means that creation is a network of *deep living connections* rather than a created finished product: the land, ocean, and sky are considered family who continue to grow by giving and receiving from each other the gift of life animated by Spirit. This is something I learned from aunty Manulani Meyer from Hawaii. As Pacific Islanders, we do not see Spirit as "*The* Spirit" dominant in Eurocentric theology. This is because Spirit is not an object. To add the preposition *the* immediately collapses Spirit into a noun with the implication of "singular one." This defeats the idea of the universal presence of Spirit in deep living connection with existence, including all cultures and races. In many island creation stories, the idea of cosmic genealogical connection animated by Spirit, where the human being is perceived as a child of a cosmic union, is very strong. Human identity is defined by this cosmic genealogy. Captured in the words of Tui Atua from Samoa, "I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas and the skies. . . . I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I belong to my village and my village belongs to me. . . . This is the essence of my sense of belonging."[12]

The same sentiment is echoed in the words of Jean-Marie Tjibaou from Kanaki, New Caledonia, who was assassinated while fighting for the independence of his Kanaki people from French colonization. Tjibaou said,

12. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi, "In Search of Meaning, Nuance and Metaphor in Social Policy," in *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance*, ed. Tamasailau M. Suaalii-Sauni, L'uogafa Tuagalu, Tofilau Nina Kirifi-Alai, and Naomi Fuamatu (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2018), 105.

"I am never undivided. I cannot be individual. The body is never a principle of individualization. The body is always a relationship."[13] It is through this holistic gaze that the eco-relational story was born.

This holistic gaze should continue to challenge theologies that centralize human existence over all other ecological lives. The Pasifika church leaders, for example, opted to script a new story of ecumenism in the region that takes the cosmos as primary. The move saw a shift from the *unity in Christ* narrative, which has dominated ecumenism in the region since the early 1960s, to the *Pacific household of God*.[14] The former is anthropocentric and church-centric, focusing more on the unity of churches and peoples. The latter is cosmological, taking us back to the primacy of creation, extending ecumenism to include ecology and economy. It focuses not only on the role of the churches in sustainable housekeeping, but on the eco-relationships and values of family that form the basis of its spirituality and well-being. The push for a (k)new story is not just about deconstructing and critiquing the old destructive story; it is, rather, about creating a (k)new one and discerning whether the new carries the wisdom, values, and needs of the Pasifika communities—because these determine the sustainability of a (k)new story.

In terms of the Pasifika household, all Pasifika Earth terms such as eleele, vanua, whenua, palapala, aba, or'*āina* are deeply connected to the idea that the cosmos forms the human. When a Fijian says vanua e/na tamata, tamata e/na vanua, or when a Tongan says fonua pe tangata, tangata pe fonua (both translate as "the land is the people and the people is the land"), they speak of the deep connection of their identity with the cosmos. The terms for person or personhood in many Pasifika communities such as tamata in Fiji, tangata for Māori and Tonga, taata in Tahiti, kanaka in Hawaii, or tagata in Samoa, are all cosmic-inclusive. When we speak of tagata, we not only speak of the self, but of the land, ocean, extended family, culture, and spirituality.

In Samoa, my birthplace, the word for soil (*eleele, palapala*) is the same as for blood. *Ua tafe le palapala* ("blood is spilled") means the Earth loses life

13. *Cibau Cibau: Jean-Marie Tjibaou* (Nouvelle-Caledonie: Agence de developpement de la culture Kanak, 1998), 28.

14. Pacific Church Leaders Meeting, "Sowing a New Seed of Pacific Ecumenism: Statement of Basis and Resolution" (Nadi: Pacific Conference of Churches and Pacific Theological College, 2017), 1–2; Tevita Havea, "The Story of Our Pacific Household in the New Normal," in *From the Deep: Pasifiki Voices for a New Story,* ed. James Bhagwan, Elise Huffer, Frances C. Koya-Vaka'uta, and Aisake Casimira (Suva: Pacific Theological College, 2020), 1–10.

whenever there is bloodshed. The word for the rocks/stones (*fatu*) is the same as for the human heart. Skies (*lagi*) is used for a human head. The word for a human skull (*atigisami*) is as that for a seashell, connoting that wisdom is always connected to the ocean currents, flows, and turbulences. The word for tongue (*laulaufaiva*) connotes distribution of resources rather than digestion. When a mother tree or a hub tree is cut, the word used is *oia*, meaning "the whole forest cries in pain." This is why any cutting of hub trees should be accompanied by rituals to ask for pardon and to restore balance, as the whole forest will be affected by cutting just one tree.

A woman's placenta is called *fanua*, meaning land. The land is thus understood to play a critical role in nurturing and feeding the unborn child. During birth, it is the *fanua* that is severed to give life to the newborn. After birth, the mother's *fanua* (placenta) is buried in the *fanua* (land) as a reminder that what nurtures human life in the placenta now returns to nurture more life in the cosmic community. In most Pasifika cultures, when a child is born, the umbilical cord is buried in the land: the child is disconnected from the human mother and is reconnected with Mother Earth. As discussed above, this practice of separation and joining, disconnection and reconnection, is central to eco-relational spirituality. Reconnection is imperative when there is disconnection, especially when we disconnect a life from its roots. Balance and harmony are not romantic notions; they are eco-relational principles of life that inform and shape how one should relate to the other members of the cosmic *Aiga*.

We Don't Have the Ocean . . . We Are the Ocean

Because of cosmic deep living connections, the notion of ownership is a controversial subject. This is because we do not own the land and the ocean; rather, the land and ocean own us. This is why the term *resource* is problematic from an eco-relational perspective, because it connotes the sense that something is available to be discovered, used, and owned. Because many Pasifika cultures revolve around the "we are" cosmic way of life, the ownership idea manifested in the "we have" ideology of neoliberal capitalism has recently been scrutinized. The Pasifika voices are looking for an alternative to the current development paradigm.[15] Their approach is cosmological and relational. The neoliberal capitalist view is anthropocentric and

15. Bhagwan, et al., *From the Deep,* 44–46.

capitalist.[16] Teresia Teaiwa, from the islands of Kiribati, once said, "We sweat and cry salt so we know that the ocean is really in our blood."[17] This sense of deep connection rather than ownership means therefore that we do not have the ocean: we are the ocean. We do not have the land: we are the land. We do not have relationship: we are relationship.[18]

Pope Francis lamented the loss of these *deep living connections* because "we have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters."[19] When we lose memory, especially the remembrance of deep connection, we lose what it means to live *within* our means. This is called greed, "the greatest of all plagues against justice, peace, and sustainability."[20] The Earth has become a theatre of pain with many suffering relatives oppressed by the greed of their own close kin. We carry every day the sin of living beyond our means. It is a sin because we no longer recognize the suffering of our own cosmic relatives as we take what belongs to them to consolidate our own.

The eco-relational sense of *deep living connections* should shape a reconstruction of a theology of stewardship for the church. The dominant push of saving the natural environment through self-limitation and all other stewardship acts cannot work unless we feel we are intimately part of what we are trying to save. How can we save something to which we are not deeply connected? Our mindsets need to shift from the stewardship idea of *caring for* the *Aiga*, which has dominated Eurocentric theology, into *living with* the *Aiga*, grounded on cosmic kinship. The *caring for* model of stewardship is

16. For further exploration of the capitalist development narrative dominating the Pasifika communities and the move towards a more relational one, see Upolu Lumā Vaai, *"E itiiti a lega mea*—Less yet More: A Pacific Relational Development Paradigm of Life," in *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi,* ed. Upolu Lumā Vaai and Aisake Casimira (Suva: University of the South Pacific and Pacific Theological College, 2017), 215–31.

17. Teresia Teaiwa, quoted by Epeli Hauofa, in *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 41.

18. Upolu Lumā Vaai, "We Are Therefore We Don't Have," in The Relational *Self: Decolonising Personhood in the Pacific*, ed. Upolu Lumā Vaai and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (Suva: University of the South Pacific and Pacific Theological College, 2017), 283–84.

19. Francis, *Laudato si', On Care for Our Common Home: An Encyclical Letter on Ecology and Climate* (Strathfield, NSW: St Paul's Publications, 2015), 10.

20. Louk A. Andrianos, "Ecumenical Theology of Hope for the Common *Oikos* and the Greed Line as Principle of Sustainability," *The Ecumenical Review* 70, no. 4 (December 2018): 613.

still anthropocentric, which allows room for capitalist manipulation framed around the idea of care. The *living with* model of stewardship challenges us to move beyond our interests to consider the interests of those who are "part of us." The more we see the other as *flesh, bones,* and *blood*, the more we are invited to be cautious in our actions. In eco-relational spirituality, relating precedes the caring, while the latter has now been categorized as paid work in many parts of the world. "Deep solidarity"[21] with creation and empathetic stewarding means that once we (re)find that intimate genealogical spiritual connection through *living with* the Earth, the *caring for* should follow. Stewardship is about deep living connections that are always spiritual in nature. To *be there* and *be caring* for the cosmic others should start with the resolve to *be with*. We can only honestly love and care for the *Aiga* if we are deeply connected to it. Pope Francis calls this kind of deep connection "integral ecology," which allows us to see the Earth as family. "Our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us."[22] In eco-relational spirituality, anything that is body-related, to which communities belong, is part of them—they will protect and care for it with all their lives.

That is why in the eco-relational spirituality, the notion of celebration is critical. In his *theology of celebration*, Sione'Amanaki Havea argues that Pasifika is founded on this cosmological relationality: the idea of celebration of relationships underpins life and activities.[23] Every gift is matched not initially with negation or with the doctrine of the Fall, but rather with celebration. To lose this gift of celebration is to lose the realization of being gifted. Today there is much negation that aims at gifting ourselves by un-gifting other peoples and communities. This has always been the aim of the colonial project. It creates a digestive centre that facilitates this un-gifting by controlling others and their wealth. This is expressed in the controlling attitude present in the wisdom saying *e tele lava le si'uvai ae sei e taele mai lava ile mata ole vai*, meaning "the downstream is large enough to bathe but you also want to cease its source." We have created a God and a gospel of uniformity to justify this "ceasing" project, that our cultures are perceived to be more divinely gifted than others. In our worship we thank this God for the abundance we have

21. Joerg Rieger, *Jesus vs Caesar: For People Tired of Serving the Wrong God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 25–26.

22. Francis, *Laudato si',* 1, 16.

23. Sione'Amanaki Havea, "Christianity in the Pacific Context," in *South Pacific Theology: Papers From the Consultation on Pacific Theology, Paupua New Guinea,* ed. Sione'Amanaki Havea (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1987), 13.

received from these un-gifting practices. Today it is hard to move back to the "we are" way of life from the attractiveness of the "we have" narrative that shapes every political, economic, and religious development, including our everyday encounters. How can Pasifika communities contribute to changing a destructive development story that predominantly functions outside of the holistic wisdom, "We do not have the ocean . . . we are the ocean"?

Conclusion

Eco-relational spirituality is a cosmic-based spirituality that concerns all of life. It sets the basis for dynamism and movement of life and well-being. It captures our deep living connection to the Earth, a relationality that has existed since the *vavau,* the "forever before," towards the *faavavau*, "the forever beyond," and finds its source and constant fulfillment in God. This is the liquidity of life that is central to eco-relational spirituality. It promotes life as not only relational, but also as ecologically relational. Justice for the Earth is dependent upon recognizing the importance of a spirituality that takes relationship with the Earth as primary. Thus, relationality is in our blood. Because of this, our Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace means to be responsible for the whole of life, not just human life. The fact that grassroots and poor communities are deeply connected with the Earth means that caring for Earth and the cosmos is caring for the poor. Doing justice to the Earth has radical implications for doing justice to poor communities. Our challenge: How can we incorporate this cosmic-based spirituality into our development structures and policies as well as into our faith discussions and actions? Is there a possibility that the global church and economic systems will learn from the eco-relational cosmic-based spiritualities of indigenous communities around the world, including Pasifika? This is a discussion that requires urgent attention.

3

Indigenous Spirituality for Transformation

Wati Longchar

This short essay argues that the core foundation of indigenous spirituality is land. It is only in relation to the integrity of creation that the question of transformation can be discerned. While seeking transformation within indigenous communities, we need to ask: Who defines transformation for them? From what and whom? Are indigenous people asking for reservation of jobs or justice? What are the indigenous people affirming in their search for a new relationship with the land and people? These are some of the questions this paper addresses. First, let us underline a few areas regarding the modern context of indigenous people.

Indigenous People Today

Indigenous people constitute approximately five to ten percent of the world's population. When we say "indigenous people," we mean the natives, the first people, or the original settlers of the land who gave names to the mountains, rivers, rocks, animals, trees, flowers, and other natural phenomena. Naming is always connected to identity, caring, and parenting; thus, indigenous people as first settlers have a special responsibility to protect all people, the earth, and its resources. They have always defined their identity in relation to space.[1]

Indigenous people have suffered due to successive colonization in the past. With the acceleration of market capitalism today, indigenous people and their spirituality are commoditized for the market all over the world. They are sold as commodity, used as objects of pleasure and enjoyment without respect for their personality, spirituality, and dignity. In some countries, indigenous communities are turned into anthropological museums by the rich to earn money from naive tourists. For example, the *Jarawa* of the Andaman Islands

1. The words *space*, *creation*, and *land* should not be narrowly understood as mere natural objects outside of us. They mean a place, a sacred place, that gives us an identity and sustenance.

are treated like animals in a zoo. Although the human safari is banned, the tour operators use the slogans "people of the jungle" and "wild tribes" to promote tours of the *Jarawa* tribe.[2] Thousands of tourists go there to see their fellow human beings. The tourists are instructed not to throw food or clothes at them, or try to establish contact, but it is perfectly okay to take a photograph. In the name of safeguarding their culture, fellow humans are sold as commodity for the promotion of the tourism industry. The whole tribe is being commercialized for earning revenue. It is an inhuman act, a denial of human rights, which could be better described as an objectification of humans for commercial purposes.

Indigenous people are used in different ways to earn revenue. Culture is the collective memory and heritage of the people that provides their identity and binds them together as a distinct community. However, along with the objectification of indigenous communities, their cultural heritages, customs, rituals, sacred shrines, places of worship, sacred music, and ceremonial dresses, which were revered, are now marketed without respect. They are marketed in the form of mass recreation, as a money-making tool of government and business houses. It is an insult to God's given spiritual heritage and wisdom. The protection of indigenous communities and their spirituality is crucial for their survival. It is in this context that we need to discern transformative action.

Foundation of Indigenous People's Spirituality: The Land

Spirituality is the deeper dimension of the socio-ethical principle that touches the life of a community and governs it. People understand spirituality in different ways. For some, it is a life of contemplation and meditation; for others, it is self-sacrifice for the sake of the gospel; it can also be a commitment to struggle for justice. While an anthropocentric spirituality is strongly emphasized in other traditions, the indigenous peoples share a common spiritual heritage that has as its central feature a cosmos-centric perception of spirituality, in which transformation is perceived only in relationship to God's creation.

Despite their cultural and ethnic diversity, the indigenous communities all over the world uphold a special relationship with the land. Land, for them, is more than just a habitat or a political boundary; it is the basis of their social organization, economic system, and cultural identification. The

2. See *"The Jarawa,"* Survival International website, 5 March 2091, https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/jarawa.

understanding of indigenous people is expressed in different wisdom sayings. For instance:

> The land is the Supreme Being's land
> One cannot become rich by selling land
> Do not be greedy for the land, if you want to live long
> Land is life
> The one who does not have land always cheats others or cannot become a good citizen
> The land cries in the hands of greedy people
> The land never lies; do not lie to the land
> Anyone who takes another's land by giving false witness will not live long
> The land is like a bird, it flies away soon in the hands of greedy people
> You can sell other things, but not land
> You are a stranger without land.[3]

Is it not the whole of creation that declares the glory of God? The whole creation expresses the spiritual relationship between the land and the people. An Australian aborigine, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, describes the community's relationship to land in the following terms: "Land gives us value, and our spirituality is in the land. The goodness that is in the land—in the trees, in the water, in the rocks, in the beauty of the landscape and nature itself—enables us to breathe, live, and enjoy."[4]

These expressions of indigenous people stress the spiritual bond between people and land. The land is a complex spiritual component and occupies a central place in the worldview of indigenous people.

Contrary to the colonizer's description of the land as "wilderness" or "space," indigenous people's identity is radically related to the land, including the mountains, the rocks, the entire cosmic universe, and everything else therein. It is in the land that we worship, heal the sick, educate our children, and feed our people. The loss of land and the destruction of the indigenous people's environment is an affront to their identities. It results in the loss of their spirituality and compromises their self-determining existence. If the land is lost, the family, clan, village, and the tribe's identity too will be lost. Without land, a person will become homeless, a person without an identity.

3. These wisdom sayings were collected by the author from Naga tribes in northeast India.
4. Galarrwuy Yunupingu, "Concepts of Land and Spirituality," in *Aboriginal Spirituality–Past, Present, Future*, ed. Anne Pattel-Gray (Victoria: HarperCollins Religious, [1996] 2000), 7.

Indigenous people's religious practices are rooted in the land. Even the Sacred Power is understood in relation to land/space. For example, the Aos and Sangtams of Nagaland (India) call their Supreme Being, Lijaba. *Li* means "land" and *jaba* means "real." The Supreme Being is "the real soil." Sometimes people call the Supreme Being *Lizaba*. *Zaba* means "enter," so *Lizaba* is "the One who enters or dwells in the soil." People believe the Supreme Being enters into the soil with the seeds and rises again along with the crops. Thus, the blooming flower, the bearing fruits of a tree, and the rice signify the presence of the Creator. The Sacred Power is present in every iota of creation and the whole creation becomes the manifestation of the Creator. This understanding reminds us of the prophet Isaiah's vision. The prophet heard God's messengers announcing, "the whole earth is full of God's glory" (Is. 6:3). For indigenous people, there is no concept of the Creator without the land; the land and the Creator are inseparably related. The Creator dwells not only in human beings but in the soil as well.

The land is also understood as the symbol of unity of all living creatures, the spirit(s), and the Creator. It is the basis for the coexistence of indigenous people with other living beings, their ancestors, and the Creator. Protection of land is, thus, the foundation for human transformation.

Transformation: From What?

"Transformation," with justice as its foundation, means strengthening the capacities of the weaker and vulnerable communities for participation in socio-economic and political life. Without dismantling the oppressive structures and systems, vulnerable communities will be co-opted. Without justice, the process of transformation will be mere assimilation to an oppressive structure.

In some societies, oppressed people have "voluntarily" adopted the dominant value system, assuming that assimilation into the dominant society will transform them. Assimilation involves the adoption of the dominant language, religious and cultural practices, clothing, names, and diet. It is called social mobility.

Assimilation through colonization was severe among indigenous people. Colonization refers to the exercise of power and control by one group over another. Both formal and informal methods (behaviours, ideologies, institutions, policies, and economics) maintain the subjugation or exploitation

of indigenous peoples, lands, and resources.[5] Colonization is an aggressive, forced, and violent activity. It attacks the territorial, cultural, spiritual, social, and political life of the people. The first phase of the colonizing process involves land or territory confiscation through military actions, diplomatic dialogue, or treaty agreements. In many cases, colonized people have been forcefully evicted; sometimes by creating fear and tension that drives them away. In an extreme case, a whole community could be massacred to take over the land. The prime lands were the target, and these were forcibly confiscated, making colonized people landless. With the loss of land, the main source of their livelihood, they lived in abject poverty. Along with this, they lost their culture. Indigenous people have thus reframed transformation to include the return of the land to indigenous people who are its rightful owners, and the protection of such land and all living beings.

Although their history, context, race, and ideologies are different, many indigenous people share similar experiences of being victimized by different forms of oppression, including land alienation, economic deprivation, political exclusion, and social stigmatization. During the colonial era, transformation was understood as "civilizing people," using absolute and exclusivist language. It was understood that indigenous peoples were going to be "transformed" only when their culture and language were demolished, as these were the result of their "pagan" and "devilish" heritage. The inferiority value system imposed on indigenous people has had a tremendous negative impact on their cultures. Indigenous people have also internalized a sense of cultural inferiority. The idealization of the white culture and religion have brought great damage to God's rich blessing of cultures. Even today many indigenous people think their religion, spirituality, economic system, and cultural values are inferior and backwards, leading some of them to aspire to westernization. It is not uncommon for young indigenous people aspire to adopt a western lifestyle.

This shows how deeply the colonial mindset has taken root in our thinking and the way we perceive the world and ourselves. Through this "civilizing mission," many indigenous people lost their land, their mother tongue, and their cultural and social structures. They were assimilated into the colonial framework. In relation to the American indigenous peoples, George Tinker observed: "The freedom imposed on American Indians by the colonial power

5. Waziyatawin and Michael Yellow Bird, "Beginning Decolonization," in *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook*, ed. Waziyatawin, Angela Wilson, and Michael Yellow Bird (Santa Fe, N. M.: School of American Research, [2005] 2008), 2.

center is the freedom to forget our past, our traditional values, our community bondedness; freedom to forget that we were once peoples; and freedom, at last, to enter the White economy and generate our wealth—by selling our most sacred traditions."[6]

The whole approach to "transformation" from the colonial perspective is to assimilate or integrate the indigenous "other" into the dominant social, political, and religious value system without challenging that unjust system. Is this transformation? Transformation, for indigenous people, involves the recovery of our self-respect, traditional wisdom, and appreciation for the diversity of cultures.

After disarming and controlling the colonized territory militarily, the second phase of the colonization process is imposed: it is called cultural and social colonization. Robert Odawi Porter expounds on the process of cultural colonization as follows:

> Cultural change at this level could be called "acculturation" or "assimilation" but the more accurate term is "social engineering." At first, the colonizer uses violence to force the colonized people to change who they are as people. This occurs through the application of new laws and punishments that outlaw traditional behaviors, such as religious practices, dancing, and certain family and marital relations. The next phase is equally as violent but takes the less overtly threatening form of taking children away from their home and raising them in the colonizer's educational institutions. This "educational" process, often referred to as "promoting civilization," involves beating, hard labor, and psychological abuse. The "benefit" associated with this is that the seeds of the colonizer's culture are planted deeply in Indigenous Peoples at a very early age.[7]

Social and cultural colonization is done in several ways. First, the colonizer changes the name of the colonized villages, towns, mountains, and rivers. The people are not allowed to identify themselves by their indigenous names: the colonizer gives them new names. This process of assimilation was strategically done in many countries, such as Myanmar, Taiwan, Australia, Argentina, and India, to name just a few. Second, the indigenous names, icons, symbols, and cultural practices are used by colonizers for undignified, demeaning purposes,

6. George E. "Tink" Tinker, *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2008), 144.
7. Robert Odawi Porter, "The Decolonization of Indigenous Governance," in *For Indigenous Eyes Only*, 89.

in order to inculcate low self-esteem and negative image in the indigenous peoples. This is especially in regard to indigenous culture and wisdom, which was intended to be passed on to their now-colonized children.[8] In some cases, people are forced to change their religious beliefs, educational practices, and economic and political systems. So, true transformation for the indigenous people involves the recovery of their history, land, culture, and religious rights.

Language gives identity to a community, and it is through language that we analyze, express ourselves, and relate to the world around us. Language is also a key social agent creating community by providing a distinct cultural identity.[9] But today, many indigenous languages are dangerously close to extinction or have actually become extinct. With the loss of land and language, indigenous culture will soon disappear. Eradicating indigenous languages has been a strategic colonizing mechanism. This is why in many countries indigenous languages are not only unrecognized as legitimate languages, but people are punished for speaking their mother tongue, even in their own places. James Brooke warns that within the next century, half of the world's 6,000 languages are expected to disappear.[10] We are all taught that the English language is an important tool to our survival in the modern world, while indigenous languages have been limited or have been portrayed as of no use. This implies that indigenous children will have a potential survival disadvantage because their language is being taken from them. Thus, protection and recovery of indigenous languages, which constitute a foundational stone of our identity, are crucial in the transformative process for indigenous people.

The democratic system of government is an imposed political machinery, which takes control of indigenous peoples' self-governance and customary law. It favours the majority or dominant community because the numbers matter in the imposed political structure. It excludes the minorities from active political participation. Transformation for indigenous people involves the right to political participation, decision-making, justice, and self-governance.

Colonization continues today through market capitalism. It operates at the expense of the land and its resources and is deeply connected with the exploitation of indigenous people and other poor communities. Unjust systems push these communities into abject poverty. Many of their people

8. Suzan Shown Harjo, "Just Good Sports," in *For Indigenous Eyes Only*, 31.
9. M.P. Joseph, "Introduction: Searching Beyond Galilee," in *From Galilee to Tainan: Towards a Theology of Chhutpthau-thin,* ed. Po Ho Huang (Tainan: ATESEA, n.d.), 6.
10. Waziyatawin, "Defying Colonization through Language Survival," in *For Indigenous Eyes Only,* 116.

are treated as commodities and beasts. With the slogan "minority should be sacrificed for the sake of the majority," many indigenous people in Asia have been forced to sacrifice their land, forest, and water. The dominant extractive growth model has become a threat to the survival of indigenous people. Unmindful extraction of natural resources, such as minerals, natural gas, petroleum, timber, and hydropower

- threatens the waters that are sacred to people and means of life for all human beings and all of creation;
- removes people from their traditional lands, and threatens the food web to which we human beings, and all creation, are dependent upon; and
- enables genocidal effects to human beings, where indigenous peoples, vulnerable peoples and the poor are displaced, poisoned, and killed so that multinational economic systems can profit for the sake of just a few beneficiaries.

Transformation is not just about regaining political and economic rights. It also involves justice and respect for all life. Indigenous people are redefining transformation. One core aspect is that humans cannot live in peace and harmony, and they cannot experience freedom, without relating to and affirming the integrity of God's creation. Thus transformation, based on the indigenous peoples' voices, should integrate the following elements:

- community transformation over individual freedom
- relationality or interconnection between all living beings, even inanimate beings such as rocks, animals, rivers, mountains
- simple functionality over luxury
- a respectful and reciprocal attitude to and use of natural resources
- sharing of over-accumulated wealth
- alternative definitions of privilege, power, and prestige
- promotion of people-oriented development and management of resources

Indigenous people affirm progress, development, and liberation as important components for human life, but they do not neglect their spiritual connection to the earth's family. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People gives a wider framework to this approach to transformation.[11] Affirming that God is revealed among the marginalized

11. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UN General Assembly Resolution 61/295, adopted 13 September 2007, https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf.

indigenous people and that God continues to journey with us in our struggle for transformation, challenges us to affirm and work toward the following aspects in our search for transformation:

- the right to the ownership of indigenous lands as the territorial base for the existence of their populations
- the right to use, manage, and dispose of all natural resources found within their ancestral lands
- the right to control their economies, and the right to economic prosperity
- the right to restore, manage, develop, and practice their culture, language, traditions, and way of life following their worldview, and to educate their children in them
- the right to determine their form of government, and to uphold indigenous political systems
- the recovery of self-respect, religious rights, traditional wisdom, and respect for the diversity of culture
- the right to political justice and self-governance: it is not just about regaining political and economic rights, but it is also about justice and respect of all life

Transformation Affirming Spiritual Connection with the Land

Since land is the foundation of all life, indigenous people take utmost care of it. The land is protected through the observance of ceremonies, rituals, and "Earth's Day" or "Mother Earth's Day." For example, in *Ao-Nagas* of northeast India, Earth's Day is observed for up to six days by many communities. The earth is given complete rest and treated with much respect by observing the followings restrictions:

- No one is allowed to cut firewood, lest the earth be shaken
- Use of axe and knife is prohibited
- No one is allowed to poke the earth by spear or by any pointed materials
- No one is allowed to make noise
- No one is allowed to spit on the ground
- No one is allowed to stamp on the ground harshly or roughly
- No one is allowed to make a fire on the ground
- No sex
- No killing of animals

- No cutting of trees
- No one is allowed to go to the field
- No merrymaking, such as dancing or singing

Here the earth is honoured and treated as sacred. It is on these days that peace and reconciliation initiatives take place between individuals, clans, villages, and communities. Earth's Days are also days of prayer and contemplation. This was and is the culture of the indigenous people.

All the indigenous communities, whether in Asia, Africa, North America, South America, or the Pacific, perceive the whole cosmos as one integrated and interlinked experience. The earth is always brought to the centre in their day-to-day life. For example, in some societies gifting a traditional shawl is the greatest honour to be offered to a guest. It is never given directly from person to person: the giver first places the shawl on the ground, and then the receiver takes it from the ground. This means that the shawl comes from the soil, and it must be taken from the soil. When a person is offered a drink, a few drops are first spilled on the ground, to honour the ground. These actions connect the person with the mystery of the earth. It is space that always brings persons together—a spiritual connection to space. Space is always acknowledged in the religious and ethical life of the indigenous communities. These values are not merely abstract concepts, but they are also part of people's life and existence. This provides a vision of life that is not based on the conquest of nature, people, and their culture, but is rooted instead in a harmonious relationship with nature, seeking its preservation as well as the protection of people and their cultures.

We need to affirm progress, development, and liberation as important components for human life, but we must do so without neglecting the spiritual connection we have with the earth. One of the major roots of today's world crises is neglecting the centrality that the spiritual connection with space/earth/creation has for human liberation. Rejection of the importance of this spiritual connection with the earth's family in development activities will be a serious mistake for the future survival of the world.

At the core of indigenous spirituality is affirmation of the interconnectedness of all living beings. The violation of mother earth, the trees, flowers, animals, and spirits is a violation of the very spiritual values that hold the community together. Based on this spiritual affirmation, indigenous people have been affirming that poverty, political oppression, economic exploitation, and justice to land are interrelated. Questions of identity, culture, and religion,

on the one hand, and the realities of hunger, disease, and illiteracy, on the other, are inseparable from space, the survival of the indigenous people, and the human community. Addressing these questions is part of an integral understanding of cosmic justice.

Conclusion

Located in the contemporary struggle for peace and justice, this essay has attempted to discern how some elements of the indigenous spirituality can be identified and integrated for the enrichment in our pilgrimage of justice and peace. Without justice, mere economic benefits, and reservation of jobs, indigenous people will have to conform to the dominant paradigm. Indigenous people do advocate for progress, development, and liberation, but without neglecting the spiritual connection to the earth's family. The core foundation is that humans cannot live in peace and harmony, and experience freedom, without affirming the integrity of creation. Protection of land is the foundation for human transformation.

II

Transformative Spiritualities for Liberation

4

Heartbless and Mek a Trod:

Meditation on a Rasta Spirituality for Justice and Peace

Anna Kasafi Perkins

Today, Rastafari has developed into a vibrant spiritual vision and social force for black dignity throughout the world.

—J. Richard Middleton, "Identity and Subversion in Babylon: Strategies for 'Resisting Against the System' in the Music of Bob Marley and the Wailers"

Words should never be used unthinkingly.

—George Eaton Simpson, "Religion and Justice: Some Reflections on the Rastafari Movement"

In leaving the Rastaman bids yo / Mannaz and Respeck/Izes and protechsun/ Upfullness / He bids you / Guidance and healt/Inity and Strenth / Bids you, Trod Holy/To I-ly I-ly I-ly / Mount Zion-I / Trod Holy.

—Kei Miller, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*

Introduction

In the June 2019 issue of *Caribbean Quarterly,* which featured "African-Caribbean Spirituality and Creativity," the absence of any reflection on a spirituality of RastafarI is glaring; several indigenous religious forms are discussed, including Spiritual Baptist, Orisha and Ettu—but not RastafarI, the best-known and most influential New World diasporic religion

originating in the Caribbean.[1] This omission is startling on at least three levels. First, the volume's guest editor, renowned Rastafarian researcher Clinton Hutton does not mark this absence even as he maintains, "One of the most enduring institutions that emerged among Africans enslaved in the Caribbean was African-Caribbean spirituality."[2] Hutton lamented: "This African folk spiritual institution, in its various manifestations, has been ridiculed, reviled, denigrated, feared, obscured, marginalized and outlawed across the Caribbean and beyond. And yet it has played a central role in the development of Caribbean civilization and the ontological shaping of its cultural, artistic, aesthetic, creative and philosophical ethos. Indeed, it has played a fundamental role in the making of freedom in the Caribbean."[3]

Indeed, RastafarI, which emerged in 1930s racist colonial Jamaica, influenced by the Pan-Africanist teachings of Marcus Garvey, has been one of the most ridiculed, policed, and persecuted New World African diasporic religions.[4] Yet, RastafarI significantly influenced the freedoms of African-descended people across the world, especially with its contribution to exorcising the debilitating ideology of classism and racism in Jamaica.[5]

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1. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, "Introduction: The Rastafari Phenomenon," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader,* ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998), 1–22.
2. Clinton Hutton, "Introduction: African-Caribbean Spirituality and Creativity," *Caribbean Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (June 2019): 207.
3. Hutton, "African-Caribbean Spirituality," 207.
4. Kofi Boukman Barima, "Obeah to Rastafari: Jamaica as a Colony of Ridicule, Oppression and Violence, 1865–1939," *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 10, no. 1 (March 2017): 163–85. In Jamaica, Revivalism, Pocomania, and Obeah were also ridiculed, suppressed, and violently attacked. Revivalism is a native Jamaican religion which began in Jamaica between 1860 and 1861 as a part of a religious movement called the Great Revival that swept across the nation. It combines elements of African beliefs and Christianity. It has several forms, the most significant being Revival Zion and Pocomania. See Barry Chevannes, ed., *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Emanuela Guano, "Revival Zion: An Afro-Christian Religion in Jamaica," *Anthropos 89*, no. 4/6 (1994): 517–28. Obeah is also an African-derived system of spiritual healing and justice-making practices developed among enslaved Africans. While not a single, unified set of practices, it has been outlawed and stigmatized as witchcraft and evil-working. It still remains outlawed in Jamaica today: see The Obeah Act, 1 January 1898, Ministry of Justice, Government of Jamaica, https://moj.gov.jm/laws/obeah-act; Diana Paton, "The Racist History of Jamaica's Obeah Act," The Gleaner, 16 June 2019, http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20190616/diana-paton-racist-history-jamaicas-obeah-act.
5. Barry Chevannes, "Rastafari and the Exorcism of the Ideology of Racism and Classism in Jamaica," in *Chanting Down Babylon*, 55–71.

Second, in wrestling with the impact of the Caribbean on global culture, Hutton noted that this cannot be appreciated apart from "an understanding of African-Caribbean spirituality and creativity, especially the agential relationship between spirituality, art/creativity, healing, and freedom around which Caribbean existence is centred."[6] Such a description readily defines RastafarI "livity," which centres on spirituality and art/creativity, making them integral elements in the healing of relationships with the self, the other, the land, divinity, and Mother Earth.[7] Livity—a term which, like spirituality, is not easily defined—gives expression to spirituality and may even be considered a spirituality, as will be discussed further here.[8] An initial way of understanding livity is to see it as "a sense of personal ritual and other taboos that enhance one's personal contact with Jah and makes one like Jah."[9]

Third, there may well be a challenge for researchers in connecting RastafarI and the notion of spirituality, perhaps because Rastas would reject such a construct being imposed upon them by the "System."[10] Also, because few of those engaging with RastafarI are theologians, and RastafarI do not have "official theologians or social theorists to codify and systematize their beliefs,"[11] a theological concept like spirituality would be given little attention. Nonetheless, one Caribbean theologian who recognizes RastafarI spirituality is Roderick Hewitt.[12] Hewitt, whose ideas will be briefly engaged with in

6. Hutton, "African-Caribbean Spirituality," 210.

7. Chet Alexander, *John Crow Speaks: Earth Teachings of the Jamaican Elders* (New York: Monkfish Book Publishing Company, 2005); William David Spencer, "Chanting Change Around the World through Rasta Ridim and Art," in *Chanting Down Babylon*, 266–83.

8. The terms spirituality-livity/livity-spirituality will be used interchangeably to capture the interconnectedness of these two concepts. The switching around is a matter of emphasis but refers to the same phenomenon.

9. Barry *Chevannes, Betwixt and Between: Explorations in an African-Caribbean Mindscape* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2006), 41.

10. *System* in RastafarI refers to the entire human complex that is arrayed against Jah and Jah people.

11. Ennis B. Edmonds, "Dread 'I' in-a-Babylon: Ideological Resistance and Cultural Revitalization," in *Chanting Down Babylon,* 23–35. Of course, this does not ignore the work of RastafarI poets and reggae artistes, whose prophetic work has globalized the RastafarI message, nor the increasing number of Rastafarian scholars, such as Michael Barnett (2012, 2005, 2002), who undertake research into their faith community.

12. Roderick Hewitt, "Stealing Land in the Name of Religion: A Rastafari Religio-Political Critique of Land Theft by Global Imperial Forces," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2016), https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i1.3347; Roderick Hewitt, "Spirituality for Democracy: Spiritual Resources for Democratic Participation in the 21st Century," Verbum et Ecclesia 35, no. 3 (2014), https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i3.1345.

the discussion, describes RastafarI spirituality as "radical," particularly in its persistent critique of the model of governance within society.[13]

It is worth noting that RastafarI, which has now become an international movement, is by no means homogenous, so its exploration in the present chapter is by no means exhaustive.

Meditating on a Rasta Spirituality for Justice and Peace

This chapter meditates on a Rasta spirituality for justice and peace, framed by the work of Jamaican Diaspora poet Kei Miller in his 2014 award-winning poetry collection, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*.[14] Miller, drawing upon RastafarI language and symbols, exhorts "heartbless," which is a RastafarI "chanting up of goodness and rightness, and, of course, upfullness" as a means to contributing to a more just and peaceful trod [journey, path, following the way of Rasta] towards Zion.[15] According to Miller, Zion is, "the destination that is outside the reach of imperial power, which does not threaten imperial power, but holds its own power on a different plain that raises it above earthly empires."[16] Such a just and peaceful trod is the Rasta livity, which is shaped by/one with a spirituality of/for justice and peace; such a livity-spirituality does not eschew "chanting down"/"beating down" imperial systems of oppression, deception, and exploitation—the Babylon Shitstem—using the power of words. The key to such upfullness (uprightness) is the individual Rasta who engages in an anti-imperial "trodding" (walking, pilgrimaging) of the distance laid out for each one by Jah. One walks this path with "Ises [praises] in [one's] mouth and cleanness in [one's] heart" in spite of the expected Crosses and Turbulation (Tribulation) along the way. In the process, the meditation nods to the significance of the RastafarI language (Dread Talk) to both deeply express and give life to its spirituality.

13. Grenadian Seon M. Lewis, *From Mythology to Reality: Moving Beyond Rastafari* (Raleigh, N.C.: Lulu Enterprises, 2012), would dispute that RastafarI has a spirituality. He argues that Rasta is a Judeo-Christian religion that has compartmentalized and separated itself from the sacred, creating an anti-spiritual frame of mind that he claims does not exist in the African spiritual systems from which RastafarI comes. This is an assertion that few would agree with, this author included.

14. Kei Miller, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2014). This book won the Forward Prize for poetry and was shortlisted for the International Dylan Thomas Prize and Costa Book Award.

15. See Velma Pollard, "Dread Talk–The Speech of the Rastafarian in Jamaica," *Caribbean Quarterly 26*, no. 4 (1980): 32–41, https://doi.org/10.1080/00086495.1980.11829315. She also notes that trod/trad means to go through or explain, and this is what the Rastaman does time and again for the Cartographer.

16. Miller, *Cartographer,* "xxvi," 68.

Caribbean spirituality, RastafarI spirituality

Diaspora Caribbean theologian Michael Jagessar maintains that Caribbean "artists, poets, and composers are often *exposing the holy in the ordinary*, providing a way for human beings to experience, question and praise it."[17] He further argues Caribbean religiosity, faith, and spirituality are a regular part of life in the region and to ignore them is to impoverish our discourse. It is necessary to come to terms with the deeply religious sensibilities of the ordinary Caribbean person and the relationship that exists between "subversion and the sacred."[18] In response, Jagessar challenges the tendency he identifies in Caribbean theology to "gloss over the fundamental reality and importance of faith/spirituality and its impact on Caribbean peoples and their psyches."[19] He defines spirituality as "the totality of one's interrelated existence as embodied in ways of life, modes of thinking and the diverse expressions of behaviour and attitudes towards the mystery that surrounds one's immediate context and world."[20] He argues that spirituality is not only Christian, but in the multifaith context of the Caribbean, it is also inclusive, ecumenical, and interfaith. Spirituality clearly encompasses the New World African diasporic religions such as RastafarI, which exposes the sacred as subversive as it outs the Babylonian Shitstem controlling the world.

Hewitt, a Jamaican United Church Minister and theologian, emphasizes that spirituality is a contested term. Nonetheless, following Swidler, he maintains that it refers to the "interior meaning of our humanity." He continues: "All religious and ideological systems sustain their identity, vocation and witness through an *embedded spirituality* that is not a fixed concept, but dynamic in that it is always *transforming reality* by embracing and relinquishing people's allegiance from time to time. It has to do with how we are being grasped by reality when we are in a liminal space."[21]

Indeed, Johnson-Hill, in arguing for a new social ethic for Jamaica, rooted in RastafarI, calls for, among other elements, a concept of lifestyle (livity) in the Afro-Jamaican underclass that reflects the unity in diversity implicit in

17. Michael N. Jagessar, "The Sacred in Caribbean Literature: A Theological Conversation," in *Reading Spiritualities: Constructing and Representing the Sacred,* ed. Dawn Llewellyn and Deborah F. Sawyer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 27.
18. Jagessar, "The Sacred," 27.
19. Jagessar, 28.
20. Jagessar, 31.
21. Hewitt, "Spirituality for Democracy," 2. Italics added.

the liminal religious awareness[22]—or the liminal space identified by Hewitt. Spirituality-livity, which encompasses a social ethic, is both subversive and dynamically transformative and deeply relevant beyond the religious system which engendered it.

Notably, this Afro-Jamaican social ethic can only be described when the deep interrelatedness of the aesthetic, the philosophical, the religious, the mundane, and the practical of the everyday is recognized as fundamental.[23] Because this is so, the self-reliant farmer, who plants with respect for the land, remains the Reggae artiste who chants down Babylon or the spell-binding poet who holds court during communal RastafarI "reasonings" or groundations. Such reasonings are "usually associated with meditation that is geared at spiritually equipping the Rastafari to "overstand" in order to maintain focus and strengthen connectivity with other Rastafari and the Creator through worship."[24]

The essence of the spirituality-livity of RastafarI voices is the distinctive understanding of justice, peace, and equal rights, which exists among the Jamaican underclasses. As Jack A. Johnson-Hill states, "It must emphasize an altruistic perspicacity, harmonious relations with the natural world, the paramount importance of communitas, and a disciplined non-involvement in relation to all violent dehumanizing social processes."[25]

The revolutionary implications of such a spirituality-livity bears consideration. Overall, it would call for a wholesale restructuring of the current socio-economic, religio-cultural, and political order in response to a spirituality-livity for justice and peace.

The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion

Jagessar calls for the consideration and acceptance of "story as a category as a counter-point for theologizing and exploring the sacred with a Caribbean flavour and tempo."[26] Therefore, the work of Caribbean poets and writers like Kei Miller are of theological importance, as they are well placed to help us perceive the-beyond-the-surface and the quotidian; they help us see the

22. Jack A. Johnson-Hill, *I-Sight: The Word of Rastafari: An Interpretive Sociological Account of Rastafarian Ethics* (Lanham, Md.: The American Theological Library Association & the Scarecrow Press, 1995).
23. Johnson-Hill, *I-Sight*.
24. Hewitt, "Stealing Land," 4.
25. Johnson-Hill, *I-Sight*, 334.
26. Jagessar, "The Sacred," 33.

religious meaning within our lives and our world. Miller demonstrates this in his work. Indeed, in discussing his choice of poetry to capture his ideas in *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*, Miller explains:

> What made me sure that it was a poetry collection is that weird dissonance that happens when the very spiritual language of Rastafari encounters the very scientific language of cartography. How do they make a sound against each other which would, in my mind, clearly be a new sound? . . . Poetry offers that possibility, I think, in a way that other genres don't offer that possibility. There's something I could do with this as a poetry collection that I couldn't do with it as an essay.[27]

So, in *The Cartographer*, Miller shares a collection of poems which is largely a dialogue between the putative Cartographer, who has been charged with mapping the island of Jamaica, and the Rastaman, who—as is the Rastafarian wont—challenges the very assumptions and systems behind what appears to be a neutral task and process.[28] Certainly, the confrontation between the two appear to be a culture clash in which one party—the Cartographer—holds the power of the Western, scientific, quantitative discipline of cartography; the other is an unnamed Rastaman, who is talkative, memorializing the land's and the people's history, questioning, sermonizing, and hospitable yet distrusting. The Rastaman knows cartography's "claim to objectivity belies a rapacious urge to count and classify . . . from above."[29] Neutrality is but an illusion or at least a deliberate misrepresentation (of the Truth). Miller perhaps hints at this in a brief poem entitled "iv": "The Rastaman thinks, draw me a map of / what you see / then I will draw a map of what you never see / and guess me whose map will be bigger than whose? / Guess me whose map will tell the larger / truth?"[30]

Truly, the ideology of the Cartographer hides the truth of the world: "There is no truth of the world accessible to us by deconstructing the ideologies we discern in maps."[31] The Rastaman's spirituality-livity enables him to disclose the larger truth of the world.

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27. "Kei Miller in Conversation with Susan Mains," Dundee University Review of the Arts, 9 October 2014, https://dura-dundee.org.uk/2014/11/09/kei-miller-in-conversation-with-susan-mains.
28. Michael Rose-Steel, "Of Metaphors and Maps: Cartographic Thinking and the Poetry of Kei Miller," *Politics of Place Green Connections* 3 (2015): 39–56.
29. Rose-Steel, "Of Metaphors," 41.
30. Miller, *Cartographer*, "iv," 19.
31. Rose-Steel, "Of Metaphors," 43.

Maria Alonso Alonso describes the Cartographer as an intruder and the Rastaman as a native.[32] However, that is too simple an explanation, for sometimes the Rastaman and the Cartographer appear to shade into each other—to slip into each other's mode of speech and patterns of thought.[33] One example suffices: "But the mapmaker is slowly getting lost / in de iya ites [higher heights] of de rastaman's talk, for consider when / de Rastaman I-nunciates something like: Map / was just a land-guage written gainst I&I / . . . / Map was just Babylon's most vampiric / orthography."[34]

Who is Rastaman? Who is Mapmaker?

Zion is not a place

Alonso Alonso misreads the meaning of Zion, inasmuch as Zion is not the place that the Cartographer travels to discover, nor the place where the Rastaman is born; nor is it the name given to the "transcultural metaphor [that] still needs to be discovered."[35] Rather, as Hewitt maintains, "The context [of Zion] is much more than a physical location or geographical point on a map but rather an indispensable symbol of ideological and psychological identity formation that puts up resistance against the imperial forces that deny fullness of life to people of African descent."[36]

Furthermore, Zion is more truly a state of being/livity-spirituality, of upfullness, as Miller demonstrates. Indeed, Zion is a counterpoint to Babylon, the Shitstem of downpression and dehumanization that dominates the African peoples of the world. Historically, Babylon is the imperial European colonial world, which continues to exist today in post-colonial power structures, their associated ideologies, and their political apparatus. Babylon, as it exists in Jamaica, is a complex of economic, political, religious, and educational institutions and values that evolved from the colonial experiment. It institutionalizes inequity and exploitation; globally it is the system in which power takes precedence over human freedom and dignity. On the level of the cosmos, Babylon is the forces of evil arrayed against Jah

32. Maria Alonso Alonso, "The Rhetoric of Movement: Exploring the Art of Mapping in Kei Miller's *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion," Oceánide* 11 (December 2018), 1–7.

33. Jacob Silkstone, "The Cartographer and the Rastaman: An Introduction to Kei Miller," https://www.litfestbergen.no/litfestbergen-2019/essaygjendiktingar/the-cartographer-and-the-rastaman/.

34. Miller, *Cartographer*, "xix," 44.

35. Alonso Alonso, "The Rhetoric," 11.

36. Hewitt, "Stealing Land," 5.

and the righteous—RastafarI and the *sufferahs*. Edmonds captures the essence of Babylon well:

> These evil forces, however, are not metaphysical entities; rather, they are human attitudes and activities that are out of touch with the divine-natural order. This imagery is applicable to the proliferation of armaments of mass destruction and the exploitation of natural resources, both of which threaten human existence and the health of the environment. Any human activity that militates against harmonious relationships is a reflection of Babylonian values. Babylon is not a geographic locality or a specific social system. Babylon is any system of ideas and institutions that constitutes a culture in which people are oppressed and alienated from "Jah" and the life-giving, self-affirming reality of Rastafari.[37]

Such is the truth that the Rastaman knows.

Plotting a way to Zion

The key contention between the two adversaries in *The Cartographer* is the Cartographer's determination to map a way to RastafarI's mystical city of Zion. In deploying the precision and orderliness of the science of cartography, the Cartographer asks, "*Where* is Zion?" The Rastaman instructs him on *how* to get there—and so answers a different, more provocative question. In a poem entitled simply "xxv, in response to the erstwhile Cartographer's declaration that he is now plotting a way to Zion, the Rastaman shakes his head and admonishes him thus: "My bredda, / you have to walk good and trod holy. You have to pass through a place called Crosses, and a town called Turbulation [Tribulation] / and only when Jah decide you trod the distance he set out / for you to trod, with Ises in your mouth and cleanness / in your heart, only then, my bredda. Only then."[38]

Suffering (Crosses and Turbulation) is a necessary feature of the trod to Zion, which surprisingly, is controlled by Jah, despite Babylon being in charge. Crosses is the "underside" of the Jamaican society and the African diaspora experience of suffering and estrangement. Specifically, Crosses (*kraasiz*) in the Jamaican language means "adversity, bad luck, evil, or trouble."[39] "Turbulation" is the very biblical word *tribulation*, speaking to a state of great

37. Edmonds, "Dread'I,'" 25.

38. Miller, *Cartographer,* "xxi," 62.

39. Anna Kasafi Perkins, "Confessions of a Jamaican 'Flatalik,'" in *Visions and Vocations: The Catholic Women Speak Network,* ed. Tina Beattie and Diana Culbertson (New York: Paulist Press, 2018), 97–100.

suffering, often caused by a divine response to human sinfulness. Crosses is a literal reference to the scriptural admonition to take up the/your cross and follow Christ,[40] which aligns with suffering being necessary and originating from the hand of Jah. The limits of that journey are Jah-determined and all that a bredren/sistren can do is faithfully trod the trod with praises on their lips for Jah and malice toward no one in their heart. Miller, like Jagessar, is right in highlighting the role of praise for the holy as a significant element of Caribbean spirituality and Rasta livity-spirituality. Only then . . . only then.

The Rastaman admonishes further in "xxv": "My bredda / You cannot *plot* your way to Zion; you can neither *samfy* your way or *ginnal* your way or palm Jack Mandora / a pound or a dollar and bribe your way in. You cya a climb / into Zion on Anancy's web / or get there by boat or plane or car. / Neither high or low science will get you through / Jah's impressive door."[41]

Trodding to Zion is not about plotting logical courses or deploying trickery (plotting/climbing Anancy's web/ginnaling/samfying) as so many in Jamaica are wont to do—as Babylon does naturally. Babylon's deception is ultimately futile. It is not a geographical place, so boats, planes, or cars are useless transport. All the science of the world—"high" science of folk knowledge or the "low" science of education, cartography, logistics, logics, and research—cannot compel Jah RastafarI to open the door to Zion. Eventually, the Cartographer grasps that "every night while the mapmaker expands / on his network of secret roads and slaving roads, / marooning roads and backbush roads, / what he has really concerned himself with is Zion- / a question has wedged itself between his *learning* / and *awakening*: how does one map a place / that is not quite a place? How does one draw / towards the heart?"[42]

The Cartographer is learning and awakening, as he sights the truth of RastafarI.

Repatriation upended?

Yet, the Rastaman's assertion seems to turn on its head the Rastafarian commitment to repatriation and the identification of Zion with Africa-Ethiopia, from which the Rastafarian was "stolen," as memorialized in Bob Marley's *Redemption Song*: "Old pirates, yes they rob I / sold I to the merchant ship minutes after they took I from the bottomless pit." Marley laments both as he and his enslaved ancestor were robbed of self, identity, land, language, and

40. See Luke 9:23; Matthew 16:24.

41. Miller, *Cartographer,* "xxv," 62. Italics in original.

42. Miller, "xxi," 50. Italics added.

community ["rob I"] in the process of being stolen from Mother Africa. He recalls the experience of the "bottomless pit" of "dark dungeons, overflowing with misery and despair" in the slave castles of Ghana. It was there where the people were held before being transferred to slave ships for the arduous journey across the Atlantic, which many did not survive.[43] The mercenary intentions of the robbery are exposed in denoting these *merchant* ships, which transformed human beings into commodities—chattel—bought and sold for the economic prosperity of Europeans in a Babylon system. The memory of the Middle Passage and the suffering consequent upon it—that extends even to contemporary times—is a most painful one for RastafarI. The ways Rastas speak of the experience of enslavement shows that they reach back into the past, feel the pain and suffering of their ancestors in such a way that they can and do talk about these in the first-person present tense.

However, it is clear that the commitment to repatriation to Africa is not a fundamental tenet of RastafarI. Chevannes argues otherwise and discusses the development of the idea that "Jamaica is Africa."[44] There is no need to return as "Africa is already in Jamaica"—historically and culturally. Indeed, the commitment to repatriation to Africa-Ethiopia did not entail a wholesale rejection of Jamaica. There is a sense in which RastafarI is deeply embedded in Jamaica, the birthplace of their prophet Marcus Garvey. In a significant way, "repatriation is inextricably linked to a rootedness in the island's yards."[45] Repatriation is not solely a kind of future transplantation; so, while failed efforts at physical repatriation are momentarily disheartening for some, Rastas remain relatively stable in and committed to Jamaica and are "fundamentally concerned with contemporary experience in the ordinary, everyday life-world."[46] Likewise, Murre maintains the brethren have reinterpreted repatriation "as voluntary migration to Africa, returning to Africa culturally and symbolically, or rejecting Western values and preserving African roots and pride."[47] This is possible because their livity-spirituality maintains a dynamism committed to grasping at reality in a liminal space. Important, however, is the notion of justice which is intrinsic to reparation; restorative

43. Lilian Diarra, "Ghana's Slave Castles: The Shocking Story of the Ghanaian Cape Coast," *Culture Trip,* 24 January 2017; Barry Chevannes, "Rastafari and the Coming of Age: The Routinization of the Rastafari Movement in Jamaica," in *Rastafari in the New Millennium: A Rastafari Reader,* ed. Michael Barnett (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 13–34.

44. Chevannes, Betwixt and Between, 32.

45. Johnson-Hill, *I-Sight,* 310.

46. Johnson-Hill, 312.

47. Murrell, "The Rastafari Phenomenon," 6.

justice is implied in the call of "Africa for the Africans." Each one is returned to the land where she is from, correcting the injustice of the rape of Africa and the Americas. So, what of this Zion that is on the horizon?

> Zion is a reckoning day / don't make nobody fool you / Zion is a turble [terrible] day… / Zion is a receipts and payment day /…/ And Zion is a parcel / of land returned onto Natty / day; more than Africa, / more than I-thiopia /.[48]

Natty Tongue

RastafarI—or *Natty Dread* as they are sometimes called—early cottoned on to the oppressors' use of language, imagery, and metaphor to control and carry forward the Babylonian agenda. They contend that language—the Queen's English—spreads confusion among diaspora Africans due to its negative description of African realities and culture. It also makes Africans ashamed of their identity and heritage. Such power relations shape our world and our view of the life-world. In response, RastafarI have "developed language into a keen instrument for defining reality and stating the distinctive Rasta worldview."[49] Having scrutinized the word/sound structure of the Queen's English, they identify and reject the negative connotations in the spelling and pronunciation of certain words such as *oppression*, *dedicate*, and *appreciate*, for such words bear the weight of their phonological implications. These words are replaced with *downpression*, *livicate*, and *apprecilove*. Rastas also coin new words like *bless up*, *heartbless*, and *upfullness* to give expression to their livity-spirituality. Velma Pollard notes that Dread Talk is a lexical expansion of Jamaican Creole, the traditional speech form of the Jamaican poor, to accommodate "a particular and for some a more accurate way of seeing life in the Jamaican society."[50] She maintains that "the man who is making the words is a man looking up from under; is a man pressed down economically and socially by the establishment [hence his experience of downpression]. His speech form represents an attempt to bend the lexicon of Jamaica Creole to reflect his social situation and his religious views."[51]

48. Miller, *Cartographer*, "xxiii," 55.
49. Anna Kasafi Perkins, "The Wages of (Sin) is Babylon: Rastafari Versus Christian Religious Perspectives of Sin," in *Rastafari in the New Millennium,* 239–54.
50. Pollard, "Dread Talk," 206.
51. Pollard, 205.

Sizzla Kalonji, influential if controversial Rasta Dancehall artiste, for example, delivers a Rasta chant called "Upfullness" on his 2001 *Black History* album —interestingly, Pollard notes that reason, chant, and trod are biblical words that have been brought back by Rasta. In calling for "upfullness nothing less" to please Jah, Sizzla curses Babylon—"bun down Babylon"; "cut dem up/off"; "drown dem." Sizzla, "who embodies the aspirations, wishes, desires of young people from the downtrodden majority,"[52] claims his birth right as one of the "Selassie children." "[The wicked] couldn't stop the bless up from shower [coming down]."[53] Sizzla represents and reflects the Rastafarian belief that words "can kill or cure and that every word carries a vibration."[54] Interestingly, Miller has the Cartographer attend Reggae *Sumfest*, Jamaica's premier reggae celebration, where he "stood . . . for over an hour during Sizzla Kalonji's phenomenal performance."[55] His attention is drawn to the flagman who is waving the'ites'—Rasta flag of ice [red], gold and green—dutifully, unacknowledged. He compares him to Moses in Exodus 17:11, where the lowering of his arm can turn the tide of the battle between Israel and Amalek: "If asked / the flagman would say: / Zion not so far, mi boss - / is just an arm's length away."[56]

The RastafarI consciousness of the power and politics of language and language politics are at the heart of Miller's oeuvre.[57] So, the Rastaman questions: "Why you try so hard / to cut the tongue out of Natty / out of all Zion's children / telling dem how dem words / was rough and uncomely how / dem language / was nothing more / than a tegareg [vulgar] sound? / Explain why you try so hard / to dub out Natty's poems?"[58]

Dread Talk/Natty Tongue/Iyaric, especially because of its attractiveness to youth, has created and continues to create much social anxiety in Jamaican society, where the Jamaican language is already stigmatized as low class, signifying lack of education. Efforts are made in many middle-class homes and elite classrooms to prevent this "rough and uncomely," "broken/bad

52. Allan Bernard, "A Focus on Sizzla Kalonji: A Leading Influence on a New Generation of Rastafari Youth," in *Rastafari in the New Millennium,* 278–90.

53. Sizzla, *Black History* (Charm Label, 2001).

54. George Eaton Simpson, "Religion and Justice: Some Reflections on the Rastafari Movement," *Phylon* 46, no. 4 (1985): 288.

55. Miller, *Cartographer,* "xxiv," 58.

56. Miller, "xxiv," 58.

57. Phil CohZen, "Kei Miller: The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion," *Spring Review* (2016), 1–5.

58. Miller, *Cartographer,* "xxiii," 56.

English" from being spoken. Clearly, the reaction is less to the language being spoken than to "the [anti-establishment] social phenomenon it signifies."[59] Ironically, the language/tongue of Natty has been silenced in another way. The Jamaican state has co-opted their music, symbols, practices, and culture, especially in marketing for tourism. Much of their distinctive Iyaric language has been incorporated into Jamaican language and culture in a fashion that is unacknowledged. RastafarI refuse to have their "tongue cut out." They recapture their dubbed-out voice in their Iyaric language, which continues to provide new ways of seeing and speaking. Through Reggae rhythms they continue to affect the way we see our world, and what we can and do say about it. As William David Spencer argues, "Reggae definitely has the ability to protest—and not simply to protest but also to offer solutions. On the ridim of reggae, the spiritual and socially oppressed can find hope riding on "upfull" words."[60]

Spirituality for Justice and Peace

Poem "xxvi," "in which the rastaman gives a sermon" further maps the contours of the Rasta spirituality for justice and peace: "The Rastaman says: to get to Zion you must begin / With a heartbless, a small tilt of the head, a nod, / Thumbs and index fingers meeting to take the shape of I / Blood, then raised like a badge to I chest, then you say it: / Heartbless. A simple word that don't cost nothing / To give but plenty to receive-like sometimes / You meet an I-dren at your door who come not only / With a gift from his own acreage but also a word."[61]

A RastafarI spirituality for justice and peace begins with the person, in this case the righteous Rasta, who symbolically captures the good will to and respect for all that is central to Rasta livity in the well-known sign made of thumbs and index fingers in the shape of a diamond, in this case, raised to the chest, where the actual heart pumps "I Blood." This sign is known as "the Seal of Solomon" and is said to have been adapted from Emperor Haile Selassie I. It may have yogic origins. Rasta believe that Selassie made the symbol to demonstrate that he is the manifestation of Divinity.[62] Emma Donaldson comments, "Rastafari say prayers as a part of their daily life. Rastafari link their fingers and hold the tips of their thumbs and index fingers together

59. Pollard, "Dread Talk," 214.

60. William David Spencer, "Chanting Change," 266–83, 274.

61. Miller, *Cartographer*, "xxvi," 68.

62. "Important Rasta Symbols and Their Meaning," 24 July 2018, https://rastaverse.com/rasta-symbols

when they pray. The shape of their hands represents a heart and a spear and reflects key Rastafari principles of peace and the combat of oppression."[63]

Rastas make the Seal when they are praying to Jah and praising the Emperor. The Seal has a twofold meaning: first, the downward pointing fingers (triangle) represent the divine on earth; the upward pointing fingers (triangle) represent the human aspiration to divinity. Together the two triangles represent oneness with Jah. Additional resonant meanings of the gesture include the Trinity and peace.

The Seal has become popular globally and one world leader who is known for this gesture is German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Merkel's use of it is referred to as *Merkel-Raute*. Sadly, like the ubiquitous heart sign, the spiritual referent of the Seal is often lost in its adaptation by popular culture where it is considered to be just one more ephemeral fad.[64] In the livity-spirituality for justice and peace, this Seal is accompanied by a word of blessing, "Heartbless," which Miller notes is important, freely given, and received as plenty.[65] Freely blessing does not deplete a stock but is rather a gift that blesses the giver as well, as is discussed further below.

> My bredda, a man like that is already well on his way / To Zion. So begin like that–a heartbless, the old / rastaman's chanting up of goodness and rightness / and, of course, upfullness–how excellent is that word– / upfullness–as if it was a thing that could be stored / in the tank of somebody's heart, so that on mornings / when salt was weighing you down, when / you feel you can't even rise to face Babylon's numbing work, / you would know, at least, that should the day wring / your heart out like the chamois towels of streetboys, / then out of it will spring this stored portion / of upfullness and so anointed by your own storage, / you would face the road which is forever / inclining hardward.[66]

"Oh Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth" (Ps. 8:1 [KJV]) echoes in the Rastaman's praise of the word "upfullness," which is compared to a thing [water?] that can be stored in a tank and drawn upon

63. Emma Donaldson, "The Rastafari Community in Scouting," Scribd, December 2002, https://de.scribd.com/document/115151133/Rastafari-Community-Scouting
64. Marisa Meltzer, "When Two Thumbs Down Are a Sign of Approval," *The New York Times,* 9 August 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/11/fashion/hand-heart-gesture-grows-in-popularity-noticed.html.
65. In Mains, "Kei Miller in conversation with Susan Mains," https://dura-dundee.org.uk/2014/11/09/kei-miller-in-conversation-with-susan-mains/.
66. Miller, *Cartographer,* "xxvi," 68.

for refreshment when needed/necessitated by the weight of traversing a road that is "forever inclining hardward." "Upfullness" blesses the upfull as well as those blessed by his or her upfullness. Miller refers to "salt" as weighing down and alludes to the folk traditions holding that those of our enslaved ancestors who refused to consume salt would one day fly away and return to Africa. This is the plot of Trinidadian Earl Lovelace's 1997 novel, *Salt*. Ingesting salt led to spiritual entrapment, so the enslaved were given heavily salted and preserved provisions, such as salted cod and salted pig tails, which ironically are now staples of Caribbean cuisine. Rastas reject such slave food and eat I-tal, naturally grown food from the Earth, unsalted. In so doing, they build upon and amplify the "strong Afro-Caribbean tradition of viewing salt as dispiriting."[67] Indeed, the word has become commonplace among Jamaicans, who often say, "Mi salt" in response to a string of bad luck. At the same time, they reject the Babylon system's predatory and exploitative relationship with the environment.

Miller writes,

> Know then that every heartbless / given is collected by Jah like mickle and muckle, / or like a basketfull of cocoa, and comes back to you/like a dividend. You find your feet at last / straying off the marl roads, the bauxite roads, the slaving / roads and the marooning roads, and you would be / turning now onto the singing roads and the sweeting / roads that lift you up to such a place/as cannot be held on maps or charts, a place that does not/ keep still at the end of paths. *Know this, / that lions who trod don't worry bout reaching Zion. In time / is Zion that reach to the lions*.[68]

The return of heartbless to the blesser is not by chance but is initiated by Jah, who collects like a farmer or a wise woman little pieces (mickle and muckle) and returns them as dividends. Eventually, the blesser finds his feet by "straying off" the roads shaped by oppression and injustice to "singing roads and the sweeting roads" which speak to the aesthetic dimension of the new reality to be experienced. This expression of heartbless is Rasta spirituality at work. Such spirituality is "an indispensable resource that ultimately transforms the individual from being possessed with selfish agendas to focusing on the common good of the entire community."[69]

67. Chevannes, *Betwixt and Between,* 146.

68. Miller, *Cartographer*, "xxvi," 68–69. Italics added.

69. Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth, referred to in Hewitt, "Spirituality for Democracy," 2.

Conclusion

In meditation on a RastafarI spirituality-livity for justice and peace, Kei Miller's poetry helps us map out the holy trod that each one is called to by Jah. Such an upfull trod requires peace and love—being able to love yourself and others, knowing yourself and others, and living in peace with yourself and others, in spite of the Crosses and Turbulation that are an inevitable part of the trod. As such, Rastas strive to not participate in the injustice and oppression of "stepping on others to gain"[70] that their ancestors, they, and their African bredren and sistren still experience today. Unsurprisingly, therefore, calls for fundamental change based on equal rights and justice are central to RastafarI. Such justice extends to nature, and so Rasta stress the importance of an organic connection to the land as well as recreative activity which combines work and leisure. Generally speaking, unlike some of the faith traditions in the Caribbean region, which tacitly support the prevailing socio-economic and political order, Rasta "articulates a dynamic, evolving critique of the status quo, grounded in the Biblical prophets' denunciation of Babylon" spread across the global by the power of Reggae rhythms.[71] For, "we speak to navigate ourselves/away from dark corners and we become, / each one of us, cartographers."[72]

70. Johnson-Hill, *I-Sight,* 332.
71. Johnson-Hill, 332.
72. Miller, *Cartographer,* "xx," 45.

5

Singing a New Song with People of African Descent: The Plurality of Transformative Spiritualities

Karen Georgia A. Thompson

transforming

i touched the earth
with every breath
i painted the sky
with my soul
i saw the purpose
for my coming
i read my life
in graying clouds
i heard my call
in crashing waters
i found my self
in the stillness

—© Karen Georgia A. Thompson, Kapa'a Beach Park, Hawaii

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The Invitation—To "All People"?

The ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is an invitation to global communities to participate with the World Council of Churches (WCC) in a transformative journey reflecting God's care and desire for justice and peace in the world. This invitation is extended to "all people of good will." As such, it is an inclusive and global invitation in scope, moving beyond the church to different faith traditions. The call coming out of the 10th Assembly in Busan, while inviting, warrants a discussion of the phrase "all people," in order to consider how the God-given gifts of "all people" will be received on this journey.

Inviting others on this pilgrimage of justice and peace requires confronting the ways in which the church problematized the practices and traditions of millions of people of other spiritualities and faith traditions, naming spiritual expressions as egregious and antithetical to the Christian understanding of God. This resulted in the oppression of the spiritual and religious traditions of indigenous people globally, including Africans and the African-derived traditions present among African descendant people.

The spiritualities of African descendant people are infused with practices handed down for generations. These are not taught from a book, nor are they written anywhere, yet African spiritualities are present along with Christianity in communities across the Americas—a region which has become home to over 200 million people of African descent whose forebears were brought to the region because of the transatlantic slave trade.

The invitation from the WCC, as extended, includes communities for whom Christianity is a part of their spiritual experience; yet these communities also understand themselves to be connected with the spiritualities of their African ancestors. Walking in both traditions has yielded transformative spiritualities with practices, rituals, and experiences providing evidence of the Spirit of God poured out on these communities in myriad ways. The presence of these spiritualities points to the resilience of enslaved Africans who passed on traditions that were at times prohibited and criminalized. They survived because they were practiced secretly.

The practice of these spiritual expressions points to the ways in which people who were enslaved brought with them understandings of God which a Eurocentric colonial Christianity vilified, punished, and deemed unholy. This type of oppressive Christianity has to be interrogated and rejected as a platform and source of accompaniment for this Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

This pilgrimage requires truth telling and experiencing God in expansive and inclusive ways that make room for personal and communal transformation and create opportunities for learning from other spiritual communities.

Transformative spiritualities are life-giving and transforming for practitioners, the communities in which they live, and for the world. Identifying all spiritualities as legitimate avenues for theological engagement invites the participation of communities of practice rooted in oral traditions and informal structures. The inclusion of all spiritualities decolonizes assumptions that prioritize and privilege Christianity, thereby allowing for a variety of ways people and groups encounter and live the presence of God.

Transformative spiritualities are present in many communities identifying as Christian and in others where the movements of the Spirit are experienced in the multiplicity of ways in which God is manifested and revealed. In the African Caribbean context, where African derived spiritualities are present and coexist with Christianity, there are transformative spiritualities which are rooted in religious multiplicity, or a religious hybridity connected as one in the lives of individuals who experience their spirituality as "and"—"Christians and. . . ."

An examination of the lives and practices of African descendant people in parts of the Americas confronts the historical context in which these spiritualities were shaped, including the impact of Afrophobia and racism, which criminalized, vilified, and demonized these spiritual practices and their practitioners. The transformative spiritualities of African descendant people are informed and affected by the history of colonization and enslavement, emancipation, and independence, even as they are rooted in a vibrant and dynamic connection to God.

These traumatic historic moments, defined by enslavement and dehumanization in the lives of African and African descendant people have been undergirded by resilient transformative spiritualities which have sustained and guided them even when hope and affirmation of their Africanness was missing. Generational transmission and communal sharing of the spiritualities emerging from these experiences of God present with the people through their struggles to "sing the Lord's song in a foreign land" (Ps. 137:4) is important for African descendant people and for this moment in the ongoing quest for justice.

Enslavement and Religion

I was born in Kingston, Jamaica. I was raised in a conservative Christian denomination which provided my early spiritual formation. I was taught that God provided redemption only for Christians, rendering all other traditions wrong in that they did not know God.

Jamaica was a colony created by Spanish and British occupation. The island was inhabited by indigenous people before the Spanish explorer Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492. The *Taino* people of Jamaica, like many other indigenous people, were displaced from their lands and enslaved by European settlers. Their spiritual and communal practices were rejected and vilified, and their existence disrespected and annihilated. European explorers were given the right to make claims on lands outside of Europe because of the Doctrine of Discovery, which established parameters for the seizure of land not inhabited by Christians. [1]

Christianity's role in the colonial enterprise allowed for the spread of Christianity around the world while negating the spiritual expressions of the people it encountered. The *Taino* people were connected to God in their own ways, as are the indigenous people of every land. The European expansion was detrimental to the souls of many who were named savages, or told they had no souls.

Africans brought into the Americas as chattel carried with them their spiritualities, rituals, and beliefs, which were indigenous to Africa. The Middle Passage across the Atlantic was gruesome and cruel; millions perished, but millions survived. Their stories of survival are replete with their belief in God as an active agent in their lives, often told as a Christian narrative of enslaved Africans, for whom the story of the Exodus became the primary justification for seeking deliverance from European enslavers. Less heard are the stories of faith and belief rooted in other spiritualities, which existed among enslaved Africans. Yet, the stories and people survived.

1. The Doctrine of Discovery was promulgated by European monarchies to legitimize the colonization of lands outside of Europe. Between the mid-15th century and the mid-20th century, this doctrine allowed European entities to seize lands inhabited by indigenous peoples under the guise of "discovery." See Susan Shown Harjo, *Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States and American Indian Nations* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2014), 15–16.

As a child I saw multiple expressions of the Divine. In different denominations I heard the stories of people of other faiths. We were taught to stay away from people of other faiths who were deemed to be spiritually corrupt and morally bankrupt. We were warned the same of other, more progressive Christian denominations. Also present and less visible were the African-derived and indigenous expressions of God found in traditions such as Rastafarianism, Kuminah, Myal, and other unnamed spiritualities. Adherents of these traditions were visible by their perceived differences.

Rastafarians did not cut their hair as a part of their spiritual practice and wore long dreadlocks. Women who wrapped their heads were from a number of African traditions. People who wore white were African religious practitioners. Others who took their offerings to the sea were known in the community, as were those who sought the wisdom of the healing traditions. Coupled with this were the healing practices utilized by many, for both good and evil.

The African-derived spiritualities which survived were not easily navigated in the pre-dominantly Christian reality created by the Doctrine of Discovery and fortified by the forced Christianization of Africans and their descendants. These people were repeatedly told that the ways they understood themselves as spiritual people were wrong, evil, demonic. Over the years, many practices went underground to survive. These practices journeyed in a variety of ways, passed on through practices and stories for many generations—even by those who identified as Christians, but who also held these traditions and beliefs as sacred.

Unboxing God

My mother was a major source of my spiritual formation. She was a conservative Christian. She went to church every Sunday, sang in the choir, and attended Bible study on Wednesday nights. After she retired, she attended a weekly daytime prayer group on Thursdays. Sometimes her entire weekend was filled with a church conference of some kind.

Our often-daily conversations were strewn with God-talk. We discussed the sermon of the week, and the songs the choir sang. As my adult self discovered God, our conversations changed. The content was different and more robust. I began to question what I was taught as a child. I gave voice to ideas and questions I had had as a child and held in secret—my own pushback to Christian exclusivism and a restrictive God who felt small and punitive to me.

There were lingering questions which emerged for me as a child and stayed with me: What happened to the millions who were born before Jesus? Why wouldn't God make a way for everybody to know God? At the age of seven, I concluded that God was big and wise enough to make a way for all people to come to know God. I further concluded that God was mighty in ways allowing God to be understood by many people in different ways.

These were my childhood conclusions, based in a logic absent of theological training. It was important for me to know God loved the Africans brought from Africa who made way for my existence. I needed to know God cared for them and they were at peace with the Creator in their death.

The time spent in conversations with my mother was one of mutual learning. We were shedding the old and making way for the new. Seminary was a part of the journey for both of us. My mother enjoyed hearing about what I was learning. She listened, we discussed, and we left with our conclusions, neither hoping to convince the other to cross the divide of our disparate Christian beliefs. There were the occasional times of confrontation when I discussed with her the challenging and problematic teachings of the church of my youth.

These conversations with my mother over the course of my adult years helped to shape and define my identity as an African-descendant Christian woman. Regardless of the changes I embraced, the underlying tenets of a conservative Christian faith formation were ever present, a shadow accompaniment on an ever-expanding spiritual journey.

My childhood was filled with street corner evangelism, passing Christian tracts to people on the street and finding ways to bring people to know Jesus. I found my way from that conservative Christianity to a progressive Christianity. The years gave way to a deep respect for other faith traditions and my thoughts, held in silence for many years, now became more vocalized in my Christian self-understanding framed by an ecumenical and interfaith foundation.

Yet, while in my theological reframing of the lessons I learned in church, I was making room for other religions to exist and flourish, I did not give consideration to the African traditions of my heritage. I had no intention to hold onto the teachings about African and African-derived spiritualities; ignoring them was the practice I knew.

Later, in my adult years, I added Ifá, Santería, Candomblé, Vodun, Espiritismo, Trinidad Orisha, and the Spiritual Baptist faith to my vocabulary and knowledge of African-derived spiritualities. These traditions survived the brutality of enslavement and were present in the Americas and thriving in African descendant communities. I realized the extent to which African traditions survived in a variety of forms and names. They were present in the Caribbean islands and across the Americas, evidence of the knowledge of God and creation that Africans carried.

These spiritualities represent a plurality of expressions and experience not often acknowledged. While there are adherents who practice a singular spirituality, others experience rituals and practices connected with African-derived traditions as a part of their Christianity. This would be similar to some for whom belonging to multiple religious traditions or religious fluidity is the path for their spiritual journey. Regardless of the scholarship and disputes over whether or not one person can have more than one spiritual identity, people are living these expressions—sometimes without self-acknowledgment.

The complexity of coupling African spiritualities and Christianity is based in the historic belief that African traditions are evil. That indigenous and African-derived spiritual spaces exist is because of the resilience of the people who found deep meaning and value in the traditions they knew. When confronted with Christianity, some chose to continue with both. Living a reality rooted in Christian and African spiritual practices continues to be a transformative spirituality for African descendant people in the Americas. Will the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace welcome all, including African descendant people of goodwill who live their spiritual lives in this way?

Multiplicity and Mystery

In 2016, while working on my doctoral dissertation on African Caribbean Christians and African traditional religions,[2] I called my mother, to ask her what she knew about Myal and Kuminah, two of the African-derived religious traditions in Jamaica. I started with Myal, which I was reading about. She told me she knew nothing about Myal and asked me what it was. I passed on to her what I knew, then went on to ask her if she knew about Kuminah.

2. See Karen Georgia Thompson, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Erasing Religious Boundaries, Embracing New Ways of Being," in *Many Yet One? Multiple Religious Belonging*, ed. Peniel Jesudason, Rufus Rajkumar, and Joseph Prabhakar Dayam (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2016), 45–62.

Yes, she knew about Kuminah. How did she know about Kuminah? As a child, she lived across the lane from the Kuminah meeting house. She was a regular attendee at the services held there along with her aunt, who was her parental guardian from when she was three years old. She described for me the services and her fascination with the worship and practices. She loved the drums and the drumming. She was curious about what the various parts of the service meant. I learned from her more than I could read in any book, but the experiences she shared with me echoed descriptions I read. She was 83 years old and in all my years of daily conversation with her, she had never spoken of these memories she carried. I had many questions, especially why she had never mentioned this as a part of her life.

She shared with me how the meetings were called, and I was surprised to learn that the people who attended the Kuminah meetings also went to church. The "Shepherd" who was the leader of the group was their spiritual leader, healer, and spiritual advisor serving in a variety of roles among the people. The Shepherd went to church too, as did my mother and her aunt—every Sunday. I asked her why she never taught her children what she knew. Her response: I did not want to confuse them.

In my mother's story, I heard her love for the spiritual traditions of Africa. I also heard the teachings of the church which she attended as a child. She was raised in the Pentecostal church with an emotive Christian witness far different from the denomination she joined as an adult, and in which she and our father raised us. This emotive Christian experience was formative for her, yet she did not enjoy it. She described the Pentecostal church as loud, and she did not understand the people falling out in the Spirit. She thought the drums were too loud. Yet, the Kuminah community was similar with its drumming, dancing, and people being set upon by the Spirit, and that she loved.

The church taught her that the Kuminah community was not of God. She heard the labelling of the community as demonic. From the pulpit they were warned that the wrath of God would be visited upon them if they continued attending the Kuminah services. They ingested an understanding of Kuminah practices as evil and wrong. Interestingly, she continued attending both. She left the Pentecostal church for a more meditative conservative Christian denomination, yet she would still visit the Kuminah community from time to time for many years.

I received her story with joy and sadness. I was saddened that it had taken so long for her to talk about this part of her life, which was important to her spiritual journey and identity. I wondered how someone so deeply grounded in a Christian conservative belief with Jesus as the only way to God could also believe that God was manifested in and through the spiritual traditions of African-derived traditional spiritual practices. Our conversations continued.

My mother's Christian conservatism was a source of unspoken tension in our relationship. While I was raised to hold the same values, as I grew in faith and knowledge of God, I rejected large swaths of knowledge and problematic theology which were oppressing my soul and supporting injustices in the lives of others. With the revelation of her early years in Kuminah, there was a change in our conversations and our spiritual journey together, which was then newly accompanied by healing and transformation. Being able to speak from this authentic place with me was healing for us because I had somehow found my way to the African traditions of my roots without human guidance. All that she taught me about an exclusive Christianity stood in the way of being able to accept my practices, my African heritage, and my God-given gifts.

My journey had brought me to an embrace of African spiritual practices as a part of my life. Because of what I was taught and my vocation as an ordained Christian minister, I felt perpetually conflicted with my understanding of God through Christian and African traditional lenses. My contemplative practices and meditation were grounded in both places, as was my reverence for the Ancestors. From these places I drew wisdom and spiritual strength, which supported my passion and quest for justice and peace. And, while I gradually found my way to African practices and beliefs which I identify as ontological and experienced as spirit-filled and nurturing of me in totality, the narratives of my Christian life continued to tell me my spiritual self was wrong.

My mother's revelations went beyond reconciling the tensions in our relationship. She affirmed my beliefs and practices and became a teacher and conversation partner on the way to an authentic spirituality for my life and calling to serve God. This was a spirituality rooted and grounded in the traditions of my African ancestors and their African beliefs and practices, as well as Christianity. She told me stories of my childhood which helped me to understood that what I thought was new was a rediscovery of exactly who I was as a child— a believer in an inclusive, expansive God of all people, faiths, and traditions. The journey I was on was one of discovering God in new and

mysterious ways but finding that they were already a part of me. God was revealed in the mystery of time and story.

Transformed by the Power of the Spirit

The call to the Pilgrimage is a call to action, a call to be transformed as we learn and grow together in God. The call beckons us beyond ourselves into a journey with neighbours and God to transform our lives as we transform the world. The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is particularly important as the world journeys through a time marked by COVID-19 and the pandemics of oppression, including anti-black racism and Afrophobia. These are times which require action rooted in a deeper spirituality and grounded in the reality of God present with us in a variety of ways. We have new opportunities to learn from each other.

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is inclusive in naming and inviting "Christians and people of good will everywhere to join in a pilgrimage of justice and peace."[3] This use of "Christians and" is important because it opens wide the invitation to people of all faiths, traditions, religions, and spiritual expressions to be on this journey together. It invites me to be a part of the journey.

The call to church and partners issued in "An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace" is a call for strengthening "collaborative engagement with the most important issues of justice and peace, healing a world filled with conflict, injustice and pain."[4] There is healing necessary in the church and injustices to be addressed as we recognize the pain and harm that Christianity has caused to people with indigenous and African-derived spiritualities, and the ways in which western Christianity holds privilege and supremacy even as the WCC embarks upon this inclusive pilgrimage.

Justice and peace require truth telling and authenticity to be relevant and transformative elements in our lives. There are many among us who are thriving in the practice of other religious and spiritual practices, including African-derived and indigenous traditions. There are others who know and live religious multiplicity as a tangible manifestation of God present among us.

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3. "An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace," 8 July 2014, World Council of Churches, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace.
4. WCC, "Invitation to the Pilgrimage"

A friend told me the story of an African man. His name is unknown, as is his country of origin. He was stolen from the land of his birth and sold into slavery with millions. He was enslaved for many years in the Caribbean and was eventually sold again arriving in the United States. Over the years, he was told that his spiritual practices and the way he knew God were wrong. He was forced to stop practising the rituals he knew, because practising meant being beaten or locked up. Eventually, deprived of the ways he knew of making meaning of the presence of God in his life, he became angry. His anger never left him. He died angry, bitter and broken because he was forced to believe his spirituality was wrong. His freedom, his beliefs, his heritage, his identity, and his connection to God—all that was sacred to him—was taken from him.

His story is that of many others, as is the story of my mother. This Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace makes room for them, for their stories, and for the stories of their descendants who continue to sing new songs of their transformative spiritualities.

Rivers of Babylon[5]
(Psalm 137)
Karen Georgia Thompson

longing, aching
in the memories of time past
re-living places where my soul
knew home
knew rest
felt belonging.

there was that time
when I knew where I was
knew where to go
knew what was expected
that time, so long ago.

the rivers of certainty are no more
like a life carried by a gentle flow
moving with the current
a part of the undertow
never questioning

5. Copyright © Karen Georgia A. Thompson, Lakewood, Ohio, 31 October 2015.

being pulled by forces
not my own.

the rivers are no more
nothing feels the same
the boxes destroyed
calm waters are now rough seas
is it wrong to miss the certainty
is it wrong to long for the tame
in the midst of embracing Mystery
in the midst of being re-named?

memories of living amidst expectations
of woman
of Black and Brown skins
of church and being churched
of rooms with no windows and doors
I weep
these days are yet no more.

I sit with the Ancestors
by the river and share their tears
longing for HOME
what song shall we sing
in this strange new place
I visit these distant places in my mind
encounter them from time to time

I am no longer their resident
I will sing a new song
of freedom and hope
in this new land
of safe space desired
play it by the book
live cautiously
tread lightly
stay between the lines
nothing to risk
everything to lose

play it safe
follow the rules.

the status quo
guarantees safety
for some but not for all
united we stand
create unrest in the land
where cops throw children
from their seats
of hungry children
of polluted streets
play it safe?
there is no safety
for Black woman or man.

I am a sister
fighting for change
I have no choice
no safety to claim
not safe on the bus
not safe on the street
not safe in my home
not safe in my seat
yet you worry
because I challenge your institutions?

I will push back from the lies that you tell
I will suffer rather than live in the hell
you so boldly created for me
you don't get to name me
nor blame me
you don't get to dictate
my race or fate
I choose my religion
I choose to name
my own God
not your will be done.

called for this time
to claim my fluidity
without apology
I am not safe with you
on any level you state
or choose
your very presence
makes this space
unsafe for me.

by the river I sit
with the Ancestors
with the sisters and brothers
with the a'nties, uncs and cousins
longing for a place to call home
longing for where
we can be fully free.

6

Transformative Indigenous Queer Spiritualities: Journeying with Jogappas of India

Gladson Jathanna

Only if the goddess herself comes and
resides in us, we can become Jogappas.

—Radhika, the Jogappa

Throughout history and across different cultures, queer people have been celebrating their distinct spiritualities despite being oppressed, dehumanized, and demonized for challenging the normalcy of dominant and "mainline" religions and spiritualities. The global North (thanks to its socio-cultural, politico-economic, and territorial privileges) has witnessed many queer spiritualities making their way into "mainstream" discussions and discourses, offering transformative spiritual elements that are radically subversive and inherently creative. This is evident in some of the publications that have become part of the public debate, at least in the West.[1] However, the spiritual expressions of the indigenous queer communities across the globe, especially in the global South, have been struggling yet to be part of the global public discussion. Their spiritualities are often unheard outside of their closed territorial borders.

1. See, for example: *John Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1980] 2015); Judy Grahn, *Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994); Christian de la Huerta, *Coming out Spiritually: The Next Step* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999).

Jogappa spirituality in India is one such indigenous queer spirituality that not only contests conventional and normative spiritualities, but also celebrates queerness as an integral and important part of spirituality. The Jogappas, with their gender-fluid identities, resist the normalcy and fixity of any dominant form of spirituality. The resistant spirituality of Jogappas can offer a transformative path in our Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

Jogappas form a gender-fluid community, based in a small region within South India. On the one hand, they have religious sanction for their queer identity through their association with the indigenous Goddess Yellamma. On the other hand, paradoxically, they have been mocked, misrepresented, and demonized for their queer identity and queer spiritualities. Their spiritual heritage and cultural significance are often unknown outside of the regions in which they live. Further, a lack of academic interest in them has resulted in the circulation of false beliefs and flawed information. This essay explores the distinct and unconventional spiritualities of Jogappas. It also ventures into rereading the Christian responses to Jogappa spirituality in the history of Christianity in India, which contributed heavily to demonizing Jogappas and their queer spiritualities. In so doing, it invites the ecumenical community to dare to leave the fixed Christian domain to seek the Divine in the margins by journeying with the Jogappas and partaking in their struggle for life and justice. The major thrust of the article is to reclaim the transformative elements that Jogappa spiritualities could offer to the world in order to achieve fullness of life and well-being of all.

Queering Indigenous Trans-Identities

Scholars and activists in several non-Western societies have been debating the complexities of sexuality-centred categories of lesbian, gay, and queer.[2] One of the major considerations is that such categories of sexual identities are Western constructions and are not in fact relevant in non-Western contexts, where non-heterosexual behaviours cannot be defined within those fixed categories and forms. Srivastava argues that this debate is significant "for at least three reasons: 1) cultural differences are important to consider; 2) non-heterosexual behaviour has also been a 'normal' aspect of, say, Indian culture; and 3) sexual identities are also class identities, in as much *gay* and *lesbian* in India may be terms that circulate in relatively privileged contexts."[3]

2. Sanjay Srivastava, "Sexuality and Culture in India: Sociological Approaches" (occasional paper, University of Pune, 2013).

3. Srivastava, "Sexuality and Culture," 26–27.

As Srivastava comments further, any attempt to understand queer identities in an Indian context needs to move away from the rigid and fixed Western categories of gender and sexualities and adopt an indigenous approach. Such approaches are not only contextually and culturally informed but are also rooted in the marginal experiences of non-Western societies and cultures. As Virginie Dutoya contends, in the Indian context, research and academic writings on non-heterosexual lives have often, if not always, been an elitist discourse and thus have become "works of representation" making the queer identities and experiences as mere "objects of study."[4]

The transsexual and transgender histories of different societies around the world point to a multitude of sexual and gender identities and behaviours. As Richard M. Juang notes, many writers on transgender issues "have referred to cultural systems in which third gender or sexes have an established role in order to develop a critique of the fixity and universality of contemporary Western taxonomies of gender and sex."[5] Jogappas of India must be seen as having transsexual and transgender identity that challenges, critiques, and transgresses the rigid Western framework of gender and sexuality.

Is it then contradictory to use the Western notion of *queer* to frame an indigenous transsexual and transgender identity? To avoid a possible contradiction, I use a working definition of the word *queer* which is taken and upheld by indigenous scholars and activists in India: "Queer is deployed as a political analysis of the diverse forms of resistance to heterosexual norms. It is intended to capture the political appropriation of non-heterosexual sexualities. . . . Queer is not to imply an identity of a specific community. Rather, it is to necessarily restore a political meaning and understanding to the ways in which these respondents experience the marginalization of their sexualities."[6]

4. Virginie Dutoya, "Defining the 'queers' in India: The Politics of Academic Representation," *India Review* 15, no. 2 (2016): 241–71.
5. Richard M. Juang, "Transgendering the Politics of Recognition," in *Transgender Rights,* ed. Paisley Currah, Richard M. Juang, and Shannon Price Mintor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 242–61.
6. Arvind Narrain, "No Shortcuts to Queer Utopia: Sodomy, Law and Social Change," in *The Phobic and the Erotic: The Politics of Sexualities in Contemporary India,* ed. Brinda Bose, and Subhabrata Bhattacharyya (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007), 258.

Jogappas the Transpeople: Transgressing the Binaries

"Jogappas are a distinctive and indigenous transgender group," says Sumit Dutta in his ethnographic study on the Jogappa community.[7] His study identifies how the indigenous transgendered people display gender fluidity and thus challenge the normalcy of heteronormativity. Transgender identity in itself is a heterogeneous identity, especially in India. There are various trans-identities in India such as Hijra, Aravani, Jogappa, Shivashakti, Kinnar, and Sakhi-Bekhi, among others.[8] Each of these identities is unique and has its own cultural, religious, and spatial specificity. Among all the sexual minorities, the transgender community is the most visible because of their easily discernible gender expressions. At the same time, they face "greater discrimination, lack of opportunities, and systemic social exclusion, even within the sexual minority communities."[9] Such discrimination and systemic exclusion is also rooted in the way heterosexuality is normalized. Cohen emphasizes the need to view transgendered identities as being varied because, as he says, "all thirdness is not alike."[10] It must be noted that even though Cohen insists on a different methodology to understand trans-identities, he alludes to the Western categories of gender and sexuality, thus reiterating the dominant notion of a hierarchical taxonomy of gender. This classifies the unconventional as the third gender. What he and other Western ethnographers and anthropologists[11] tend to overlook is the fact that in the indigenous worlds, gender and sexualities are affirmed and live beyond dominant categories and constructions. Jogappas of India stand as an example for that.

7. Sumit Dutta, "Following the Divine: An Ethnographic Study of Structural Violence, Religiosity and the Life Journey of the Jogappas of Karnataka," (PhD thesis, K.N. Modi University, Rajasthan, 2017), 8.

8. Aneka, *Jogappa: Gender, Identity, and the Politics of Exclusion* (Bangalore: Aneka, 2014), 2.

9. Aneka, *Jogappa*, 2.

10. Lawrence Cohen, "The Pleasures of Castration: The Postoperative Status of Hijras, Jankhas, and Academics," in *Sexual Nature/Sexual Culture,* ed. Paul R. Abramson and Steven D. Pinkerton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 277.

11. A number of Western anthropologists and ethnographers conclude that transpeople often articulate their subjectivity through the notion of "third-ness": that is, the idea that they are neither man nor woman but have non-normative gender identities. See for example, Kira Hall, Lal Zimman, and Jenny Davis, "Gender, Sexuality, and the 'Third Sex,'" in *Language and Identities,* ed. Dominic Watt and Carmen Llamas (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 166–78; David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007); Don Kulick, *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Jogappas as transpeople are specific to the northern part of Karnataka, some parts of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana in South India, and Maharashtra in Central India. The Jogappas often reiterate that they are not *hijras*,[12] as their transgender identity "transcends normative gender roles and finds validation in the mythological structure built around Yellamma Devi."[13] Even though gender and sexuality questions have elicited a fair degree of academic research and discussion in the last decades,[14] particularly in reference to the queer population such as the Jogappas, the question of their spirituality and religiosity is hardly discussed. As Nicholas Bradford states, "Indeed, it is considered to be part of Yellamma's power and character to change a person's sex: '*ganda hoogi henna maadataala, henna hoogi ganda maadataala*' (come as a man, she will make a woman, come as a woman, she will make a man)."[15] Since the Jogappa identity is so closely associated with the spirituality of Yellamma Devi and its related practices and politics, it is important to engage with it in order to understand and reclaim the transformative elements that such alternative queer spirituality offers.

Goddess Yellamma and Jogappa Spirituality

The Jogappa identity is, in fact, deeply rooted in ancient religious practices and indigenous descriptions of the Yellamma worship.[16] Yellamma is a Goddess worshipped in different parts of India by different names. The name Yellamma literally means "Goddess/Mother of All." She is also known by a

12. *Hijra* is a self-identity taken up by some male-to-female transgender people across India.

13. Vikhar Ahmed Sayeed, "Music from the Margins," *Frontline*, 1 April 2016, https://frontline.thehindu.com/arts-and-culture/music/music-from-the-margins/article8356416.ece.

14. See, for example: Suparna Bhaskaran, *Made in India: Decolonizations, Queer Sexualities, Trans/national Projects* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); Nivedita Menon, "How Natural is Normal?" and "Feminism and Compulsory Heterosexuality," in *Because I have a Voice: Queer Politics in India,* ed. Arvind Narrain and Gautam Bhan (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2005), 1–44; Brinda Bose and Subhabrata Bhattacharya, eds., *The Phobic and the Erotic: The Politics of Sexualities in Contemporary India* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007); Ana Garcia-Arroyo, *Alternative Sexualities in India: The Construction of Queer Culture* (Kolkata: Books Way, 2010).

15. Nicholas J. Bradford, "Transgenderism and the Cult of Yellamma: Heat, Sex, and Sickness in South Indian Ritual," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39, no. 3 (1983): 307–22.

16. Bradford, "Transgenderism," 307–8.

host of other names, the more popular being Jogamma, Holigammma, and Renuka.[17] The religious association of Jogappas with Yellamma influences all aspects of their lives. Their association with her provides them with the livelihood opportunities they usually have no access to. This involves Jogappas freely expressing their gender identity within respected spaces in society, which means that Yellamma is therefore instrumental in the realization of their gender identity. It is through Yellamma that Jogappas come together, and it is through their ways of worshipping her that they form a community. Jogappas believe Yellamma lives in them and grants them the power to foretell the future of others.[18] This is a radically transformative spiritual experience for Jogappas because the "beyond" is incarnated and is lived in them in the community. It is the "co-inherence" of Goddess Yellamma "in them" that makes Jogappa spirituality not only transformative but also distinct from the dominant notion of a deity "for them." Perhaps this is as one of the major causes of the Euro-Christian missional misrepresentation of Jogappa spirituality (discussed in the next section).

From the *bhajans,* the indigenous spiritual songs sung by Jogappas, it is clear that they join the community through a process of dedication to Yellamma.[19] They do this either voluntarily or at the behest of their families. If an individual decides to join the Jogappa community and their family refuses to accept this, it leads to the person leaving the family and/or running away from home to join the community. The reasons for the dedication of young "men" to Yellamma vary. Within some families, possession by Yellamma seems to "run in the family"[20] and they have a tradition of dedicating certain members, generationally, to Yellamma.

According to studies, most Jogappas join the community when they realize the Goddess has entered them. This possession manifests in forms such as *jadey* (matted hair), pain in limbs and/or the body, lethargy, shaking, and shivering on certain days of month, expression of feminine mannerisms, and appearance of the Goddess in their dreams. Following this, they consult either a Jogappa or a temple priest about what to do with these visions and feelings. After the senior person interprets these signs and advises the family, they move forward with the dedication.[21] This clearly indicates that it is through their distinct spiritual connection with the Goddess that Jogappas experience

17. Aneka, *Jogappa,* 9.
18. Dutta, "Following the Divine," 35.
19. Sayeed, "Music from the Margins."
20. Aneka, *Jogappa,* 22.
21. Aneka, 23.

a sense of identity and recognition. The exclusion of Jogappas from the "mainstream" communities is challenged by their reception into the new community, which is predominantly defined by their resistant spirituality. Hence, their spiritual allegiance to Yellamma transforms not only them, but also the community that rejected them for their queerness. However, such spiritualities are often seen as deviant and superstitious, especially by the "mainline" religions such as Christianity. It is noteworthy that despite Christianity having existed for centuries in the region where Jogappas have lived and celebrated their queer spiritualities, it has never engaged with any constructive dialogue with them. Rather, Christianity continues to be part of the dominant narrative of spirituality that has demonized Jogappa spirituality for being unconventional and non-heteronormative. Therefore, to make a transcultural and trans-spiritual dialogue possible we need, first, to identify the roots of such spiritual exclusivism and problematize them.

European Christian Representation of Jogappa Spirituality

As mentioned earlier, Yellamma is one of the female deities the people of Karnataka have been worshipping since time immemorial.[22] She is recognized as an indigenous subaltern Goddess.[23] Dalits, women, and transpeople are prominent devotees. The European Christian missionaries several times encountered worshippers of Yellamma in North Karnataka. Following are a few examples from the account of the Basel missionaries.[24] These demonstrate how European Christianity responded to Jogappa community and their deity Yellamma, and how the missionaries' representation of transpeople and their spiritualities further demonized transcommunities.

The first encounter between missionaries and the Jogappas took place in 1843, according to the *Basel Mission Report*. One of the missionaries who was stationed in Dharwar met at least 400 Jogappas, who were going to a feast at the temple of Yellamma. A notable conversation took place there between those indigenous worshippers and the missionary. The missionary used all his "knowledge" to prove that "there was only one true God, that he dwelt

22. Ranganātha Śrīnivāsa Mugali, *The Heritage of Karnataka* (Mysore: Geetha Book House, 1990), 103.

23. Kancha Illaiah, "Productive Labour, Consciousness and History: The Dalitbahujan Alternative," in *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society,* ed. Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 175.

24. The Basel Evangelical Missionary Society from Basel, Switzerland, started its missionary activity in India in 1834. One of the places where they engaged in this work was the region where Jogappas and Yellamma worshippers were prominent.

in Heaven, and Yellamma was merely an image of stone."[25] The missionary does not provide any details on the response of the Jogappas to such an interpretation of their deity! However, he adds, further, "I asked many, why do you go to worship this stone, Yellamma?" He "quotes" some of the answers he received: "We go to beg food and clothing of her." "She torments us, and to avert her displeasure, we must worship her by breaking and pouring out cocoanuts before her." Furthermore, the report states, "An emaciated woman who was riding on a bullock, answered me if Yellamma is powerless, why then has she been able to deprive me of the power of walking?"[26]

Though the legitimacy of these responses cannot be taken at face value, they are not silent on the spiritual experiences of Jogappas. Whether Jogappas are correctly quoted or not, their solid faith and dependency on Yellamma cannot be denied. This narration communicates very well the missionaries' unwillingness to read the experiences of Jogappas in their own context. Jogappas' faith affirmation that "Yellamma heals us when we fall sick" needs to be used to read their spirituality independent of European missionary representation.

The *Basel Mission Report of 1856* offers another example, of a time when the missionaries visited the temple of Yellamma during her great festival in Hubli (a popular city in North Karnataka). This visit supposedly enabled them to come out with an account of the history of Yellamma. The fact that this account found a place in the missionary reports may indicate that the reporting missionary wanted to make European readers understand Indian "superstitions." Before beginning his story, the missionary calls it an "animated" account of what the native missionaries saw in the temple of Yellamma. He writes,

> Yellamma is worshipped in a temple originally built by Jains. She was a famous courtesan, but ended by becoming a great saint and mighty deity. The crowds that flock to her yearly feast consist chiefly of prostitutes, who glory in her patronage. They pass along the road with endless shouts and praises, and attract all the villagers by obscene songs and dances, continued as long as there are houses within sight. When the pilgrims arrive at the temple, they circumambulate it three times, and then procure lodgings, eat and bathe without any reference to caste rules. The vows made to the shrine range from a cocoanut to a handful of pearls, poured as if for the purpose of

25. *Report of the Basel Evangelical Mission in the Canara, Southern Mahratta and Malabar Provinces,* Bangalore: Wesleyan Mission Press, 1844, 30 (Hereinafter BMR 1844).
26. BMR 1844, 30.

anointing over the head of the idol.[27]

The account does not end with this description. The missionary adds these zealous words: "Though we called upon as many as we could reach, to listen to the gracious words of Jesus, we found but few patient hearers."[28] With this, the whole account comes to an end without further comment. Thus, the report allows readers to assume they now comprehend the indigenous experiences of the natives, especially in connection to a Goddess of the trans people. As Kwok Pui-lan says, "The study of myths and rituals of the so-called 'primitives' and 'savages' reinforced the cultural hegemony of Europe."[29] Here in this account, the effort of the native missionaries ("native brethren") to study the rituals of Yellamma reproduced the missionary zeal to proclaim and to prove the native religion and cultures were "full of folly" and false stories." Thus, these narratives side-lined the queer experiences attached to the Goddess worship. This was a common practice of all the European missionaries in India because they carried the Victorian morality that compelled them not only to endorse heteronormativity but to demonize any form of spiritual expressions that did not subscribe to their worldviews and theologies.

Victorian Morality and the Christian Construction of Normative Spirituality

The Victorian era is both historically and ideologically identified with the sovereign regime of Queen Victoria (1819–1901) in England. As Anne Shepherd remarks, Victoria was "the first English monarch to see her name given to the period of her reign whilst still living."[30] During this time, the British Empire grew and expanded around the world, generating a massive economic growth. However, it was an important period not only for the Empire, but also for the entire Western colonial enterprise. It was during the Victorian age that a number of important developments happened in different spheres such as industrial work, technology, and science which formed the foundational rationales of colonialism.

27. BMR 1856, 20.

28. BMR 1856, 21.

29. Kwok Pui-lan, introduction to *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse,* ed. Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 15.

30. Anne Shepherd, "Overview of the Victorian Era," *History in Focus 1* (Spring 2001), https://archives.history.ac.uk/history-in-focus/Victorians/article.html.

The Victorian era is also important from the point of gender and sexuality constructions. The society and culture during this period were characterized by sharp gender and sexual heteronormativity. Men were categorized as sexually active beings and women as sexually passive and inactive. Though sexual restraint was considered to be morally superior in theory, in practice, there was considerable ambiguity about expressions of sexuality. As Walter Houghton wrote in his book *The Victorian Frame of Mind*:

> In the Victorian home swarming with children sex was a secret. It was the skeleton in the parental chamber. No one mentioned it. This conspiracy of silence . . . sprang from a personal feeling of revulsion. For the sexual act was associated by many wives only with a duty and by most husbands with a necessity if pleasurable yielding to one's baser nature. . . . The silence which first aroused in the child a vague sense of shame was in fact a reflection of parental shame, and one suspects that some women, at any rate, would have been happy if the stork had been a reality.[31]

As Dominik Wohlfarth says, the Victorian era was full of, "prudery, puritanism, sexual repression, and moral strictness… [where] cleanliness, health, sincerity, earnestness, morality, and manliness were virtues, expected of good British citizens."[32] He further argues that the influence of Christianity intensified the moral expectation of the Victorian society. The Bible and other Christian books were used, "not just for guidance, they were for obedience and Victorian Society accepted and strictly followed them." That means that a strict moralism, also in relation to sexuality, was vehemently advocated as having the endorsement of Christianity. Hence, the whole Christian missionary enterprise during the colonial time carried such Victorian moralist ideals, which were transplanted to the colonies.

Colonial Construction of Victorian Sexual Imperialism

Michael Foucault's concept of the relatedness of language and power[33] helps us to see that the portrayal of the sexuality of the colonized in the writings of colonizers was central to the power and knowledge at work in the

31. Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 353.

32. Dominik Wohlfarth, "The Initial Perception of the Novel The Picture of Dorian Gray through the Victorian Public: An Analysis of the Standards of the Literary Critic," seminar paper, University of Freiburg (Munich, GRIN Verlag, 2003), 4, https://www.grin.com/document/13873.

33. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1981).

Victorian colonial (which includes missionary) enterprise. The production of knowledge on the subjectivity of the indigenous people, particularly on their sexualities, served to defend the superiority of the White Western Male. Their understanding of the Christian mission as transplanting Victorian Christianity to the colonies reinforced the subjugation of the colonized. It reduced the Christian mission to the changing of religious identities. It also divested the colonized bodies of the indigenous people of their personhood by treating them as either "stumbling-blocks" or "stepping-stones" in the missionaries' expansionist enterprise.[34]

The conversion of "heathen" bodies and minds to Christianity, and the spread of Victorian values, have been considered in colonial discourse as "the white men's burden." Gayatri Chakravarthy Spivak points out that such a burden has a gender and sexuality dimension. She formulates the masculine-imperialist ideological formation as "white men saving brown women from brown men."[35] She argues further that the colonial discourse has legitimized the violent subjugation of the body of the Other, as if such action was called for and demanded by indigenous situation. This argument and the evidence from the missionary texts make it clear the Western missionary believed in the superiority not only of his religion, race, economy, and culture but also of his sexuality and gender. This superiority called upon him to bear the vocation of converting and ordering the world toward his own identity. Such an ideology was grounded in the beliefs of Victorian morality. In this discourse, indigenous bodies and sexualities were forced into being objects of Western imperialism. It is today our task to redeem such worldviews from their colonial captivity, and to celebrate the indigenous people and their spiritualities. With that objective, let us revisit the Jogappa spirituality to reclaim its heritage and transformative power.

Jogappa Devotion to Yellamma: Wrestling in the Margins

Yellamma is principally a subaltern Goddess worshipped by the people of "lower" castes. Religious scholars as well as historians argue there is no indication that Yellamma is worshipped by caste Hindus.[36] According to Pupul Jayakar, "the composite female form of the half Brahmin, half-outcaste

34. James Taneti, "Empowering Mission or Enslaving Enterprise? Women Missionaries' Attitudes to Telugu Women," *Bangalore Theological Forum* 39, no. 1 (June 2007): 158–69.
35. Gayatri Chakravarthy Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies,* vol. 4, ed. Diana Brydon (London: Routledge, 2000), 1427–77.
36. Illaiah, "Productive Labour," 175.

was named Ellamma, the grama devata (village deity), the primeval Sakti of the South. She was to be worshipped throughout the country South of the Vindhya mountains by the pariah and the outsiders."[37]

Oppert claims that the name Yellamma is derived from the Tamil word *ellam*, which means "all" or "everything." He also explains that her name indicates she was worshipped as the "Mother of All."[38] The stem of this term is *ellai,* which means "boundary." This makes her the Mother Goddess of the boundaries. Thurston, one of the earliest researchers into Dalit and tribal religions in South India says, "Each village claims that its own mother is not the same as that of the next village, but all are supposed to be sisters. Each is supposed to be guardian of the boundaries of the cheri. . . . She is believed to protect its inhabitants and its livestock from disease, disaster and famine, to promise the fecundity of cattle and goats, and to give children."[39]

Thurston notes that Yellamma is positioned at the boundary of the village, where she can preside over the village and safeguard its perimeters. The image of Yellamma is strategically situated on the boundary that is regularly used as crossing from the Dalit village into the outside world.

From these accounts one can notice the dialectic nature of the two motifs of the Goddess Yellamma. Sathianathan Clarke describes these as "particularity and universality; geographical locatedness and boundlessness; fixity and fluidity; determinedness and openness; resistance and assimilation."[40] It is this particularity and distinctiveness of Yellamma that reveals worshippers' resistance to the expansionist and overpowering nature of caste Hindu hegemonic forces. Jogappas, ardent worshippers of Yellamma, find resources to resist the Brahmenical strategy of re-enforcement of heteronormativity and the subjugation of trans-identity.

Yellamma is an iconic representation of the resistance of Jogappas to the conquering tendencies of the caste and patriarchal Hindu and Christian world. The caste Hindu enforcement of patriarchy, on the one hand, and the Christian domination through its Eurocentric religious and cultural

37. Pupul Jayakar, *Earth Mother: Legends, Ritual Arts, and Goddesses of India* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990), 44.

38. Gustav Oppert, *On the Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarsa or India* (Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1972), 464.

39. Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of South India,* vol. 6 (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975), 105.

40. Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 101.

worldview, on the other, continuously threatens the Dalits, and more particularly, Jogappas people. Culturally, Jogappas are dehumanized in the name of purity-pollution conventions. Religiously, they are prevented from worshipping Hindu Gods through the discriminating temple laws. Geographically, they are cut off from the caste village community since they live outside the contours of the village. They are tortured and abused, both physically and psychologically, by being used by the heteronormative forces as mere sex objects.[41]

These insights invite us to see Jogappa spirituality surrounding Yellamma worship differently than the Eurocentric missionaries. Their indigenous queer spirituality of the Jogappas stands as a counter to the casteist and Eurocentric worldviews through which vulnerable communities such as women and transpeople are being exploited. This is where Jogappa's affirmation, "Yellamma heals us when we fall sick,"[42] makes sense to Yellamma's devotees. Healing is not just a physical act; it is also a social, religious, and cultural transformation. Susan Bayly writes that "although this Goddess was recognized as healer and protector, she was never wholly beneficent like some of the region's so-called 'pure' or 'high' gods."[43] This indicates how even the Goddess is exploited by the heteronormative spiritualities and worldviews. In such context, when Jogappas worship Yellamma and shout praises to her, they are affirming their belief in a Goddess who counters the power of the casteist and Eurocentric worldviews.

Conclusion: The Queerness of Yellema - Indigenous Goddess versus European God

In these examples and in many other narratives of European Christian missionaries who worked in North Karnataka, it is clear that the Jogappas never converted to Christianity, or to any European religion. It may be interesting to ask, what prevented them from receiving the "good news" from the West? Did they find any contradictions in the missionaries' theologies and their indigenous queer identity as Jogappas? To answer this, it is worth recollecting a profound statement made in one of the meetings of the Ecumenical Association of the Third World Theology: "The classical, Western, colonial, feudalistic, elite, and patriarchal theologies passed on to us have themselves

41. Clarke, Dalits and Christianity, 101.

42. BMR 1844, 31.

43. Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 27.

inflicted much violence on women's life [read also on the lives of transpeople]. These theologies have misogynistic texts of terror and tradition at the core. Furthermore, they have separated theology from spirituality, piety from social action for justice, and intellectual reflection from its symbolic expression in ritual and art.[44]

These words, spoken in a different context, with a different focus in mind, hold true to the experiences of Jogappas or any such gender-fluid communities. The European missionary portrayal of the divine as a masculinist male certainly re-enforced the heteronormative sexuality and thus the subjugation of non-heteronormative identities and sexualities. It never took the symbolic expressions of indigenous worldviews seriously. Since it tends to represent, to speak for, and to save the indigenous people without valuing their experiences and expressions, it made a meaningful dialogue impossible. The missionaries from Europe were always preoccupied with the doctrinal purity of their religion. What matters to the indigenous queer identities is the survival and the liberation of themselves and their communities. Like any indigenous vulnerable community, Jogappas' selectively chosen, "life-giving elements of their culture and religions have woven new patterns of religious meaning."[45] Jogappas of India find life-giving elements in the Goddess Yellamma. Her queerness allowed them to identify themselves in her rather than converting to a belief that re-enforced binaries and, thus, a dominant system. Therefore, Jogappas' refusal to convert to Christianity should be seen not only as a commitment to the queerness of their Goddess Yellamma, but also as an act of subversion of the heteronormative spirituality of the west.

Jogappa spirituality has the potential not only to challenge the dominant Euro-Christian and Brahmenical-Hindu notions of spirituality, but also to help transform those rigid and unjust frameworks of spirituality. The spiritual expressions of Jogappas assist in reconstructing a more relational and fluid God that cannot be defined by the heteronormative categories of the dominant cultures. A committed journey with the Jogappas, when free from prejudices and preoccupations, would enlighten us to draw a strong connection between Christian spirituality and Jogappa spirituality. Both are rooted in love, fluidity of identities, mutual respect, justice, and equality.

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44. EATWOT Women's Commission, *EATWOT Asian Woman's Consultation: Spirituality for Life: Women Struggling Against Violence* (Madaluyong: Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, 1994), 21.

45. Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 113.

Both Christian spirituality and Jogappa spirituality are subversive and transformative because they are entrenched in the belief in a just God(dess) who promises liberation and justice for the vulnerable and the oppressed. As Mary, the mother of Jesus, celebrates her spirituality when she sings, God "has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1:52), so does a Jogappa when they sing "'*Messe mattu kase iddavara / solisi seere udisidavalu Yellamma*'" ("Yellamma defeats all those who sported moustaches and *lungis*[46] and made them wear saris instead").[47] For both Mary and the Jogappas, such strong faith and hope come in the midst of their oppressive situations and out of their long struggle for justice and equality. It is a victory over decreed authority/masculinity that both Mary and the Jogappas have sung about for centuries.

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace should make sure such hope comes true in our context today, where similar vulnerable voices in the margins are singing their sagas of alternative and transformative spiritualities.

46. A *lungi* is an Indian garment for males.

47. One of Yellamma's many songs in the Kannada language, found in oral tradition in Karnataka.

III

Transformative Spiritualities in Situations of Conflict

7

When Was It that We Saw You Sick?

Transformative Spiritualities and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Matthew Ross

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus COVID-19 a pandemic. A year later, COVID-19 has claimed the lives of almost 3 million people and caused 140 million people to become infected, some of whom have long-term health problems.

The response of the churches and their diaconal organizations plays a major role in addressing infection and suffering. Church-run clinics often provide the only medical services readily available to millions of people, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Such services may play a crucial role in education and vaccination against COVID-19. Practical care is at the heart of this type of Christian witness, which may prove transformative for the recipient.

Misleading Names; Embracing Truth

The last pandemic on such a scale was the influenza outbreak in the years 1918–20, which claimed at least 17 million lives and possibly infected up to 100 million people. Wartime newspaper censorship affected reporting of the outbreak, with the notable exception of the disease's course in neutral Spain—thereby leading to the inaccurate but widely-used term "Spanish flu." Although affected by the pandemic, Spain was neither the most severely affected nation, nor the source of the outbreak.[1] The naming of infectious diseases after a particular location may create stigma, irrational fear, and even xenophobia. The USA has witnessed an increase in the number of racist attacks on people of Asian ethnic origin since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.[2] How far does nomenclature such as "China virus," as used by some politicians, contribute to this? If even a name can be misleading,

1. Trevor Hoppe, 'Spanish Flu': "When Infectious Disease Names Blur Origins and Stigmatize Those Infected," *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 11 (2018): 1462–64, https://doi:10.2105/AJPH.2018.304645.

2. "COVID 'hate crimes' against Asian Americans on Rise," BBC, 21 May 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56218684.

Christians must heed the words of Jesus: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31–32).

Transformative spirituality must embrace truth. Anything less is neither transformative nor is it centred in the liberating love of God revealed in Christ. Therefore, Christians cannot ignore the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. This places a huge responsibility on churches, and particularly their leaders, for their words and actions. Denying the magnitude of the crisis or the efficacy of vaccines in the face of scientific evidence and tolerating undue risk may exacerbate the scale of the pandemic and place lives in danger. Conversely, the Church may be able to offer practical and spiritual support to many millions of people—including those who may have previously had little or no religious conviction. In England, the 800-year-old Salisbury Cathedral is being used as a vaccination centre. Infused with centuries of prayer, worship, and Christian spirituality, it is a physical witness to health and healing.[3]

Justice and Peace

Following the Busan Assembly of 2013, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has promoted the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace as a way to express and explore transformative spirituality in response to worldly pressures to deny justice and peace. The pilgrimage aims to encounter the vulnerable, to embrace one's own vulnerabilities, and to become vulnerable with others. It stresses the need to question and be purged of personal prejudices, preoccupations, and priorities. In so doing, the aim for Christians must be to seek God's will rather than personal greed and fear. This unselfish approach can help inform the Church's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and challenge obstacles. Structural and corporate sin in society, such as the causes of climate change that imperil life on earth, must be challenged. Other factors that threaten justice and peace include poverty, economic injustice, threats to health and well-being, violence, and warfare. The message of Jesus in John 10:10 of "life in all its fullness"[4] counters these forces in a radical way. Christians are therefore called to affirm, sustain, and protect life. Accordingly, a transformative spirituality must embrace justice and peace.

3. "Cathedral Opens as COVID-19 Vaccination Site," Salisbury Cathedral, 19 January 2021, https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/salisbury-cathedral-turned-into-mass-vaccination-centre-complete-with-beautiful-music-20210125-p56ws5.html.
4. Good News Translation.

The pandemic has demonstrated the fragility of our world and has laid bare risks ignored for decades, including inadequate health systems, gaps in social protection, structural inequalities, environmental degradation, and the climate crisis. Entire regions that were making progress towards eradicating poverty and narrowing inequality have been set back years in a matter of months.[5]

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible mentions the word *health* 37 times, *disease* 88 times, *compassion* 80 times, and *care* 163 times. In response to God's command to love and to serve, churches are called to respond to people's suffering:

> Then the righteous will answer him,
> "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food,
> or thirsty and gave you something to drink?
> And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you,
> or naked and gave you clothing?
> And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?"
> And the king will answer them,
> "Truly I tell you,
> just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my
> family, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:37–40).

Human, physical, and financial resources are severely constrained in many countries, yet the words of Matthew 25 mean the church must be active in its response to human suffering. Issues of justice, equity, and alleviation of poverty, which directly impact the needs, expectations, and demands for diaconal services, must not be neglected in the face of the new challenges that COVID-19 creates. While the needs have increased globally, the ability of churches and communities to respond effectively has been hampered because of restrictions on gatherings, travel, and work. Nevertheless, this crisis has also offered inspiring responses from churches and diaconal organizations to the way forward, to bring healing and transformation, with love, faith, hope, courage, and persistence. In doing so, Christians can help bring about justice and peace.

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5. "Secretary-General's Nelson Mandela Lecture: 'Tackling the Inequality Pandemic A New Social Contract for a New Era," United Nations Secretary-General, 18 July 2020, https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-07-18/secretary-generals-nelson-mandela-lecture-%E2%80%9Ctackling-the-inequality-pandemic-new-social-contract-for-new-era%E2%80%9D-delivered

Fruits of the Spirit—The Transformative Impact of COVID-19

In Galatians 5:22–23, St Paul writes: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things."

The pandemic has had a transformative impact on the world in both divisive and unifying ways. How can we witness the "fruit of the Spirit" in the context and challenge of COVID-19?

The pandemic has had a dramatic psychological impact for many. Inability to travel—particularly internationally—may be an inconvenience for most, but for some it has had an acute personal impact. The unprecedented growth in international travel in recent years has led to an increased number of long-distance relationships, where spouses, partners, and families may be located across different countries. Remittances from work abroad have become an essential source of income for some families, particularly in some economically less advantaged countries. In some cases, family reunions across international borders may be annual, in other cases more or less frequent. Annual festivals, such as Christmas or Chinese New Year, have become times of homecoming for many. The COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed such longed-for reunions, with acute disappointment for those affected. Many have endured these disappointments with great forbearance.

For many young people, restrictions on travel and meetings with friends have consequences. The forming of friendships and relationships and even rites of passage (such as taking and passing a driving test) may have had to be postponed. Inability to visit elderly relatives, or for grandparents to be with grandchildren, have become notable features of many countries. For many single adults, enforced loneliness and isolation are very real challenges.

An article by Louis Appleby, professor of psychiatry at the University of Manchester, notes that levels of suicide do not appear to have increased globally during the pandemic. He does, however, express caution:

> We need to recognise the continuing risk as the pandemic enters its second year. The social coherence of last April seems to have eroded as we pit public health and business against each other and report our neighbours to the police. With each lockdown cycle people seem wearier and more pessimistic. There are fears for children and the economy. Recovery can be a dangerous time—as any clinician can tell you—as restrictions are lifted and we look at our lives in a new way. We need to ensure support for

> anyone lonely or mentally ill, in turmoil or financial hardship. We need to rediscover the values that unite us and the benefits of mutual support. We need to reassure ourselves that there is a way out of this crisis and a better, fairer, more compassionate society at the end of it.[6]

Levels of compliance with government-imposed restrictions appear to have been closely followed by a large majority of the world's population. Following St Paul's words, this may demonstrate love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Altruistic observance of rules shows a sense of social solidarity beyond the familiar and local. Wearing of facemasks and other active steps to avoid spreading infection or creating risks are both in our self-interest and in the interest of the well-being of wider society.

The pandemic has been divisive in many ways. The necessity for many countries to rely on the COVAX strategy to receive vaccinations[7] has revealed a sharp division between the world's richest and most technologically advanced countries and the rest. Despite such criticism, the COVAX scheme is altruistic—and it is also an admission that unless all have access to vaccination, the pandemic will not be contained. Other examples of divisiveness can be seen in access to technology. Online work depends on access to reliable internet connections and expensive computer equipment. Even in the more advanced economies, the poorest can too easily be excluded.

The greatest tragedy of the pandemic has been the number of preventable deaths. This places a great onus on politicians, international organizations, and others, including churches, to learn lessons. In doing so, fruits of the Spirit may perhaps be realized.

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6. Louis Appleby, "What Has Been the Effect of COVID-19 on Suicide Rates?," *British Medical Journal,* 29 March 2021, https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n834.

7. COVAX is "the vaccines pillar of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator. The ACT Accelerator is a ground-breaking global collaboration to accelerate the development, production, and equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines. COVAX is co-led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, Gavi and the World Health Organization, alongside key delivery partner UNICEF. Its aim is to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines, and to guarantee fair and equitable access for every country in the world" ("What is Covax?," *Gavi: The Vaccine Alliance,* https://www.gavi.org/covax-facility.

The Diaconal Response: "Full of the Spirit and of Wisdom"

The diaconal response to COVID-19 must be based on compassion and action. This corresponds to the reaction of Jesus when he encountered people in need. Beyond responding to immediate individual needs, a diaconal response leads to a process of discernment and justice by which the needs of entire communities and nations can be assessed.

Acts 6:1–7 describes an early response to a diaconal need in the church, which in this case was the neglect of the needs of widows from the Hellenistic community in Jerusalem:

> Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait at tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Diakonia is care for human need in Christ's name. The commissioning of the seven can be interpreted as the creation of the first deacons in the Church, although the word *diakonos* does not appear in the text. The word *diakonos* does make an appearance in the Bible: in 1 Timothy 3, the qualities required of a deacon are laid out. Significantly, in Romans 16, Paul describes a woman named Phoebe as a deacon—*diakonos*—of the Church.

The biblical examples of deacons occur in the context of a fast-growing church in the aftermath of Pentecost. To sustain its mission, the infant church required effective organization rather than just charismatic leadership. The problem is highlighted by the need to support widows, ensuring that no one is left out. The biblical text shows that (1) God has a direct concern for human welfare and (2) if a divisive issue such as this is not quickly addressed, there is a serious risk of divisions, which would have a very negative on the mission

of the Church. Furthermore, the description of the seven as being "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" is significant from the perspective of transformative spirituality, implying that if this were not the case, then the caring ministry could not and would not be effective.

The development of the ecumenical movement and the creation of the WCC can be seen in terms of a developing transformative spirituality. The WCC was founded in 1948, just three years after the end of World War II. An early priority for the WCC was coordination of diaconal care for refugees and displaced people in Europe. While the creation of ACT Alliance[8] in 2010 transferred coordination of development work to specialized organizations, the diaconal work of the WCC continues to this day, most recently with a comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including prayer, worship material; campaigning against gender-based violence; and practical information for churches and ecumenical organizations.

The Technological Response: Faith seeking Understanding

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in extraordinary technological change at a speed almost unprecedented outside of wartime. The greatly accelerated development of vaccines and innovative use of online communication tools, such as the Zoom videoconferencing service, are particularly notable. Human progress in technology is notable even in a biblical context:

> "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live" (Num. 21:8–9).

8. ACT Alliance is the largest coalition of Protestant and Orthodox churches and church-related organizations engaged in humanitarian, development, and advocacy work in the world, consisting of more than 130 members working together in over 120 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalized people, regardless of their religion, politics, gender, sexual orientation, race, or nationality, in keeping with the highest international codes and standards. ACT Alliance is supported by 30,000 staff from member organizations and mobilizes about three billion US dollars for its work each year in three targeted areas: humanitarian aid, development, and advocacy (ACT Alliance website, www.actalliance.org).

This reference to bronze is significant in terms of transformative spiritualities. The invention of bronze—an alloy of copper with other metals or sometimes non-metallic elements (notably arsenic)—represents one of the earliest examples of a rapid advancement in human technological progress. As bronze was considerably harder than copper, it became a much sought-after metal for armaments and even decorations, as in the case of the biblical reference to the bronze serpent. The Bronze Age started in the 5th millennium BCE. Moses lived during the latter part of the Bronze Age, by which time bronze as an alloy of copper and tin had largely replaced copper and arsenic. Several centuries after the death of Moses, the Bronze Age gave way to the Iron Age, partly due to increasing difficulties in obtaining tin.

In approximately 1440 CE, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, using a moveable typeface. This technological advance allowed the production of books at a far lower unit cost than for handwritten books. Printed Bibles, although still extremely expensive, allowed scriptures to be read and studied by many more people than was previously possible. Without such access to the Bible, particularly for laypeople, it can be argued that the theological discourses which led to the Reformation a century later would have been impossible.

Will the COVID-19 pandemic lead to further theological upheaval? The inability to worship collectively during the pandemic has been a grievous absence for many Christians. Some have accepted the use of new technology, such as services through Zoom, YouTube, or other internet providers. Other people have been more reluctant or resistant to this use of technology. Many more are unable to access the internet, whether due to cost or lack of infrastructure, particularly in much of Africa.

The use of the internet to facilitate fellowship and worship has been a notable feature of the COVID-19 pandemic. What started as an emergency expediency (largely in March and April 2020) cannot be uninvented. How far can an expediency resulting from such a crisis be described as a transformative spirituality? The resulting questions, such as the validity and efficacy of online communion services, are now attracting theological debate.

St Anselm (c. 1033–1109) is remembered as one of the foremost Western theologians of his era. The original title of his *Proslogion* was "*fides quaerens intellectum*"—faith seeking understanding. The starting point must begin with faith in God. On the basis of faith, St Anselm's theology moves to a deeper understanding of Christian truth. It helps, therefore, for believers to

explore and develop the relationship of faith to human reason. Yet human reason is shaped by experience, including social, economic, historical, and technological progress. A faith seeking understanding implies that a transformative spirituality is inevitably affected by such change.

Forthcoming Pressures

As of early 2021, the world is still in the medical phase of the pandemic. The urgent priorities are to prevent death by treating the sick and to prevent infection—through vaccination, restrictions on movement, testing, and monitoring. The effort to provide sufficient vaccines for the entire population of the world is an enormous logistical and financial challenge.

It appears that COVID-19 and its mutations will never be entirely eradicated, but humanity may come to terms with it through vaccination and preventive measures. After the pandemic has subsided, there will be an enormous financial cost to be calculated—especially in terms of increased government debt for almost every country. Many national governments have incurred enormous additional expenditures, such as for employment protection programs, whilst simultaneously being affected by lower tax revenues. Such borrowing is comparatively feasible due to historically low interest rates, but any increase in interest rates may cripple the ability of governments to service such debts and still maintain public services such as state pensions, social security, education, healthcare, and social care services. This could lead to considerable unemployment, unrest, political instability, and other tensions in the coming years, as previously witnessed in countries such as Argentina, when the levels of governmental debt became unmanageable. If coupled with an economic recession, the consequential levels of unemployment and migratory pressures may become huge. Likewise, if governments argue that initiatives to tackle climate change need to be postponed due to financial shortcomings, the long-term consequences for the global ecosystem may be catastrophic.

Rivalry between superpowers, migratory pressures as the world's population continues to increase, environmental degradation, and the poverty that afflicts the world's poorest one billion people are enormous challenges for this decade. The aftermath of COVID-19, both in terms of human loss and economic consequences, will add considerably to these challenges.

Conclusion

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating, most notably in the cost of human lives, but also in its economic and social impact. Churches must be acutely aware of the socio-economic pressures that many governments may face over the coming years. The pressure on diaconal services provided by churches may well increase as governments find themselves increasingly unable to afford adequate social care services. In such circumstances governments will be under pressure to prioritize their expenditures. There is now an acute danger that the targets set by the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2015–2030 may not be met, which would have a catastrophic impact on the poorest people in the world.

This is a historic and worldwide opportunity to reduce expenditure on militarization and instead prioritize the alleviation of poverty. This will only happen if there is sufficient political will. A transformative spirituality is necessary to address this, emphasizing Christ-like ways of justice and peace. Churches will need to stress the transformative way of Christ, encapsulated in John 10:10: "I have come that you may have life . . . life in all its fullness."

8

Empowering Spiritualities in a Multifaith Context among Threatened Communities in Northern Nigeria

Ibrahim Yusuf Wushishi

For decades before the COVID-19 pandemic, Africa has suffered from conflicts, corruption, weak institutions, hunger, poverty, deceit, and political instability. Today, the pandemic has exposed the weakness and vulnerability of the entire world's systems and institution. Yet, the situation is much worse in countries facing armed conflicts, compared to regions that appear to be more stable. Insecurity, coupled with the global pandemic, has increased the negative economic, political, and religious impacts in the life of many. Today, people keep asking the questions: Where is God in our suffering? How can we connect the promise of God who said, "I will be with you, I will protect you" to the context of the current armed violence and COVID-19?

Nigeria is a nation of multiple religions, faced with serious economic, political, and religious challenges. Most of the time, these challenges are given a religious interpretation: hence, the frequent occurrence of crises that are based on religious difference. These situations are more prevalent in northern Nigeria, which has been experiencing different kinds of armed conflict and criminal actions over the past years. The churches in the north of Nigeria have been affected by these unfortunate incidences in various ways, resulting in the loss of lives, livelihoods, and properties, and the destruction of residential buildings and places of worship.

Notwithstanding this unfavourable situation, many religious communities continue to hold firm to their religious beliefs and commitments, putting their trust in God, while seeking answers to so many unanswered questions. This essay seeks to discern how local communities' spiritualities and strong resilience in God enables them to transform human suffering into a narrative of living hope. Also, it will consider how spirituality is contributing and sustaining the resilience of the church in her engagement in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. I will focus on my personal experience coming from northern Nigeria. The community

spirituality experienced in this context may reflect the reality of many more communities in Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

Insecurity in Northern Nigeria

It is no longer news that the insecurity in northern Nigeria has reached very high levels and involves complex dimensions. The occurrence and intensity of deadly attacks and bloodshed in the north are alarming. Insecurity is ravaging cities, towns, and villages. Lives and properties in both the cities and villages are not safe. People live with horror and anxiety almost every day because of kidnappings for ransom, brutal killings, and banditry. The evil is growing in northern Nigeria, and the brutality against the armless civilian population is alarming. On a daily basis, people are faced with psychological and emotional trauma resulting from the burial of mutilated bodies of beloved family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbours. Schoolchildren are kidnapped for ransom, exposing them to inhumane treatment at the hands of their kidnappers, including sexual abuse and rape of women, girls, and boys as well. This has increased the fear of many parents who question whether their children should be enrolled in school at all. The government has decided to close some schools for the fear of the unknown and because of the fragile security in the region.

These atrocities have cut across many communities in northern Nigeria. However, it is important to state here that the Christian minority in the northeast, northwest and the middle belt of the country are most affected. It is not an easy task to be a Christian and live a Christian life in some parts of northern Nigeria today. In some communities, to be identified as a Christian is enough to deny you some fundamental human rights—including freedom of association and freedom of worship—and basic benefits of citizenship, such as political participation and job promotion.

This chapter examines the deeper spirituality that motivates and strengthens the Christian communities amidst this context of violence.

Understanding Transformative Spiritualities

Spirituality can be difficult to define. Various people define it in various contexts to address diverse issues. In the context of this essay, I see spirituality as an expression of submission to the will of the divine, through prayer, meditation, fasting, and study.

Biblical spirituality is founded upon a personal relationship with God

who is both holy and loving. Deepening this relationship is life's most fulfilling experience. Ajith Fernando suggests that Christians believe that the relationship with God is most fulfilling because God is the creator of human spirituality and Jesus is God's answer to human needs.[1] Biblical spirituality can be described as the process of divine restoration and healing of the broken relation between the triune God and humanity. It is the response of a repentant human heart and mind to the loving heart and mind of God made manifest in Jesus Christ, the Son.[2] Consequently, the individual is empowered by the Spirit of God to draw others to find life in Christ Jesus. In this instance, individuals are expected to surrender their lives completely to God, who is believed to be all-powerful.

In the Nigerian context, spirituality is best understood as a relationship with God that develops one's resilience by transforming one's spirituality into a strength that enables a living hope. In creating and sustaining positive spiritual beliefs, John C. Robinson suggests the following:

- Keep searching for what feels personally real and valid in your own spiritual journey. . . .
- Turn to spiritual intuition in times of pain and struggle and let them teach you what you already know and believe.
- Remember that spirituality often moves from beliefs to direct experience as we age, so pursue the journey into first hand awareness of the divine.
- Avoid beliefs or practitioners that cause you to feel fear, pain, helplessness, shame, or guilt.
- Recognize that aging is a new spiritual stage that can transform your life if you let it.
- Know that you are inherently beautiful, precious, and worthy. [3]

From my personal experience in the context of northern Nigeria, I can see transformative spiritualities playing an important role in sustaining strength and engaging the church in search of justice, peace, and reconciliation in a context of religious-based violence. It has created a living hope despite hopelessness.

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1. Ajith Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love: How to Relate to People of Other Faiths* (Sri Lanka: GLS Publishing, 2014).

2. See 1 Corinthians 2:12–13; Romans 8:14.

3. John C. Robinson, "Transformative Spiritualities," *3rd Act Magazine,* Winter 2019, para. 15, https://www.3rdactmagazine.com/lifestyle/reinvention-spirituality/transformative-spirituality/.

Strength from the Scriptures and Religious Rituals

The activities of Boko Haram, Fulani killer herdsmen, kidnapping for ransom, banditry, economic instability, and the COVID-19 pandemic are challenges that can threaten the cooperative existence of religious communities and larger societies in northern Nigeria. The normal response of communities who face such challenges is depression, fear, faithlessness, and hopelessness. However, we also witness the contrary. Despite these challenges, local communities' spiritualities and resilience have remained strong. Faith in a supernatural Being who is believed to be the all-powerful and all-knowing God drives people to move on with their lives, contributing positively to the political, economic, social, religious, and security development of their communities and the country.

The church has drawn strength from the word of God and from rituals and practices such as prayer, singing, dancing, worship, and inter- and intra-religious dialogue. These practices have continued to nurture, strengthen, and sustain the spirituality of local communities, religious institutions, and individual lives in a context of insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Word of God

There are several biblical passages that serve as encouragement and sources of strength for many Christian communities, especially in northern Nigeria. For instance, Jesus said during His earthly ministry that "because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved (Matt. 24:12–13).4

This sounds like words of encouragement. Jesus did not promise us a world free of crisis but He warned his followers against pending wickedness with a strong statement that only those who will endure shall be saved. In Matthew 28:20b, Jesus promised to be with His followers always, until the end of the earth: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

These and many other biblical passages have continued to assure us of Jesus' presence with and among us, even amid our suffering. The word of God continues to be our motivator, building strength and resilience to continue our pilgrimage with God in an unjust world.

4. All the passages of scripture in this chapter are from the New International Version of the Bible.

Life is "a set of challenges," problems and troubles.[5] I am fascinated with the words of President John F. Kennedy, delivered during his acceptance speech of the Democratic nomination in Los Angeles. In the Old Testament, the kings appointed by God faced many battles. Prophets and priests faced challenges of demonic attacks and exile. David, as recounted in the book of Psalms, faced pain and distress. In the New Testament, Paul is shown to have faced false accusations and the frustration of being held in prison several times. John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod at the request of the daughter of Herodias. And most of the disciples of Jesus Christ were martyred, as were many Christians during the post-apostolic era. As I read the scriptures and church history, I see that the problems and troubles which face the church in northern Nigeria today are quite similar to these challenges throughout history. Looking at these examples, the questions are: What can believers expect in an unjust world? Can we expect less than the treatment that was given to Jesus and his disciples?

Sometimes we are strengthened by the fact that God allows us to face these challenges for reasons known to Him only. However, God does not want us to face these challenges of life alone; hence, He promises to be with us always. We believe that God knows us and is with us in our situations and difficulties. We have learned to take these challenges to God in prayer and fasting as we await divine intervention. Christians are invited to take their problems to God: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

The persistence in studying and applying God's way of being in relation to the situation in Nigeria has provided us with strength and has deepened the spirituality of the church in Nigeria—and in Africa as a continent. Yes, we weep sometimes, we get discouraged, and the pains of injustice and corruption eat at us, deeper and deeper. And sometimes we wonder whether the God who promised to be with us is still standing with us or not. Yet the promises from the holy scripture are too real to be ignored, no matter the situation. In the midst of several uncertainties, Christians continue to derive strength from biblical statements, such as the one given to Joshua: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).

5. John F. Kennedy, "Acceptance Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, Democratic National Convention", 15 July 1960. https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/democratic-party-nomination-19600715.

In Deuteronomy 31:6, it is said, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

No doubt, the situation in the local communities of northern Nigeria is very challenging and frustrating. Yet, the word of God has provided us with the necessary accompaniment, coping mechanisms, and a high sense of spirituality, strengthening our perseverance. The word of God has called the church to engage in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, giving hope to a dying world. The Christian teachings have a way to direct one's hope to the Creator: "And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Because we hold on to our faith with passion, the consolation derived from scripture strengthens our resilience in the midst of severe challenges.

Singing

Singing is one of the therapies that has contributed to a deeper spirituality among Christian communities in Nigeria. Singing remains a common practice across Nigeria´s cultural divide, from former generations to today. We sing during worship, burials, naming ceremonies, marriages, fellowships, and many other occasions. In many Nigerian indigenous communities, singing has been part of the culture and the worship system even before Christian faith was introduced. Songs are normally composed to feed into a particular situation or specific occasions. For instance, in the *Bajju* culture from southern Kaduna, a song is composed for every situation that is life threatening, like war, natural disasters, mourning of loved ones, tragedies, and pandemic outbreaks like COVID-19. The songs express emotion, ease the stress associated with challenges, and challenge injustices in the home, the community, and the larger society, while providing hope for a better future.

Today, singing is a vital part of many indigenous Christian communities´ worship in Nigeria. The Pilgrim Team Visit to Nigeria in 2016, organized by the WCC, visited Abuja and Kaduna. This provided a good example of the role of singing when it comes to Christian worship within the Nigerian context. Listening carefully to some of these songs, you find that they contain elements expressing grief, amplifying dissatisfaction, challenging the status quo, exposing societal injustices, reaffirming the sovereignty of God, and expressing hope for a better future. These songs provide consolation, inner peace, living hope, inner healing, assurance of God's presence, and help to the people.

In the words of a song by Don Moen, a famous Integrity worship leader:

> Lord it seems so far away,
> a million miles or more it feels today,
> though I haven't lost my faith
> but I must confess right now
> that it's hard for me to pray,
> but I don't know what to say
> and I don't know where to start
> but as you give the grace,
> with all that is my heart I will sing.[6]

There are times when the magnitude of the challenges facing Nigerians makes it very difficult to pray or to read the Bible. Then, singing becomes an option because it gives soothing relief to a depressed soul. This religious ritual has helped the church in Nigeria to gain the stamina it needs to face the challenges of today.

Dancing

Dancing goes with singing. It is very difficult to belong to any culture in Nigeria without singing or dancing. Before the coming of Christianity, traditional singing and dancing were a major part of worship in many indigenous communities. To this day, no Nigerian culture prohibits dancing. Dancing has been incorporated as a form of worship, especially within Christian communities and in traditional religions. Churches that encourage dancing during worship attract more worshipers. It is believed that when you dance, you are dancing out your challenges or depressions. Depressed worshippers give testimonies of having become cheerful after dancing in church.

The traditional religious deities have always been characterized by dancing. Most of these deities can dance and scream. Worshippers dance in various cultural displays. Dancing is believed to be a way of putting off any form of anxiety and trauma, improving the health of individuals, and preparing them for healthy activities devoid of any grudges. It is believed that when the body feels good, the mind does too.

6. Donald James Moen, "I Will Sing," from *I Will Sing* (Integrity Music, 2000).

This cultural background has influenced the practice of Christians in Nigeria. Today, dancing in the church is a way of expressing thanksgiving and appreciation, and of honouring God, giving praise, and renewing commitments to the supernatural Being who is believed to be the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe.

Scientifically speaking, dancing offers a creative outlet for people to express their personalities in a safe environment. A family can easily ignore the challenges they are passing through when occupied with dancing. A woman testified that she had been sick throughout the lockdown related to the pandemic, because she couldn't go to church and dance. After the lockdown, churches were filled with members dancing and praising God for divine intervention in the face of the pandemic. Dancing has contributed to building resilience and strengthening spirituality among the followers of Christ amidst the numerous challenges they face, providing them with a living hope in Christ Jesus.

Faith in God

Northern Nigeria is made up of different ethnic and religious communities. There has been a remarkable growth of Christian faith among these communities even in the midst of political, economic, and security challenges. This is because today, much greater attention is given to the spiritual dimension of life, as a means of solving social, cultural, economic, security, and political problems. Individual Christians express their spirituality in different ways. In the same way, different Christian communities have significantly varied understandings of the nature of the Christian life that gives them the strength to oppose the injustices among and around them.

The most important factor that keeps many Nigerian Christian communities strong is their faith and trust in God as the Creator and the Sustainer of all of life. It is strongly believed that nothing happens to us, whether bad or good, that is not known and allowed by God. Many Christian communities have total faith in God as the only one who can provide a solution to Nigeria's problems. The story of Jesus and, in particular, his death and resurrection shape the values, beliefs, and hopes of Christians in the current situation. Christians are compared to soldiers, who must be disciplined to persevere in the struggles that lie ahead of them. Paul exhorted Timothy to "join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:3).

There is a lesson I learned as I grew up as a Christian in my own context, which included incidents of violence: Christians appear to be stronger in their faith and more spiritual when they are under attack, or when they are forced to suffer for their faith in Jesus Christ. Though it is difficult to explain suffering in relation to God´s divine love and promised presence, during times of suffering, strong faith in God remains unshaken. The New Testament frequently assumes that Christians will suffer and experience persecution in the world because of their faith. Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Although a minority in the north of Nigeria, Christians have continued to exercise a strong spirituality in the midst of the numerous challenges, "celebrating their gifts" in the Lord, "visiting the wounds" inflicted by the situations around them, and "transforming the injustices" because of their strong faith in God through Jesus Christ.[7] This has influenced Christians' understanding of faith and spirituality. To many believers in Christ Jesus, the world is considered a hostile environment for Christians, not a permanent home. But they are on a pilgrimage to their permanent home: heaven. The values of the kingdom of God stand in contrast to those of the world, and Christians must expect to struggle in their attempt to lead an authentic Christian life. The hope of being heavenly citizens has continued to provide Christians with the courage to withstand all political, economic, and religious challenges, including the pressure of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The strong belief is that COVID-19, Boko Haram, killer Herdsmen, banditry, kidnapping for ransom, and many other vices will soon end, hence the need to keep faith in Jesus Christ, and to look forward to that day.

Interfaith Engagement: Muslim-Christian Relations

The three basic and leading religions in Nigeria are Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (ATR). However, Christianity and Islam have been the main faiths practiced in almost equal numbers in the country. The situation in Nigeria is unique in the sense that Christians and Muslims are almost equal in number, with a Christian majority in the South and a Muslim majority in the North. Many Nigerians are so committed and attached to their religion that they will identify themselves first as Christian or Muslim

7. These are the three dimensions of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. See "An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace," 8 July 2014, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace.

before their citizenship affiliation. The situation is worsened in the northern region due to the low level of literacy found there. This has resulted in the inability of many communities in the North to differentiate what is religious and what is not. The conservative northern Muslim view is that this region belongs to the Muslim population; hence any non-Muslim in this region is considered a second-class citizen. The political and economic spheres, and other social engagements and benefits, thus include religious dimensions and considerations. This situation has resulted to serious misunderstandings and mistrust among different ethnic and religious communities in the North. A mere argument between two persons can easily include a religious dimension and interpretation, capable of interrupting the peace in the region. What gave rise to Boko Haram was that its founder felt that the North should introduce the sharia legal system throughout the region, despite the fact that there are other ethnic and religious communities in the area for whom this legal system would not make sense.

In northern Nigeria, religion is a sensitive issue in the day-to-day lives of the people. Some of the elites and the political class in the region take advantage of this fact, inciting more conflict and division in order to manage the affairs of government. Some conservative religious leaders also aggravate the existing fragile environment. Hence, there is a need for Christian and Muslim leaders to promote conversation related to interfaith cooperation between their followers. To survive the hostility of the conservative Muslims in the North, the church and liberal Muslims have opened up spaces to discuss these challenges, and to explore how they can be managed, in order to promote interreligious harmony.

The major cause of the religious crisis between Christianity and Islam is the inability of both parties to understand each other´s religion and to know the reason for the other's practices. Over the years, the church has tried to understand the tenets of Islam, and this has helped to reduce the occurrence of religious crises in Nigeria. Given the deplorable state of the conflicts, Muslims and Christians need to come together to understand their challenges. The fact is that both are confronted with injustice, poverty, banditry, kidnapping for ransom, and the impact of corruption and bad systems of governance. These issues do not have tribal or religious faces. Therefore, everyone, irrespective of tribe, ethnicity, or religion, is affected. Interfaith engagement has produced some understanding of this fact, creating opportunities to jointly engage in programs that alleviate poverty, challenge the injustices resulting from

bad governance, and advance freedom for the citizens of the country. This learning has been possible when both religions share from their deep spiritual heritage. This makes dialogue possible. During these interactions, Christians and Muslims share and learn from their experiences. This has not solved all problems of injustice and crisis in the nation, but it has remedied the situation and strengthened religious resiliency, allowing citizens to look forward to a better future through supernatural intervention.

Religious plurality is a challenge to dialogue in Nigeria. Christians believe and accept Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation while Islam sees Jesus as a prophet who was sent to declare the ways of the Lord. Since it is difficult to arrive at a consensus, it is important that both religions develop a form of tolerance for each other, respecting their differences and areas of similarity. Interreligious engagement has promoted religious tolerance and contributed to justice and peace in the country.

Interfaith engagement also brings about love for one another irrespective of religious and ethnic differences. Both religions have some elements of hate and mistrust toward one another that have developed over time. This is the reason why crises can erupt at the slightest provocation. Developing genuine love for the other religion helps to mitigate the regular occurrences of religious conflicts in Nigeria. The church has in the past and continues in the present to advocate for a peaceful coexistence as a way to continue in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

Interfaith engagement promotes mutual respect and appreciation for the differences that exist between religions. These differences can bring out the beauty in the whole process. We are unified in our diversity rather than divided. While we may not agree with the differences between us, such differences must be respected and appreciated.

9

Reclaiming *Hai* Spirituality

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Colonized West Papua

Rode Wanimbo

History, pain, and hope are expressed mainly in my culture through *wene, ndawi and lee-ndawi*. In the Lani and Walak languages—languages spoken in the Central Highlands of West Papua—*Wene* means words, *ndawi* in Lani means songs, and *lee-ndawi* means songs of lament. In the context of Lani and Walak, two tribes which I belong to, *wene* is not simply a story; it is a story with an important message. It is critical for elders and parents to share *wenenu*—a series of *wene*—to their children before they pass away. The first part of this chapter shares the story of the struggle of Mama Yosepha Alomang, the people of Amungme, and all Papuans, which will be shared in the form of *wenenu*. The struggle for justice and resistance to defend God's creation and protect *hai*—the Amungme's concept of *shalom* which was crushed by the existence of the Freeport-McMoRan, a United States mining company. The second part explores the story of my own journey to become an activist of *hai*, which was deeply inspired by Mama Yosepha Alomang. I will focus on sharing the pain of injustices through *lee-ndawi* as well as the important role of true solidarity in restoring God's image in the land of West Papua.

Mama Yosepha Alomang's Story

"Why did you come to our house, go straight into the room, and rape my Mother? You have no shame!" Mama Yosepha cried, breaking the silence in the cable car. Suspended by wire, we were slowly passing over Wanagong Lake on the way to the top of Mount Nemangkawi in West Papua. Mama Yosepha's body trembled. Tears streamed down her eyes. For the first time she was seeing what happened to the sacred place of her Amungme ancestors. It was painful for her to bear the destruction by mining companies of what her ancestors had protected for many centuries. For the Amungme people, Nemangkawi is their Mother. *Nemangkawi* means "white arrows." The

mountain gives life. She nurtures the various types of plants that have become food both for humans and animals. For centuries, she has ensured the survival of humans and other creatures on Amungsa (the land of the Amungme people of West Papua). In Yosepha's eyes, Freeport-McMoRan, the mining company that operates the gold and copper mine in Amungsa, has "raped her Mother." Mama Yosepha wants it to stop immediately. Her tears expressed it all.

I was with her in the cable car that day. I felt the weight of her emotion in my chest. I could not bear the overflowing anger as I witnessed Mama Yosepha's loud protests against the mining company. After arriving at the top of Mount Nemangkawi, it was clear that the sacred contents of the mountain were being scraped bare. Giant trucks—bigger than houses—slowly lined up, carrying the innards of Nemangkawi that had just been cut off.

"Oh, my God! This is what must have caused the trees in the forest to die. Our rivers and sea have been polluted. The villages below around the foot of the mountain are gone," said Mama Yosepha, with an angry and sad look. Some of us bowed our heads silently, unable to look at her face. After approximately 30 minutes at the top, Freeport mining executives were asked to immediately return to the cable car, back to the city of Tembagapura.

The mining company and the state have endangered the harmonious relationship between the communities of Amungme and Kamoro and other living creatures in the villages and forests. The hunt has been halted. The birds are gone. We cannot hear their chirps or songs anymore as thousands of trees die, drying out due to the disposal of tailings from the mining process. The joy of the children on the banks of the rivers no longer puts smiles on their parents' faces because the rivers have been polluted by mining waste.

Cultural and traditional spiritual values in nature no longer warm our heart and soul because these values have become rigid and have lost their meanings. Kinship and companionship between creatures—which have been interwoven for centuries—have been threatened, while new capitalist and extractive cultures and values are forcefully introduced to replace old ones. It is as if we—Papuan men, women, and children, created in God's image, with a culture, identity, and livelihood rooted in place—have been seized in the name of civilization, colonialism, Christianity, and development.

The Neglect of *Hai* and Jesus' Tears of Pain

The Amungme use the term *hai* to refer to the harmonious relationships among all of God's creation. It is one of the forces that underlies Yosepha's resistance against Freeport. This understanding of the interconnectedness has been passed on through generations. When boys become teenagers, they will receive advice from their father and elders in the *honai*, or the roundhouse. The main advice is about protecting and respecting the land where their feet stand, for the soil produces food. Within this approach, trees are only permitted to be cut when a garden is made. Trees are the house of birds; when the fence of the garden is done, trees must be planted. This kind of advice is shared mostly by the fathers and elders walking to the garden with their sons, and by the mothers to their daughters during their daily responsibilities.

The notion of *hai* belongs to the Amungme people, but it also resonates with all West Papuans. In the book by West Papuan theologian Benny Giay, titled *Zakeus Pakage and His Communities*, the writer describes *ayii* as the term that Mee people use for *hai*.[1] The Mee describe *ayii* as a condition when the soil is fertile, providing food for human beings, beasts and all those beings that breathe. When *ayii* is present, people are normally free from sickness and sufferings. People don't get old very quickly. Women generally give birth to healthy children. In order to experience *ayii*, human beings must maintain a harmonious relationship with animals, plants, and spirit beings. When threatened, *ayii* becomes the irrepressible hope and expectation of an oppressed people for a future that is harmonious, just, and prosperous.

But to truly know *ayii* and *hai,* they must be practised. Mama Yosepha, for example, avoids religious teachings encouraging followers to participate in religious activities that are disconnected from daily realities, which should be the goal of their lives. She says that we must not just memorize verses from God's word and give up our problems to God in prayer. For Mama Yosepha, the word of God is like fresh water. It must be drunk to give one strength to continue the long journey to fight crimes against humanity, injustices, and discriminatory ideologies and policies.

Hai and *ayii* existed before colonization and before Christianity. We might be new to modern institutions, but like many other cultures, we know the

1. Benny Giay, *Zakheus Pakage and His Communities: Indigenous Religious Discourse, Socio-political Resistance, and Ethnohistory of the Me of Irian Jaya* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1995), 3.

fullness of human experience. We are spiritual people. Before Christianity came onto our shore, we felt and knew the forces coming from a source greater than ourselves. We knew the desire for shalom, that longing for a peace beyond all understanding.

And yet, there are some possible identifiable relations between *hai* and creation and stewardship, according to Scripture. This view of creation and stewardship resonates with our own cultural values as Melanesians. The problem is that the original blessing of *hai* in West Papua is being destroyed. To reclaim *hai,* West Papuans need to give proper dignity and place to our own history. Becoming a *hai* activist in the midst of injustices is a real and ongoing struggle. But it must be our path if we are to create solidarity, challenge together, and tear down the oppressive system. Throughout all this, it is possible to consider the phrase "Jesus wept" from John 11: 35 (NIV), as an interruption to show how Jesus' struggle for justice and his tears of pain are relevant to our struggle for justice in West Papua. It reminds us that Jesus continues to cry with us, and that our lament for justice connects our struggle with him. But first it is vital for the reader to understand a little of the tragic history of West Papua, how the Indonesian government became a colonizer, and how the international community turned away from us to plunder our resources.

Destruction of *Hai* through Political Conspiracy for Economic Interests

Back to that time in the cable car. My soul was utterly stirred up as we slowly rolled away, leaving the top of that golden mountain. This mountain was the target of those who signed the New York Agreement in 1962. The United States wanted the mountain of wealth and they conspired with the Indonesian state to obtain it. At that time, West Papua was still a Dutch colony. The Kennedy administration initiated the New York Agreement to facilitate the transfer of power over West Papua from the Netherlands to Indonesia. Although the New York Agreement was fundamentally undemocratic—inasmuch as not a single Papuan was consulted—it did stipulate that it would be subject to an act of universal suffrage. While dismayed and angry for not being included in this process, Papuans believed that there would be a referendum. In 1969, for a period of several weeks, the Indonesian government organized a way to ascertain the people's will. The Indonesian government called the process the "Act of Free Choice" or *penentuan Pendapat rakyat,* abbreviated to *Pepera* in Indonesia. Happy to get rid of the problem of West Papua, the

United Nations rubber-stamped the process. But instead of organizing a general referendum, the Indonesian government manipulated the process by selecting only 1026 people to be consulted. Out of approximately 800,000 people at the time, this was less than 0.2 percent of the population. In a series of public meetings—while surrounded by armed Indonesian security forces—participants were "asked" to raise their hands, indicating their wish to join Indonesia instead of forming the independent nation-state of West Papua. The so-called "Act of Free Choice" was neither free nor fair. There was no choice at all. What happened in 1969 went against the international democratic principle of one person, one vote.[2]

Even earlier, in April 1967—two years before the UN-sanctioned process of determining West Papua's political status—the Freeport-McMoRan company had signed a business contract with the Indonesian government to begin a mining extraction project of one of the largest gold and copper reserves in Amungsa land.[3] As with the New York Agreement, the parties involved did not consult the Amungme and Kamoro communities, ostensibly because both communities were "uncivilized." The Amungme and Kamoro, guardians of the gold mountain and the coastal forests and sea where the company operated, never knew that the world's largest gold company had signed a contract with the Indonesian government. In this sense, crimes against humanity and the earth were carried out by a group of people who claimed to be civilized. To this day, I ask myself: Has the greed and the desire to possess West Papua's rich natural resources poisoned their souls?

In 1969, the Indonesian government sent the military special forces—called *Kopassandha* or *Kopassus*—to intimidate Papuans and punish those who expressed any resistance to Indonesia's manipulation. The actions of these forces included bombing villages and disappearing dissidents.

Traces of these kinds of violent practices are still evident today. For instance, Rev. Yeremia Zanambani, the head of Moni Bible School and a Bible translator, was shot dead in September 2020 by Alpius Hasim Madi, an Indonesian soldier, in Hitadipa, Intan Jaya. His tragic killing was not an isolated event. He was the tenth civilian-victim shot in Intan Jaya between October 2019 and December 2020. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indonesian government has forced its own citizens to leave their homes

2. John Saltford, *The United Nations and the Indonesian Takeover of West Papua, 1962–1969: The Anatomy of Betrayal* (London: Routledge, 2003), 190.

3. Denise Leith, "Freeport and the Suharto Regime, 1965–1998," *The Contemporary Pacific* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 96.

while they conduct military operations. Three villages have been emptied. People have moved to the neighbouring regions and shelter with churches and their relatives. The Humanitarian Team of Papua points out that there are multiple causes of violence in Intan Jaya. A key factor is the existence of a large gold deposit, which is leading to a new resource war—just like the one around the Freeport mine.[4] The Wabu gold deposit in Intan Jaya is only a few kilometres from Freeport's Grasberg mine near Tembagapura.

Abu Obeelom Aret ("Creation Is Very Good")

Before I explore the way the Amungme people understand peace and good life, let me examine the concept of *alle'nggen* in scripture from my own cultural point of view. *Alle'nggen* has the meaning of *shalom* for the Lani. The word *alle'nggen* is a verb; it becomes possessive as *nale'nggen,* when I, as first-person singular, play my role in maintaining good relationships between people and other living creatures. When *alle'nggen* is experienced by a community, we greet each other with the expression *ninale'nggen*. *Ninale'nggen* means that the *alle'nggen* is ours. It is also a term used as a response by people in the communities when an elder greets them with *alle'nggen*. *Alle'nggen, nale'nggen,* and *ninale'nggen* imply that my peace is dependent upon the peace of the other: they are inseparable.

As we will see, the Freeport mine and everything that has happened around it stands in stark contrast to what God intends for creation. According to Genesis 1:31, "God saw everything that He had made and indeed, it was very good [*abu obeelom aret*]. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day." *Obeelom* is a Lani word for "good." The word does not refer only to the goodness of the object itself but refers also to the ties and relationship between things. In the Amungme, Lani, and Walak conception of the world, all of creation is connected. The well-being of the whole depends on the well-being of each individual part. The words *abu aret* literally mean "perfect," "complete," and "finished." The creation of God produces *alle'nggen*—shalom—and it is *abu obeelom aret*—perfect and complete.

Tumariyak as Stewardship

According to Genesis 1:26–27, men and women are created in the image of God. This means that human beings are made with the desire and capacity

4. Humanitarian Team for Papua, "Findings of the Humanitarian Team for Intan Jaya Papua," news release, https://humanrightspapua.org/images/docs/Press_release_from_Humanitarian_Team_for_Intan_Jaya_Papua_Oct2020.pdf.

to exercise *tumariyak*—care for creation. *Tumariyak* is the Lani word for stewardship. Trees will be cut down only when we want to make a garden. Woods from the trees will be used to make fences around the garden; the rest will be used for the firewood. When sweet potatoes and cassava are planted, we also have to plant trees in order to replace what we have cut. In our stewardship role, all that is displaced must always be replaced; what is removed must always be regrown. The spirit of connection and reconnection is key to this theology of stewardship.

In her book *The Very Good Gospel*, Lisa Sharon Harper states that *radah*—the Hebrew word for stewardship—is not a call to exercise imperial power. It is rather a call to exercise care. Instead of cultivating stewardship, Christian leaders have often promoted dominion. Pope Nicholas V, for instance, infamously granted nations the right to "discover" and claim dominion over non-Christian land.[5]

The Amungme's Conception of the World

The Amungme's conception of the world is unique, anchored in the place that has shaped them. As Mama Yosepha explained to us that day in the cable car, the Amungme people consider Mount Nemangkawi to be their Mother: lake Wanagong, in the middle of Mount Nemangkawi, is her brain and marrow; the Arafuru sea, located to the south of the Amungme land, is her two feet; and the land in the middle is her body.[6]

Living this philosophical principle, Tuwarek Nartkime, an Amungme elder, led the Amungme people to protest when the Freeport company started building a helipad and basecamp in Pegukate, a village in the Waa valley, close to the gold hidden within the Mount Nemangkawi. The company did not ask permission from the Amungme community, who are the customary landowners. They did not negotiate with the residents of the Waa valley. The protests started in the late 1960s and continued well into 1972. Freeport and the Indonesian government sent security forces to silence the Amungme's voice. Sixty indigenous people were killed during this protest. In the following

5. Lisa Sharon Harper, *The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right* (Colorado: Waterbrook, 2016), 146. The Doctrine of Discovery elevated "power" over people and exploitation of creation over care of people and place. In the process, the church diminished the capacity of human beings to understand and practise stewardship. The consequence of this was the obscuring and tarnishing of the image of God on earth.
6. Benny Giay and Yafet Kambai, *Yosepha Alomang: Pergulatan Seorang Perempuan Papua Melawan Penindasan* (Abepura, Jayapura: Kerjasama Lembaga Studi dan Advokasi Hak Asasi Manusia, 2003), 83.

year, the community felt increasingly worried as the company began cutting down forests and displacing residents of Mulkundi—now Tembagapura City—to build a residential area for the mining workers. In that year, the mining company began to operate at full capacity.[7]

Massive protests by the Amungme took place in Mulkundi. Freeport planned to build a settlement for mining workers. Indigenous Amungme put crosses in the location of the construction. These were taboo sticks used as a warning to outsiders, signaling to the latter that they were forbidden to enter. The Amungme occupied the area, armed with bows and arrows. Finally, an agreement between the Amungme and the Indonesian government and Freeport came about. The Amungme begged both parties to respect customary rights and boundaries of customary lands. However, the final agreement, called the "January Agreement" and signed in 1974, was formulated by just two parties, Freeport and the Indonesian government, without any representation from the Amungme people. Once again, the company and the State ignored the Amungme's demands.[8]

As a result, the Amungme returned to fight the mining company and the government in Agimuga in 1977. In retaliation, the Indonesian security forces killed 30 Papuans. The Amungme were outraged. They cut Freeport's slurry pipes, which transported gold and copper concentrates from the mill site to the port of Amamapare. In response, the Indonesian military dropped bombs on the Amungme communities and rained down bullets on the residents of the Waa Valley and Kwamki Lama. The two villages were emptied as villagers fled to the forest.[9]

Jesus wept!

People lived in prolonged trauma in the woods. Eight years later, in several different places, more resistance emerged. Too many innocent lives have gone to defend the divine inheritance of our children and grandchildren.

Jesus wept!

When we deprive people of the ability to exercise *radah*—stewardship and agency—and when we exploit the land, the image of God is crushed. God no longer reigns supreme in that place, and the damage of creation stands as a witness to humanity's disobedience and selfishness.

7. Giay and Kamai, *Yosepha Alomang,* 2–4.
8. Giay and Kamai, 7.
9. Giay and Kamai, 8.

Mama Yosepha's Struggle as a *Hai* Activist

Painfully, the Amungme's attempts to defend creation and protect the good life represented by *hai* are being crushed in West Papua. Between 1970 and 1999, for instance, Mama Yosepha and dozens of Amungme women were arrested and jailed 18 times. In 1994, for one month, they were not provided with food, they were put in a shipping container full of human feces, and they were tortured and interrogated.

Jesus wept!

Along with 15 other people, Yosepha Alomang and Yuliana Magal survived. For the sake of Mother Earth as God's creation, they survived. They were released and continued the struggle.

In 1996, Yosepha Alomang and Thom Beanal, another Amungme elder, left for New Orleans, Louisiana (USA), to sue Freeport in the country where its headquarters are based. Alomang and Beanal accused Freeport of committing two crimes: complicity in human rights abuses committed by Indonesian security forces who protect the mine, and environmental violations. Unfortunately, the court ruled in Freeport's favor. Today, Freeport continues to dump mine tailings into the Aijkwa river, destroying over 3300 hectares of tropical forest vegetation.[10] Mama Yosepha and Thom Beanal may not have won the legal battle, but in the court of public opinion they were lauded. In 2001, in recognition of her persistence in organizing women's movements in the struggle against the Freeport mine, Mama Yosepha Alomang received two prestigious awards: the Yap Thiam Hien Award in December 1999,[11] and the Goldman Prize in April 2001,[12] given in San Francisco.

10. Giay and Kamai, 11.

11. The Yap Thien Hien Award is given by the Human Rights Study Center Foundation, based in Jakarta, to individuals who have dedicated their lives to efforts on human rights works in Indonesia. The award name is taken from an Indonesian lawyer and human rights defender of Chinese descent. This award has been granted every 10 December since 1992.

12. The Goldman Environmental Prize honors grassroots environmental heroes from around the world. The prize recognizes individuals for sustained and significant efforts to protect and enhance the natural environment, often at great personal risk. The Goldman Prize views grassroots leaders as those involved in local efforts, where positive change is created through community or citizen participation. Through recognizing these individual leaders, this prize seeks to inspire other ordinary people to take extraordinary actions to protect the natural world.

The Amungme people, Yosepha Alomang, and other ordinary women tell us that the true human beings are meant to be protectors, cultivators, and servants of the land, not its exploiters. These values and roles have inspired and have been lived out by our ancestors, then passed from generation to generation.

Shifting World View

Mama Yosepha's treatment at the hands of state and corporate power, and the acquiescence of the local, national, and international church, alongside the international community, raises uncomfortable questions for me. Why does God seem to be silent in the face of the suffering of His own people? God once divided and made a path in the middle of the sea so that the Israelites could escape from their oppressors, who had enslaved them. Why doesn't God intervene directly to help the Papuan people as in the case of the Israelites?

After reading the testimony of Tuwarek Nartkime, the elder who led the first protest against Freeport in Waa Valley in 1971, I thought to myself, "Maybe the story would have been different if God had blessed the mountains in Spain, Holland, Germany, and other European countries with gold. Perhaps, there would be no British Petroleum in Bintuni (in the western coast of West Papua) if the seas from European countries contained oil and natural gas."

These thoughts are shared by other Papuans. Nartkime said, "I always ask God in my thoughts and prayers every day, why did God create those beautiful mountains of rock and snow in Amungsa? Why did God allow outsiders to come here and take it from us? Why do the Amungme people continue to be arrested, tortured, and shot at for fighting for the protection of their lands? I am really angry with God. Why did He have to place those beautiful mountains and minerals here?"[13]

I will never forget my seven-day journey to Amungsa, which was the first time I set feet there. It was an honor to be invited by Mama Yosepha Alomang to be part of her initiative with the Yahamak Foundation, which she started in 2001. It seems to me that Mama Yosepha wanted to share her pain through this pilgrimage of justice. Yosepha Alomang's stories of pain and resistance have now become part of my story. She has taught me to own the story which has now shaped my world view. Her struggle is an inspiration that has determined the path that I have chosen, which calls for an alternative

13. Giay and Kambay, *Yosepha Alomang,* 10.

world view. Even though her lawsuit against Freeport was unsuccessful, it has inspired many Papuans, myself included, to tell these stories of suffering and struggle for justice to our children and grandchildren. I tell my children that Yosepha Alomang is a fighter for the truth, a *shalom* activist.

Sharing Stories of Justice through *Lee Ndawi*

As noted previously, l*ee-ndawi* literally means "songs of lament." *Lee-ndawi* occurs, for example, when a member of a community passes away, when a woman leaves her village to marry a man from a different village, and when children leave their villages for further study. The practice is led by a male or female when the community experiences natural disasters, drought, and various unexpected events.

Our parents and elders lamented when the massacre occurred in my village, Kelela, in 1977. After an insurgency raised against the Indonesian security forces in various places in Central Highlands, the Indonesian government sent thousands of soldiers to hunt for what they named "Papuan rebels." In the meantime, the government also designated West Papua as a military zone (*daerah operasi militer*), which allowed the security forces to arbitrarily torture and kill Papuans.

Jesus wept!

I was welcomed by my aunties with *lee-ndawi* when I returned to my village years after these events. I lamented together with them inside the *honai*—the traditional Lani roundhouse—when I heard their testimonies of sexual violence committed by the Indonesian security forces during that year. I believe that Jesus wept in *lee-ndawi* with us, as thousands of Nduga people were forced to flee their highland villages when the Indonesian military started bombing them again in 2018. Many were injured and killed. For more than three years, the fate of the Nduga refugees has been in limbo. Hundreds of Nduga children, for example, are still studying under tents in neighboring towns.

I hear the *lee-ndawi* of thousands of parents, who greeted their children fleeing racism from various cities of Indonesia. Almost 3000 Papuan students left their university studies sparked by racist remarks in Malang and Surabaya in August 2019.[14] In the villages, during lament, the number of people joining the ceremony increased as the *lee-ndawi* was unfolding. They came

14. "Mahasiswa Eksodus: 'Emas' Papua yang Terlantar," 29 February 2020, Suarapapua.com, https://suarapapua.com/2020/02/29/mahasiswa-eksodus-emas-papua-yang-terlantar/.

from different villages and cities. The stories of injustice of the students and their parents which were expressed in cries and laments moved my heart. I was called then to lead *lee-ndawi* in Jayapura.

Finding Our Way as *Hai* Activists

In 2018, I was named Coordinator of the Women's Department of Evangelical Church in Tanah Papua (GIDI). As part of my role, I work interdenominationally with other women. We have been praying regularly for reconciliation, peace, and justice. Dozens of us lament the lack of unity of our church and pray that the church leaders can find the courage to speak publicly about systemic and structural sins. We are convinced that the gospel is not only about an individual's reconciliation with God, but also with the communities and creation. It has a lot to say about systemic justice, peace between people, and freedom for the oppressed. We lament for the Papuans serving in the Indonesian government. We pray that they work with integrity, asking protection and wisdom for them so that they can be agents of transformation in the midst of an imperial oppressive system.

In our lament, we also express gratitude for Rev. Andrikus Mofu.[15] Two years ago, he facilitated the way for three important leaders of West Papuan churches to register their churches as members of Pacific Conferences of Churches (PCC) in Suva, Fiji. Then, the following year, in 2020, the West Papua Council of Churches was founded.[16] As followers of Jesus, these church leaders consistently amplify the voices of the marginalized and oppressed who are struggling against a modern-day Goliath and Pharaoh. They made a clear statement that the 20 years of the Indonesian Government's Special Autonomy Law has failed to improve the human rights situation in West Papua. These leaders encourage Joko Widodo, the President of Indonesia, to meet the leaders of United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP).[17]

15. Chair of the Synod of the Christian Church in Tanah Papua (GKI-TP); member of the World Council of Churches.

16. The West Papua Council of Churches was founded by Rev. Benny Giay, head of the Kingmi church, Rev. Socrates Sofyan Yoman, President of the Fellowship of Papuan Baptist Church, Rev. Dorman Wandikbo, President of Evangelical Church in Tanah Papua (GIDI), and Reverend Mofu.

17. The ULMWP is a united group of West Papuans who represent the political aspirations of the oppressed people, seeking a solution to more than 50 years of violent political conflict. See West Papua Council of Churches, "Open Letter to President Joko Widodo as the Supreme Commander of the Army and Police, 7 October 2020," https://www.papuapartners.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Open-Letter-from-WPCC-Oktober-2020.pdf.

The *Wenenu* Community of Justice and Hope

As I actively became involved in critical discussions and political protests during my college life, those pains and stories led me to years of hatred, bitterness, and trauma. I am forever grateful to my close friend Naomi Sosa, an Irish woman, and her wonderful family, who lived in our communities in Papua for 14 years. I have no idea why she asked me to join her as part of a pilgrimage to Robben Island, South Africa, together with various peacemakers from other countries. The pilgrimage was facilitated by some shalom-doers who work for Warehouse, a faith-based organization based in Cape Town. We spent four days walking on the soil where South African political prisoners walked. One day, as we stood in front of Nelson Mandela's former prison cell, I could not help feeling overwhelmed with emotion. I walked away, looking for a place where my cry would not be heard. But Naomi heard me. She came and hugged me. We cried together. My personal journey of healing started in that place.

From that pilgrimage, I have learnt that I have to make peace with myself. This is the beginning of reconciliation. As I make peace with me, I am able to use my pain as a resource and energy to drive me forward, seeking for positive change.

After returning to West Papua, Naomi and I invited the four friends we met on Robben Island to visit West Papua. Together with several youth leaders, women activists, legal practitioners, and human rights and environmental activists, we spent three days together. Identities, peaceful resistance, and reconciliation became the topics of our discussion. We not only learned from them, but we also shared our stories of hope and horror with Sami Awad, a Palestinian peacemaker, Matthew LeBlanc, from the Mi'kmaq nation of Turtle Island in Canada, and others from South Africa. Although these pilgrims returned to their homes, the discussion has continued. They have visited us a few times since then. As a result, a community was formed with the name *Wenenu,* which in the Lani language means "important messages."

I have witnessed how the seeds of hope have grown into true solidarity.[18] We, the *Wenenu* community, were deeply humbled and grateful to Gary Swart, who facilitated the process so that again three leaders of the West Papua Council of Churches could to travel to South Africa.[19] Conversations with Moses Nthla and other key leaders motivated and strengthened the conviction of West Papuan church leaders that West Papua, in this current time of crisis, also needs a Kairos Document, similar to the initiative undertaken by the churches of South Africa during the apartheid regime.

As West Papuan women, reflecting on the coming of Easter, we realize that we have chosen to play a role as Mary Magdalene, not only lamenting on the long way of the *via dolorosa* to the last breath of Jesus on the cross, but also spreading the news of Jesus' resurrection. Even though in the West Papua's context, the church as an institution has "imprisoned" women with its doctrines and misinterpretations of the scriptures, we have chosen to be a pillar of our nation, to be the messengers of *wenenu*—spreading the messages of hope. We choose to be *hai* activists—to strengthen solidarity, to lament collectively and regularly, and to practice nonviolent actions—so that one day *hai* will come upon us in our beloved West Papua, the Land of the Morning Star.

Conclusion

Indigenous West Papuans need to grant dignity and proper place to their own stories and histories in order to reclaim the *hai* or *alle'nggen* in the Land of West Papua. Being a *hai* or *shalom* activist in the midst of injustice is indeed a real struggle. And yet, it must be part of our journey to unite in true and strong solidarity and to tear down the oppressive system. Mama Yosepha Alomang successfully inspired and taught young West Papuan women that we women have been given a responsibility as life-givers. We must share our history, pain, and hope passionately through stories, songs, and songs of

18. Two Papuans from the *Wenenu* community were able to learn and share our stories with participants of a conference in Palestine, which was facilitated by Sami Awad, the founder of Holy Land Trust. Matthew LeBlanc created a space for two indigenous Papuans to join an indigenous youth event held by the United Nations in New York. I was able to share Mama Yosepha's stories with Lisa Sharon Harper, the author of *The Very Good Gospel*, whom I met on Robben Island. Stories of pain and struggle were also shared with other women who participated in the Ruby Woo Pilgrimage in her country.

19. These leaders had the opportunity to learn from South African church leaders about their role in facing the apartheid system. We met Frank Chikane and Mary Plaatjies, representatives of the WCC.

lament. To restore the image of God in the land of West Papua, the role of women needs to be acknowledged and appreciated. Even though Jesus had twelve disciples, he welcomed and appreciated women and their important roles during his ministry. Women must be welcomed in the processes of decision and policy making in every level of leadership, and in all aspects of life.

To conclude, I quote Benny Giay:

> We tip our hats and thank chiefs, church leaders, media, political and government leaders, civil society, and intellectual, each of ordinary person in the Pacific, and those involved in international solidarity for West Papua in Africa, Australia, Europe, the United States and Indonesia who have been showing true solidarity in the course of the journey of our nation.[20]

May we become *hai* activists!

20. Benny Giay, "West Papua—The Journey of our Nation," *Asia Pacific Report,* 12 May 2016, https://asiapacificreport.nz/2016/05/12/benny-giay-west-papua-the-journey-of-our-nation/.

10

"No Violence!"

Transformative Spirituality of a Peace Circle in the German Democratic Republic

Marie Anne Subklew

The Power of Candles and Prayers

I have personally experienced how praying and singing can change a whole society. In the revolutionary fall of 1989, many people in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) gathered in Protestant churches before they went out into the streets to demonstrate. Intercessory prayers were held, and people sang and prayed. Many had never seen a church from the inside before. Yet, at this moment, together with hundreds of others, the people sat freezing on hard pews, singing *Dona nobis pacem*—"Give us peace!" At the end of the liturgy, the people lit their candles on the altar candle, and, carrying the light out into the cold streets, shouted "No violence!" while continuing to sing the canon *Dona nobis pacem*. With water cannons and police chains, the government forces tried to prevent what had long since become unstoppable.

During a visit to West Berlin in 1989—before the wall between East and West Germany was brought down—Gottfried Forck, then bishop of the Berlin-Brandenburg church, was asked whether the intercessory prayer services in East Germany were "real church services" or simply "devotions," since at least 90 percent of the participants were people who had nothing spiritual in mind, but only wanted to gather for political reasons. Forck asked back: "Have you ever been to such an intercessory prayer service? For 25 German marks—that was the amount West Germans had to pay per day when entering the GDR—you could witness one."[1] Forck went on to emphasize that "the intercessory prayer services were an important and significant ministry of the church, and not just a service at the margins."[2]

1. Manfred Kliem, Klaus Roeber, Malte Wiedemyer, *Glauben ist Ermutigung zum Handeln* (Rothenburg: Publikation des Ernst Lange-Instituts für Ökumenische Studien, 1996), 100.
2. Kliem et al., *Glauben ist Ermutigung,* 100.

What is the task of the church, of Christian people, other than to pray and to bless—and precisely not to do this in secret? That was exactly what annoyed the GDR government so much: the church did not do its very essential thing in hiding. This was the opposite of what the ruling Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED) had in mind: "It is time to immediately ensure and guarantee that the church becomes the church again, everywhere."[3] By this, the ruling party had in mind that the church would become silent. But the party misunderstood something. For whenever the church is *the church*, whenever the church takes its mission seriously, the church becomes highly political. The intercessory services provided during this time were a form of protest. They made it clear that, on the one hand, the biblical word is a promise and a claim on the whole of a person´s life; on the other hand, this promise and claim cannot be separated from the social realities in which the Bible is being read.

Was it not this very space, this shared time in the churches that contributed to the fact that the East German revolution was a peaceful one? Could it not be that the praying and singing, the silence and listening, reached so many people even though many of them were not Christians? Was it not the Spirit and the intercessory prayers that were taken out into the streets where the cold wind of state powers blew: there, where the police and the State Security Service (*Staatssicherheit*, or "Stasi") tried with massive presence to save something that could no longer be saved?

What happened on the streets back then is still a miracle to me. When have we Germans ever succeeded in a revolution without bloodshed, without war and victory and humiliation of other people and nations? It is a miracle of biblical proportions, says the theologian in me. It was the multifactorial interplay of foreign and domestic political constellations, says the political scientist in me. Both are true, says the experience in me. The fact that in those months more than 30 years ago, there were causes at work beyond the political is not a pious interpretation of the events; nor is it an example of the church ascribing to itself a special role during the fall of 1989. One witness who cannot be suspected of being somehow close to the church or of overvaluing the church's role out of self-interest is Horst Sindermann, a high SED functionary and member of the SED Central Committee. He is

3. epd-Dokumentation 43/1988, 60–80. Translation by the author.

credited with saying: "We were prepared for everything, except for candles and prayers."[4]

Years before those revolutionary events, groups committed to social justice had already sought shelter in churches where they were protected from the government. One such group was the Pankow Peace Circle (*Pankower Friedenskreis*), a decidedly Christian group, yet open to all who sought an exchange of ideas and who shared the longing for change. During the fall of 1989, circles like this were essential supporters of the nonviolent revolution in the GDR.

The Pankow Peace Circle: An Example of Transformative Spirituality

The Pankow Peace Circle is an excellent example of transformative spirituality. Pankow, a district in northern Berlin, had been separated from the neighbouring district of Wedding by the construction of the Wall in 1961. In 1981, a peace circle was founded in Pankow—one of the first of such groups in East Berlin. At the beginning of the 1980s, the nuclear arms race in Europe had reached its sad climax. The hostile lines of the Cold War had deepened. Both sides, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, were rearming with both conventional and nuclear weapons. SS 20 and Pershing 2 missiles stood in both German states, aiming at each other. The term *arms race* dominated all political discussions and made clear the absurdity of the situation. People in the GDR felt the increase of militarization over their entire lives. As early as 1978, for example, the subject "socialist military education" was introduced to students in the 9th and 10th grades. In these courses, students were taught military knowledge as part of the regular curriculum. Even in kindergarten (although many teachers did not adhere to it), military education was on the agenda. In this life-threatening situation of rearmament and growing domestic militarization, the non-governmental peace movement emerged in the GDR, encouraged by Western peace movement protests against the same absurdity.

In 1980, the 10-day "Ecumenical Decade for Peace" (*Ökumenische Friedensdekade*) was initiated by youth church workers. A "Swords to Ploughshares" patch, a symbolic reference to the hoped-for demilitarization of politics, became a significant issue. Those who wore the patch publicly on their jacket sleeves were threatened with expulsion from high school

4. Stefanie Golla, "Vater des Mauerfalls —Interview with Christian Führer," *ZEIT Online,* 1 April 2008, https://www.zeit.de/online/2008/14/Interview-Friedensgebet.

or university. This was particularly absurd because the patch displayed the sculpture that the USSR had donated to the UN in 1959, which has stood in front of the UN headquarters in New York ever since.

In the GDR, harmless behaviours, such as wearing long hair, lighting a candle in the window, showing a patch, or making a critical remark, were now immediately suspected of indicating opposition to the system.

In this context, on 24 October 1981, the Protestant parish of Alt Pankow invited people to a festival entitled "Against Death Security—for Peace."[5] Only a few people suspected that this would be the birth of the Pankow Peace Circle. But the longing for an exchange of ideas and discussion, for free space and information, was so great that the idea to meet regularly arose spontaneously. Those who participated wanted to talk to each other about the pressing issues of the day. The mood that dominated the country was exemplified by the very short sentences people wrote on a wall of the Pankow church that day: "Stop civil defense," "Peace education instead of military education," "No more nuclear experiments," "Money for peace and the disabled—not for arms." The Ministry of State Security was quite irritated by these slogans. Four weeks later, about 50 people gathered in the parish hall and the Peace Circle was founded.

The history of this circle serves as an example to us, showing the many faces and possibilities of resistance in totalitarian regimes. The members of the Pankow Peace Circle were not heroes, they were women and men, mothers and fathers, who at one point in their lives simply stated: "We cannot stand our silence any longer."

Democratic Grassroots Principles

The Pankow Peace Circle quickly found a variety of ways to work together. On the one hand, the participants focused on different interests; on the other hand, working groups within the circle focused on key themes. The working groups emerged as a consequence of the diverse individual pressures people suffered. While some did not want to live with the nuclear threat any longer, others were looking for ways to come to terms with the official socialist education, for themselves and their children. Others wanted to explore ways of nonviolent living or to think about the connection between armaments and ecology. The "Open Friday," which was held once a month, gathered all the working groups together.

5. In German: *"Gegen Todsicherheit—für den Frieden."*

Right from the beginning, the Peace Circle agreed on democratic grassroots principles that explicitly emphasized the responsibility of each individual. Thus, everyone would only be accountable for his or her own actions and words. No one was to be identified with the statements and actions of others, so that all could determine for themselves the risks they were willing to bear. On the one hand, this was an evasion, a way to shift risk away from the group to the individual; but at the same time, it ensured the conditions for existence of the circle. The strategy avoided violations of state prohibitions; it respected differences in terms of goals and possible actions; and it ensured wide access to the group integrating people of different motivations and political origins. Based on this principle, the circle decided that no letters would be written and sent out collectively by the "Pankow Peace Circle."

Motivation

The motives behind participation in the Peace Circle were a mixture of feelings and fears, experiences and longings. People suffered from political isolation as well as from the loneliness of a big city. Their "bilingualism"—the division between public and private speech—was painful and shameful. The fear of war was paralyzing. The discrepancy between proclaimed aspirations of socialism and social reality increased.

However, for most, the decisive break with the political system had been made 12 years earlier. When the tanks of the Warsaw Pact[6] crushed the small shoots of democratization in Prague, Czechoslovakia, they destroyed more than the hopes for democratic socialism. The testimonies of loyalty to the Warsaw Pact policy demanded by the GDR government left a feeling of shame. For some, the violation of people's dignity was such a traumatic experience that their subsequent refusal to support the GDR government may have been caused by this event. Political commitment is derived not only from the perception of global or local problems; it also arises from one's own sense of dignity when one is challenged by the political impositions of the ruling system.

In addition, there were other political events that motivated or increased people's willingness to engage in political protest. These included the expulsion of the singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann in 1976, the NATO rearmament debate, and the stationing of Soviet nuclear missiles on the territory of the GDR. All these experiences led people to join the Peace Circle.

6. The Warsaw Pact was a collective defense treaty signed in Warsaw, Poland, between the Soviet Union and seven other socialist republics of Central and Eastern Europe in May 1955.

Spirituality

Christian faith and the biblical call to *metanoia* need responding expressions. A circle in which Christians and non-Christians worked together on an equal footing demanded that these practices not be exclusive, thereby mirroring the invitational character of the biblical message. Christian members of the Peace Circle expressed their faith by bringing different spiritual practices into the circle. These spiritual activities were open to all and, as such, were accepted with varying degrees of intensity.

Devotions

The most continuous spiritual element were the devotions at the beginning of each Open Friday. These devotions usually consisted of a song, interpretation of a biblical text, and prayer. It could be led by any member of the Peace Circle. However, those who agreed to lead a devotion had to be aware that such behaviour could result in an interview with one's senior leaders at work. After the physicist Gerd Stadermann, staff member of the Central Institute for Optics and Spectroscopy, held a devotion on 1 March 1985, he was called to the Director of the Institute, who informed him that any "public relations work must be approved by the Institute Director. This would also apply to appearances in the church. To approve a presentation, an application would have to be made to the Scientific Information and Library Department" (WIB).[7] After Stadermann responded that he was not aware of any organizational directive according to which devotions required approval, the director replied that Stadermann, as a member of the Institute, was not allowed to express any opinion other than the official one held by the government. Gerd Stadermann made a record of this conversation. Only after the intervention of the Berlin-Brandenburg provost, Friedrich Winter, did the situation ease for him a little.

Table community

The table community usually met once a month in the parish hall of the Pankow church where an *agape* meal was shared. This "love meal" is a meal for saturation, different than the Lord's supper, in which the social aspect comes to the fore. The festive *agape* meal is framed with prayers and songs. Each time, one family of the Peace Circle prepared the meal and invited the others from the Circle. They were also responsible for the liturgical portion of

7. Gerd Stadermann, minutes of conversation, 3 May 1985. Das Bundesarchiv, Stadermann Archive. Translation by the author.

the gathering. They chose a Bible verse, which was used as the theme for the entire evening. Eating and sharing was thus placed in a spiritual and thematic framework. Werner Schulz, a member of the German parliament (*Bundestag*) after reunification, and who later served in the European Parliament, recalls: "We celebrated communion in a very archaic way, maybe the way you imagine it, with a long table in the church and red wine, and we broke bread and talked and celebrated liturgical nights. And I suddenly realized that church can live again. . . . We sang songs together. Today there is hardly any political movement that sings songs. Or the open intercessions, where people opened up."[8]

Bible study groups

In two Bible study groups, which each met twice a month, biblical texts were read together and were related to the participants' life circumstances. This showed that theology never arises outside of a situation but instead, is always related to a context. It develops and articulates itself in conversation with those impacted by a particular social setting. In the Bible study groups, Christians and non-Christians found a new or initial access to the stories and history of the Bible. The Bible study groups were experienced as the integrating centre of the entire Peace Circle. As one participant states, "We not only had the political working groups, we also had two Bible study groups, . . . and I liked that very much. . . . That was another framework, which created cohesion in the peace circle."[9]

One of the two Bible study groups that were formed at that time still meets today, continuing with the agenda as before.

The Ministry for State Security (MfS) noted about the women's Bible study group that during the "so-called 'Bible lessons' attended exclusively by women, the discussions centred on stories involving 'extreme actions,' including those of 'Judith' and 'Eve.'"[10] However, the MfS paid special attention to the fact that in the course of the discussions "references to the present were also made and discussed."[11] Based on the expertise of the participants, the *Stasi* informer got the impression "that the majority had completed a theology degree and

8. Peace circle member A, interview with author, 31 October 2000. Translation by the author.

9. Peace circle member B, interview with author, 20 November 2000. Translation by the author.

10. Das Bundesarchiv, Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv (BStU), Ministry for State Security (MfS), ZA 2603, 41. Translation by the author.

11. BStU, ZA 2603, 41. Translation by the author.

worked in a church institution."[12] He was wrong. Apart from Ruth Misselwitz, there were no other professional female theologians in the circle.

Fasting

The Peace Circle took up old Christian traditions such as fasting,[13] and adapted them to their own needs. Fasting is much more than abstaining from food. It is an exercise in another way of living, a discipline of discipleship and repentance. Repentance can happen in several ways during one's fast. Those fasting can encounter themselves and thus turn back to themselves.[14] Turning to one's neighbor allows more time for family and friends, as well as sensitivity to the people in one's surroundings. Fasting is an expression of the theological view that repentance relates to peace, justice, and the care for creation that begins in one's own life. The most essential dimension of religious fasting, however, is that of repentance and reflection on God.

The spectrum of what individuals seek to achieve through their fasting ranges from self-awareness to political action. When the people of Pankow fasted together for the first time in 1983, during the Ecumenical Decade for Peace, participants explained their motivation for this form of self-reflection and protest in a handout that was displayed and distributed in the church during the campaign:

> We have heard, with horror, that measures are being initiated to station nuclear missiles on the GDR soil. In an "emergency" this implies a death sentence for the entire population of the GDR. Even if these countermeasures are intended as a response to the stationing of the nuclear first-strike weapons Pershing 2 and Cruise Missiles in Western Europe, they do not lose any of their danger as a result: Security in Europe will be considerably reduced and thus the probability of a war destroying our continent will increase.

12. BStU, ZA 2603, 42. Translation by the author.

13. The meaning of the word "fasting" comes from "holding fast." This refers to the observance of rules. Fasting was originally understood as the complete or partial abstention from food. In all world religions, fasting is considered to be a spiritual practice. Fasting was thought to perfect the whole person. Christians have observed fixed periods of fasting before the major feasts of Christmas and Easter since around the 4th century. Fasting mainly disappeared from Protestant churches as a result of the Reformation, but this form of lived piety is currently experiencing a renaissance.

14. Björn Uwe Rahlwes and Thomas Hammerschmidt, *Das Fastenlesebuch: Weniger Kann Mehr Sein—Vom Reichtum des Verzichts im Angesicht des Überflusses* (Frankfurt: Gemeinschaftswerk der Evangelischen Publizistik, 2003), 141.

> We want to think together and with you about how we can cope with this new situation and what we have to do so that these missiles are not stationed here.
>
> We want to fast together and with you, as a sign of our protest against nuclear missiles in the West and in the East, but also as a sign of our guilt for not having done more to prevent the stationing of nuclear missiles in Europe.
>
> We want to pray together and with you, and ask God to avert the disaster from us and to give us strength and courage to continue to work for peace.
>
> But we also want to live together and with you.
>
> Because life must be stronger than death. We also want to think about what we will do if missiles are stationed in the West and East.
>
> We want to organize our daily routine together, discuss, argue, play, sing, meditate, be silent and pray.[15]

In this call, several of the motives described above are linked. At the beginning there is reflection (returning to self). Fasting is described as a protest and an admission of guilt (returning to peace and turning to other people). Finally, an essential element is prayer (returning to God). Following this action, Gerd Stadermann practiced a day of fasting every Wednesday for two years. This was an unknown dimension of lived faith for his colleagues at the Academy Institute where he worked. Today, Stadermann believes that he reached more people by fasting than if he had told his colleagues what action was being planned or carried out in the Peace Circle. The fact that someone did not eat anything for a whole day for the sake of peace made his colleagues thoughtful, and good conversations developed from this quiet, impressive action.

About eight people from the Peace Circle lived together in the parish hall for a week. During this time, they wrote a letter to the President of the People's Chamber, Horst Sindermann, in which they expressed their solidarity with the hungry of the world and protested against the stationing of short-range missiles on the territory of the GDR. The letter did not receive a reply.

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15. Translation by the author; underlining as in the original. The MfS files note the following about this fasting action: "Questions were also asked about the meaning of the paper published by the 'fasting group', since fasting could hardly be interpreted as active advocacy for peace. Here, too, there were heated discussions. Stadermann and also other members of the fasting group said that fasting had helped them to find themselves" (BStU, OV "Virus" Vol. 3, 45). Translation by the author.

During the Peace Workshop in 1986, the Peace Circle issued a fasting appeal asking participants to abstain from alcohol and cigarettes. The Peace Workshop was a one-day event in Berlin where peace, environmental, and human rights groups met to get to know each other, exchange ideas, and plan joint actions. The first Peace Workshop was held on 27 June 1982, on the grounds of Berlin's Church of the Redeemer. The church services, readings, concerts, exhibitions, lectures, and other events were attended by up to 3000 young people, who traveled not only from Berlin but from all over the Republic. The MfS noted that "the 'Peace Circle Pankow' is considered the starting point of numerous negative actions since 1982."[16]

In its fasting appeal for the *Kirchentag* (Church congress) 1987, the Peace Circle described in even greater detail why fasting was relevant:

> For us, fasting is not starving, but conscious renunciation of, for example, questionable living and eating habits, life-threatening luxury and addictive substances (alcohol and nicotine) and needless consumption. Fasting is a nonviolent action to awaken our consciousness.
>
> How do we want to fast?
>
> During the *Kirchentag* we want to abstain from alcohol and nicotine and limit the use of the car to urgent journeys only. On Saturday, we will forego lunch and eat a slice of bread instead.
>
> Who should fast?
>
> All participants of the 1987 Berlin *Kirchentag* who feel able to do so in terms of health.
>
> How do we want to organize it?
>
> All those who have read the fasting appeal and agree with it should also spread the word. Discuss it in your congregations and among your friends! In this way, this appeal can become a grassroots initiative and can be implemented at the 1987 *Kirchentag*.
>
> What do we want to achieve?
>
> We want to set a sign of repentance and reflection. The money saved is to be donated for a concrete project in the 2/3 world. Fasting gives impulses and

16. BStU, OV "Virus" Bd.2, 68.

> new thoughts, which we want to use to overcome our speechlessness and to lose the feeling of powerlessness.[17]

While the 1983 campaign focused more on reflection, repentance, and protest, the fasting for the 1987 *Kirchentag* added social engagement for the "2/3 world." Here the interplay of personal, physical fasting, social-ethical engagement, and religious interpretation becomes particularly clear.

Worship Services

All elements and forms of spiritual life found their expression and culmination in the preparation and celebration of church services. In addition to the classical liturgical elements, the Peace Circle hosted additional forms of worship. These included youth services (during the Easter Vigil, for example); family services (such as on community days); discussion services (during, for example, the *Kirchentag* and the Ecumenical Peace Decade); thematic services (such as the 8 May commemoration of the end of World War II and the commemoration of the Chernobyl nuclear accident); and meditative services (for "long night," during the Ecumenical Peace Decades).

Just as with the other spiritual practices, all were invited to participate in these services. One Peace Circle participant, who describes himself as a decided atheist, says: "The fact that I worked in a Christian peace circle and even helped to say intercessions or prepare events in the church was not a contradiction to my atheism. I felt that this was an enrichment for me.[18]

These elements of lived spirituality gave the Circle a certain stability. They were not designed to legitimate the Circle in the community; rather, they served as a form of self-reflection, contemplation, and reflection on the socio-economic context in which one's own peace work was taking place.

Publicity

For the political party and state leaders, the media and the public sphere were essential and well-guarded elements of power. In a closed society, free speech and free information threatens the monopolies of power. This state's fear of those who had alternative ideas about the public sphere and tried to live these ideas was tangibly expressed in the GDR's penal code, which criminalized many free expressions of opinion, even, for example, something

17. Translation by the author; underlining as in the original. Fasting appeal Kirchentag 1978, archive of the author.

18. Peace circle member C, interview with author, 24 October 2001. Translation by the author.

as simple as having a conversation with a citizen of a Western country.[19]

The monopoly on information held by the SED also affected the churches. Churches were largely excluded from the public media. Newspapers, radio, and television mentioned the church and its statements only insofar as these statements appeared to support the state's ideology. For this reason, the Pankow Peace Circle tried to create a kind of counter-public sphere under the institutional protection of the church—because it was and remains true that the church is public by its very nature and mission, or it is no longer church. Because of this claim, the churches became even more threatening to the government.

Thus, in addition to the public media, a different kind of public sphere developed around the church. Due to the censorship, of which people in the GDR were very much aware, a widely noticed partial public sphere was created. Especially in societies where the media is controlled by those in power, everything that happens outside this controlled sphere is carefully noted. Thus, the public space created by churches can become an alternative form of the public sphere that reaches much further than official newspapers. Unadulterated media coverage was denied to the churches in the GDR, yet the church was able to create a direct public sphere through its public church services, which remained largely beyond the control of the government. The church used its space to provide forums for issues that were troubling people but could not be discussed publicly.

The way in which a congregation created a public sphere of engagement depended to a large extent on the local church councils, the groups that were allowed to operate within a congregation, and not least of all, on the pastors. This was also true for the parish of Alt-Pankow and the Pankow Peace Circle. The initiators of the Peace Circle were motivated by their desire to step out of the living room into a larger public sphere. The greatest publicity was achieved with actions that were carried out in the Pankow church. These included the annual Ecumenical Peace Decades each November. Here, bustling activity spread in and around the church. In addition, the Peace Circle organized large community events twice a year.

Demonstrations were not considered a real possibility until 1987, since those who participated could easily have been treated as criminals by the state. The peace movement revealed itself to the broader community when

19. *Strafgesetzbuch der DDR* 1977, § 99 "Traitorous communication," § 106 "Anti-State agitation," § 219 "Unlawful communication," § 220 "Public disparagement".

participants carried banners at the Olof Palme Peace March for the first time in September 1987. In 1989 the Peace Circle entered the public space of the GDR in all its breadth, opening itself to all possible consequences.

The peace movement operated politically on the razor's edge of legality. The Pankow Peace Circle wanted to exhaust rather than break the legal conditions of the GDR. They were very conscious of the limits to the feasibility of their actions. Therefore, their goals did not include the introduction of parliamentary democracy or a market economy. This would only have been possible through the abolition of the GDR. In addition to the Peace Circle's three pillars—1) disarmament, demilitarization, ecology; 2) education; and 3) theology and faith—another aspect played an essential role in the movement's goals. This was the attempt to develop forms of language and life that would enable alternative culture and life to emerge. Although communes, such as those in the West during the 1968 student movement, were not founded, the longing to try out other forms of togetherness remained. Undermining state repression without retreating into a niche required the search for space to manoeuvre. In the Pankow Peace Circle one approach to this was the practical politicization of all life forms and life issues. Topics such as education, alternative living, solidarity with a hospital in Benin, West Africa, and tree-planting may have seemed apolitical. However, they raised awareness of how to operate within the legal boundaries. This awareness was important as up until this time, the most significant power of the state was its ability to define what it considered to be opposition. The corresponding arbitrary definitions were articulated in the GDR's penal code (which was renewed in 1979), or in regulations of the MfS (Ministry of State Security) on combating "political underground activity." Their definition of political opposition, which was both comprehensive and vague, aimed at undermining any legal security on the part of the actors. It enabled state repression.

Eliminating the feeling of powerlessness through the creation of a consciousness of legitimacy, legality, and personal competence generated a spirit of steadfastness and empowerment. This was inevitably followed by the awareness that certain practices or goals could be pursued without breaking the system. It was articulated as the "politicization of life practice."[20]

Self-Perception

In GDR times, the term *opposition* did not actually exist. GDR historians completely ignored this reality of opposition because things that were

20. Translated from the German phrase *Politisierung der Lebenspraxis.*

prohibited were not supposed to exist. According to the Marxist-Leninist definition, there could be no opposition, since the conditions for its emergence, namely antagonistic class differences, had been removed by the elimination of private ownership of the means of production.

In written self-testimonies of the Peace Circle, the word opposition is not used even once. This is not surprising, since the self-description of a Circle as political opposition would inevitably have resulted in the criminalization of the group. The word was thus avoided for tactical rather than substantive reasons. The self-editing worked so well that people forbade themselves to even think of the term "opposition." Yet, the groups naturally had an oppositional effect in the coercively-homogenized power structure of the GDR. Of course, in a repressive system, actions are quickly considered oppositional, even if they are not meant to be.

"Decomposition" Measures

Even if the peace groups did not see themselves as oppositional, they were treated as such by the police and the security apparatus. In *Stasi* jargon, the action of the groups was called "political underground activity" (PUT) or "political ideological diversion" (PID), which according to §107 of the GDR's penal code was an anti-constitutional association and was to be prosecuted accordingly.

The Pankow Peace Circle was massively affected by *Stasi's* measures. In addition to at least 25 unofficial employees of the State Security (IM) who reported on the Peace Circle, 30 so-called "social forces" and 15 MfS students were deployed to prevent the "hostile activities" of the circle. All three political powers, the SED party, the government, and the MfS worked together according to the principle of democratic centralism and "political-operational cooperation."[21]

Even if no one from the Peace Circle was imprisoned, most were aware that the state always had the option of invoking this penalty. In case of imprisonment, many Pankow Peace Circle members had deposited statements with the superintendent of the church or others they trusted, specifying where their children should stay in such an event. The MfS relied on the

21. For the MfS, this implied "a planned, comradely coordinated action of the MfS with other organs, characterized by mutual help and support, in the exercise of their specific responsibilities and possibilities." See Siegfried Suckut, *Das Wörterbuch der Staatssicherheit: Definitionen zur "Politisch-operativen Arbeit"* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2001), 428. Translation by the author.

silent destruction of the circle and its members through the subtle strategy called "decomposition" (*Zersetzung*). This strategy of psychological pressure on individuals and destabilizing of private and professional relations may have been more successful than if the MfS had arrested members of the Peace Circle, which might have provoked protests beyond the country.

Historical Impact

The Peace Circle was a place of political education and social bonding, insofar as it had a consciousness-raising, hope-giving, vision-developing, path-seeking, and alternative-providing effect. During the months of upheaval in 1989–90, most members of the Peace Circle were active in political parties or groups, as, for example, state secretaries, official negotiators in the "2+4 Negotiations," moderators of round tables, or, from March 1990 on, as freely elected members of the parliament (*Volkskammer*). After German reunification on 3 October 1990, many returned to their professions or sought new ways of living. For both, those who continued with their professional paths as well as those who became politicians beyond 1990, the Peace Circle was formative. The friendships and discussion groups that developed during those years have endured to this day and can be activated depending on the political situation. The groups were schools of freedom in terms of language and life, in which democratic perspectives on communication and action could be demonstrated and practiced, and in which a culture shaped by Christian faith had a peacemaking effect.

It was the members of these Peace Circle groups who spoke freely and openly—yet with pounding hearts—in front of large crowds in the churches during the fall of 1989. Sometimes it was only a few sentences or part of a freely formulated intercession that someone dared to speak in front of hundreds of unknown people in a large, half-dark church. Some sentences turned into speeches and some short intercessional prayers became whole devotions. A man from an East Berlin Peace Circle, later a rhetorically brilliant and much respected speaker in the Bundestag, describes it this way: "I was able to develop my rhetoric talent in the Peace Circle. That was a difficult situation in the GDR, because you could never actually speak in public, let alone give speeches. Only in church you could, and there you could also test the persuasiveness of your arguments. I learned to develop political patience and, above all, to take in and listen to other arguments."[22]

22. Peace Circle Member C, interview with author, 31 October 2000. Translation by the author.

Conclusions

The Pankow Peace Circle in the GDR is an example of how spirituality not only changes the individual people who practice it but can also become a catalyst for change in society as a whole. The Pankow Peace Circle combined the character of a political oppositional group with a clear Christian identity. It opened itself to those who identified only with the group's political goals and actions. At the same time, however, it strove to clarify and communicate the Christian roots, motives, and goals of political action. The Circle was present in the focal point of political conflicts, but it wanted to remain at home in the church. It asked the church not only for protection, but also for support of its work. The groups were schools of freedom for life, in which democratic perspectives on communication and action could be demonstrated and practiced, and in which a peace-making culture was developed, shaped by the Christian faith tradition.

The longing and the search for alternative patterns of life and communication, cannot be destroyed by political systems. For this will always be a task of our church: "To encourage people, to learn to speak freely and clearly, and also vicariously for those who have no voice." Today, we need these cultures of conversation and encounter as well. We need places where, beyond political party preferences and dispositions, realities are described, truths are sought, and interpretations are possible: spaces in which we can dismantle the principalities and powers. Whether we, the Church, succeed in this depends decisively on our credibility as witnesses to the possible. In 1988, Ulrich Kühn, theology professor in Leipzig, described the special opportunities of the churches' indirect political mandate and reminded Christians: "lived truth is always more appealing and inviting than proclaimed truth."[23]

23. Ulrich Kühn, „Begrenztes politisches Mandat. Lutherische Akzente im Verständnis des Auftrags der Kirche an der Gesellschaft," (*Zeichen der Zeit* 44, 1990), 97.

11

The Transformative Power of Black Preaching

Xavier L. Johnson

Black religiosity, particularly black Christian religiosity, has been a spring of life-giving, life-sustaining hope and strength for black people in the USA. In many ways, it provided what was necessary for them to understand, make meaning out of, and overcome the suffering, oppression, injustice, and marginalization that became a distinguishing characteristic of the black experience in the United States. Historian and theologian Gayraud S. Wilmore notes that black people took the Christian faith that was given to them, what he calls "white Christianity," and transformed it. However, because it was a faith born in and from extreme brutality, suffering, and hardship, it also became the foundation of "an indigenous faith that emphasized dignity, freedom, and human welfare."[1]

This foundation is firm even today. In 2014, the Pew Research Center published the "U.S. Religious Landscape" study, the results of which are most instructive when it comes to the state of black, Christian religiosity in the United States of America in the twenty-first century.[2] The study found that on average black people were more religious than whites and Latinos. Seventy-five percent of the black Americans interviewed viewed religion as a fundamental part of their lives. Blacks were also found to be more likely to attend a weekly religious gathering and pray. Though atheism has seen a slight increase, blacks were also found to be more likely to believe in the existence of God. Seventy-nine percent of African Americans identified themselves as Christians. A closer look into the numbers revealed that the majority of black Christians, and roughly half of all black people, in the US claimed membership in a historically black Protestant church denomination.

1. Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: Interpretation of the Religious History of Black Americans* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 4.

2. David Masci, "5 Facts about the Religious Lives of African Americans," Pew Research Center website, 1 November 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/02/07/5-facts-about-the-religious-lives-of-african-americans.

Black Christian religiosity is still alive and well and black people in the USA continue to find value in religion and in gathering together as a worshipping community. This is partly due to the origin of the black church, which was born in "hush harbors" and frequently met in secret during the days of chattel slavery. It became a safe place, where the black enslaved were free to worship God in their own way, particularly when it came to preaching. Unrestrained and unencumbered by the gaze and presence of white owners and overseers, black people were free to express themselves and interpret, or perhaps reinterpret, the gospel in ways that affirmed their dignity, personhood, and their status as children of God.[3] This fact speaks to the historical connection between black faith and social justice and the fact that, historically, the black church has been a place where matters of faith and justice are intertwined, especially in black preaching.

Even today, issues like racial justice loom large in black church life and in black preaching. In another study, the Pew Research Center found that just over sixty percent of black adults affirmed the importance of dealing with subjects like immigration and race relations in sermons. That number includes the twenty-three percent of black adults who viewed the matter as not just important but essential. These numbers become even more telling when compared to those of the white community. The study found that only thirty-six percent of whites believed that it was important to address issues like immigration and race relations in sermons, with only eight percent of that number believing that doing so was essential. Conversely, over forty percent of white Americans actually believed that those issues should not be addressed at all.[4]

As the Pew study reveals, black preaching still plays a central part in the life of the black church and in the lives of black people. It is still a source of strength, hope, and empowerment for black people as they confront injustice and work to change societal and political systems and structures. The question is, "Why?" This essay will answer this question by examining the transformative role of black preaching in the lives of black people. Specifically, this essay will examine the source of black preaching's power and its history as a catalyst for change.

3. Wilmore, *Black Religion*, 14.

4. Besheer Mohamed and Kiana Cox, "Before Protests, Black Americans Said Religious Sermons Should Address Race Relations," Pew Research Center website, 16 November 2020,

https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/15/before-protests-black-americans-said-sermons-should-address-race-relations/.

The Power of Black Preaching

As mentioned earlier, black preaching has historically played a transformative role in the lives of black people. This is, in part, because from the very beginning black preaching took seriously the black experience and sought to make meaning out of it in light of the gospel. Black preaching saw past the distorted theology, disfigured hermeneutic, and dehumanizing gospel preached to black people by their white enslavers and heard the liberating and transformative good news of Jesus Christ. The proclamation of that "good news" became black preaching. Black preaching is preaching that takes seriously the issues that black people face every day. It is contextual. It is preaching that is born out of the black experience and capable of encapsulating the entire spectrum of that experience. This is what makes black preaching both relevant and practical.[5]

Cleophus J. LaRue explores the transformative power of black preaching in his ground-breaking work, *The Heart of Black Preaching*. In his quest to understand what differentiates black preaching from other homiletical traditions, he concludes that the power of black preaching does not come from "special techniques" or tricks, but rather from the black experience, the ways in which black people understand the Bible and God, and the ways in which that understanding is applied both to the scriptures and to their everyday lives. For LaRue, the transformative power of black preaching comes from the soul of the black Christian experience, the ways in which black people have come, through their collective lived experience, to understand the character and the ways of God.[6]

Kenyatta R. Gilbert calls this "contextual awareness." He says, "Contextual awareness in preaching helps us to see that we bring ourselves to the scriptural texts we interpret, and our seeing, if we see anything at all, is revealed through the lens of our lived experience." Gilbert finds precedent for contextual awareness in the preaching of Jesus. He observes that even Jesus preached from a particular socio-cultural and religious context and that trying to read and understand his preaching outside of that context and social location risks reading and understanding it in a way that is both ahistorical and unfaithful to its original intent and purpose.[7] The same is true of black people and black

5. Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 6.

6. LaRue, Black Preaching, 1.

7. Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *Exodus Preaching: Crafting Sermons About Justice and Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), x.

preaching. Black preaching is best understood in relation to the experience of black people.

However, LaRue does more than simply suggest that the black experience is the key to understanding the transformative power of black preaching. He pushes the concept further. He moves past the homiletic event that is black preaching and looks to the hermeneutic that informs it. He suggests that what makes black preaching unique and differentiates it from Euro-American Christian preaching traditions is not only the fact that the black experience (both historical and contemporary) informs black preaching but also that it is the hermeneutical lens that is applied to the biblical text.[8] What gives black preaching its power is that it reads and interprets scripture through the lens of the black experience. The power of black preaching, then, is primarily found in what black people believe the Bible says about God's active involvement in their everyday lives and circumstances.[9]

This is a subtle but significant distinction. What gives black preaching its transformative power is not simply the fact that it takes the black experience seriously—though it could be argued that for a people forced to live and engage daily in spaces where their experience is often devalued and downplayed as "playing the race card," that fact alone makes black preaching a radical, revolutionary, and transformative enterprise. Yet, LaRue argues that black preaching does more than that. Black preaching does not just centre and privilege the black experience ontologically and existentially. It uses the black experience as the epistemological frame through which it makes meaning and does theology. The black experience literally shapes and informs the way that the black preacher reads and what the black preacher has to say about the biblical text.

Black preaching meets at the crossroads of the biblical text and the life experiences of black people and investigates the ways in which they "encounter, inform, and affect one another."[10] LaRue also identifies an *a priori* assumption that is brought to bear on during the exegetical and hermeneutical exercise in black preaching: that God can be trusted to faithfully and powerfully act on the side of the oppressed and the marginalized. God is understood to not only be concerned with the plight of black people but to be personally involved on their behalf.[11] The transformative power of black preaching, then, lies in both

8. LaRue, Black Preaching, 2.
9. LaRue, 3.
10. LaRue, 14.
11. LaRue, 14-15.

belief and content. The terms *belief* and *content* mean what black people have come to believe about God based on the black socio-cultural experience, on their lived experience with God, and on what they have come to believe about God based on how they read and interpret the Bible.

Black Preaching as a Catalyst for Change

Black preaching is transformational because it takes seriously and centres the black experience. Its contextuality makes it both relevant and practical. It takes what black people believe about God—that God has chosen sides with and acts on the side of the marginalized and oppressed—and couples it with the lived experience of black people, thereby reading scripture in a way that gives it meaning and makes it applicable to and for black people. Again, this alone makes black preaching both revolutionary and transformative. It values the black experience in a world that does not and uses it as a normative lens through which to see God, read and understand the scriptures, and view the world. However, the reach and the transformative power of black preaching extends beyond what it does for black people to what it empowers black people to do for themselves. The transformative power of Black preaching can be seen in its ability to transform black people, who in turn go out and transform the world in which they live.

Frank A. Thomas briefly examines the transformative power of black preaching in the United States in his book, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching.* For Thomas, the history of the study of black preaching is divided into two periods: the period before Martin Luther King, Jr., and the period after King. Thomas observes that King's preaching looms so large in both the cultural memory of the black church and that of the United States that it becomes an obvious line of demarcation. He notes, "In the preaching of Martin Luther King, Jr. (1955–68) and several other well-known African American preachers of the civil rights movement, the folk and the educated strands of African American preaching converge and majority America [sic] had a 'homiletical epiphany' and became aware of the power of black preaching."[12]

12. Frank A. Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 29.

Thomas notes that after hearing the preaching of King, the broader culture in the USA became more aware and paid more attention to black preaching.[13] This was not solely because of King's oratorical acumen and rhetorical flare. It was also because of what the preaching of King and his contemporaries inspired black people to do and what it challenged the USA to be and to become. Though many black churches and preachers were either silently complicit or excoriatingly critical of the civil rights movement, preaching was nonetheless at its centre and a fundamental component of its work. Thomas is keen to note that it was preaching that motivated societal change. He says, "Through dynamic and relevant preaching that empowered activism, the civil rights movement flourished, broke the back of segregation, and brought significant change to American society." He names black preaching luminaries like Prathia Hall, Wyatt Tee Walker, Walter E. Fauntroy, and Ralph Abernathy as exemplars of the kind of preaching that inspired and empowered people, particularly black people, and consequently changed the nation.[14]

Kelly Brown Douglas agrees, particularly when it comes to the preaching of King and its ability to inspire people to pursue societal transformation and change. In her book, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, she offers a close reading of the famous "I Have A Dream" speech that King delivered at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial during the 1963 March on Washington. In her analysis, she identifies the ways in which he both inspired those who were gathered with him and challenged the nation. Her observations are instructive. Douglas points out that, as a master black homiletician, King was astutely aware of his setting, context, and audience. The Lincoln Memorial represented a watershed moment in the history of the USA. His personal views on the equality of black people notwithstanding, Abraham Lincoln believed that chattel slavery was wrong and a sin. He believed that the country could not last "half slave and half free" and led it into war with itself in part over the issue. Douglas notes that King understood the significance of the setting he was in and the history behind it and used both as a backdrop as he reminded the nation that it was once again at war with itself over the freedom of black bodies. She says, "With his homage to Lincoln, he was confronting the nation with the reality of surviving or being destroyed by a war over the colour line."[15]

13. Thomas, African American Preaching, 31.

14. Thomas, 138.

15. Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 2015), 212.

Douglas notes further that King capitalized on the context of the moment. Understanding the nation was at war with itself again, King chose to make the focal point of his speech the idea that what was at stake was not just the fate and condition of black people but the very identity of the country. The plight and the condition of black people in the United States was a testimony not to their inferiority but rather to the hypocrisy of the American democratic experiment. This is why King chose to invoke the most sacred artifacts of American civil religion, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, and the promises that they make to all citizens. Douglas suggests, "King understood that he would have to call upon the nation's faith in itself. So he did, but with a signifyin' difference. King drew upon America's belief that it was God's city on a hill to call it to task for its treatment of its black citizens."[16]

Lastly, Douglas names the ways in which King addressed both black people and the nation as a whole. By skilfully making the connection between black faith and American exceptionalism, King was able to speak to both audiences. His allusions to the language of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were aimed at white citizens who had believed and bought into the narrative of American exceptionalism. How could the United States of America be exceptional and a beacon of democracy and freedom when its black citizenry was denied the very liberties and rights guaranteed by the nation's founding documents. Douglas says, "Pointing to the white persons who were in the crowd, King reminded the white community that their freedom was 'bound' to black freedom."[17]

Concomitantly, King also spoke to black people by weaving the rhetoric of black faith and black preaching into his message. Douglas intuits that King leans fully into the "signifyin'" tradition of black preaching by speaking in the language of the black faith tradition while at the same time prophetically critiquing the United States. This is particularly seen in the way that King chose to conclude his "I Have a Dream" speech. His speech resonated with and amplified the black faith that brought him to the foot of the Lincoln Memorial and informed and inspired his vision. It was that same faith that gave the black people who heard him the will, the courage, and the inspiration to fight for their rights and work to bring about the transformation of the society in which they lived. Douglas notes that it was black faith that "allowed black people to survive and to fight."[18]

16. Douglas, *Stand Your Ground,* 214.
17. Douglas, 215.
18. Douglas, 214–15.

Conclusion

Black preaching continues to play a central role in the life of black Christian religiosity and the broader culture of the United States of America. It has been a force for transformation that has inspired black people to continue to work for change and justice, often while calling on and challenging the nation to live into the promises it made and continues to make. This essay traced black preaching's transformative power back to its source: the lived experience of black people. Further, it argued that what makes black preaching such a powerful force for change is the way in which black preaching not only privileges the black experience but uses it as a hermeneutical lens to read and interpret scripture. Additionally, using the preaching of Martin Luther King, Jr., this essay examined the role of black preaching during the civil rights movement as an example of the transformative power of black preaching in action. It has demonstrated that for black Christians in the USA, black preaching has been a spring of resilience and resistance for black people as they have confronted the evils of white supremacy and anti-black racism. It has energized and empowered black people as they have worked to transform the societal and political dynamics of their lives by those two death-dealing forces.

Through black preaching, black people are brought into the presence of God. They are affirmed in their status as children of God and nurtured in their understanding of themselves and others, and of God's vision for the world around them.[19] Black preaching at its best is transformative, in as much as those who hear it are transformed into change agents and commissioned to transform the world. Perhaps this is the reason why black preaching still plays a role in the transformation of society in the United States of America. Even today, drawing on the contemporary black experience in the USA, black preachers are still preaching and inspiring the black faithful, and others, to transform their society. Though the ranks of black clergy have expanded since the days of King—for example, it now includes more women and openly same-gender loving people—the message and mission remain the same: to preach a gospel that transforms lives and makes the world a better place.

19. Debora Jackson, *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership: 7 Rs of Sanctuary for Pastors* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson Press, 2015), 41.

12

From Spiritual Crisis to a Transformative Spiritual Journey: Re-imagining Reconciliation in Colombia

Andrés Paceco Lozano

On 9 September 2020, Javier Ordoñez died after being subdued and repeatedly shocked with an electric taser gun by two policemen in Bogotá, once again bringing to light police brutality in the country.[1] This case led to unrest and multiple protests in the city,[2] to which, according to Amnesty International, the police forces responded at times with excessive use of force.[3] Several protestors were injured and approximately ten were killed during the protests.[4] On 13 September 2020, a *Ceremonia por el Perdón y la Reconciliación en Bogotá* (Ceremony of Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Bogotá) was organized, supported by the mayor of Bogotá.[5] The intention was to deescalate the violence and pave the way toward healing. For this

1. See Abel Alvarado, "Procuraduría de Colombia Inhabilita por 20 Años a Dos Policías Supuestamente Involucrados en Muerte de Javier Ordóñez," CNN, 27 October 2020, https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2020/10/27/procuraduria-de-colombia-inhabilita-por-20-anos-a-dos-policias-supuestamente-involucrados-en-muerte-de-javier-ordonez/. See also Santiago Torrado, "Un Policía Implicado en el Homicidio de un Abogado Bajo Custodia en Colombia se Enfrenta a una Pena de 20 Años," *El País,* 13 April 2021, https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-04-13/un-policia-implicado-en-el-homicidio-de-un-abogado-bajo-custodia-en-colombia-se-enfrenta-a-una-pena-de-20-anos.html.

2. Oscar Murillo, "Javier Ordóñez, el Asesinato que Sumió a Bogotá en un Caos," *El Tiempo,* 16 March 2021, https://www.eltiempo.com//javier-ordonez-historia-del-asesinato-bogota-537555.

3. See Amnesty International, "Colombia: Amnesty International Condemns Torture and Excessive Use of Force by Police," press release, 11 September 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/09/colombia-amnistia-condena-tortura-uso-excesivo-fuerza/.

4. See BBC News Mundo, "Javier Ordoñez: 10 Muertos y Decenas de Heridos en Colombia durante las Protestas por la Violencia Policial," 11 September 2020, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-54106609.

5. To watch the whole symbolic act, see Canal Capital Bogotá, "Conéctate a #SumoMiVoz: Ceremonia por el Perdón y la Reconciliación en Bogotá," streamed live on 13 September 2020, YouTube video, 1:07:15, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tv7FVwLOq0A.

public event, religious leaders (all of them men!) were invited to present short reflections envisioning reconciliation in such a context of violence. While the mayor of Bogotá, the religious leaders, and several victims were present, the president of Colombia and the official representative of the police forces were absent.

In this chapter, I reflect on some of the challenges of reconciliation in the Colombian context, focusing particularly on how the wisdom, experiences, and spiritualities of faith communities might help to envision reconciliation in this deeply divided society. To do so, I consider how both the violence and the longing for reconciliation in Bogotá are not isolated events but rather a continuation of the long-term armed conflict in this country. Secondly, I explore some key theological and ethical implications regarding the framing of reconciliation by the religious leaders who took part in the 13 September event. Thirdly, I present an alternative framing of reconciliation, inspired by a "pilgrimage of reconciliation" with three faith communities in Colombia. I close by identifying key aspects of reconciliation that can be learned from the spiritualities of these communities.

Spiritual Crisis and Broken Relations: A History of Violence in Colombia

The September 13 event was not attended in massive numbers—partially due to the COVID-19 pandemic measures—but it was livestreamed. Its significance is best measured in terms of how it connects to the history of violence in the country and the attempts to address that violence.

Colombia has witnessed decades of violence—even centuries, given that the colonial past has set a trajectory of violence which can be traced to today. One of the most recent expressions of that history has been armed conflict that has continued for more than 60 years. This conflict has involved different guerrilla, paramilitary, and neo-paramilitary groups, as well as the army and other actors. It has thus far led to the internal displacement of more than seven million people and the death of over 200,000.[6] The protests in September 2020 signalled, among other things, how governmental forces—police and

6. Mariana Rolón, "Hay Más Víctimas de Desplazamiento Forzado en Colombia que Número de Habitantes en Costa Rica," UNHCR/ACNUR, 26 December 2018, https://www.acnur.org/noticias/noticia/2018/12/5c243ef94/hay-mas-victimas-de-desplazamiento-forzado-en-colombia-que-numero-de-habitantes.html; César Romero, "262,197 Muertos Dejó el Conflicto Armado," Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 8 August 2018, https://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/262-197-muertos-dejo-el-conflicto-armado/.

army[7]—have been part of the violence against the civil society.

Different reasons have been given for the emergence of armed confrontations: such as land possession and land distribution, deep inequality between the Colombian "elites" and the rest of society, structural injustices, and corruption. The protests in 2020 and the recent protests to resist a tax reform proposed by the government in 2021[8] have brought to light how some of these injustices are still present today, as well as how deep are the wounds caused by violence. At the same time, these protests and what has happened around them demonstrate the variety of responses from different sectors of society to these historical injustices and violence: from indifference, silence, stigmatization, polarization, and open violence to nonviolent resistance, solidarity, and the consolidation of social organizations and movements aiming at justice and peace.

In his book *La Audacia de la Paz Imperfecta* (*The Audacity of the Imperfect Peace*), Francisco de Roux, Catholic priest, and current president of the Truth Commission,[9] frames the current state of Colombian society as one of spiritual crisis. He defines spiritual crisis as the loss of sense of self due to an incapacity to comprehend the suffering of victims as part of one´s own identity, and personal and collective responsibility.[10] To describe the situation

7. See Julie Turkewitz and Sofía Villamil, "Colombia's Police Force, Built for War, Finds a New One," *The New York Times,* 12 May 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/12/world/americas/colombia-protests-police-brutality.html. An example of the military violations was the so-called "false positives," a practice in which innocent young civilians were killed and presented by members of the army as insurgents. For an overview of the "false positives," see Mariana Palau, "The 'false positives' scandal that Felled Colombia's Military Hero," *The Guardian*, 19 November 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/19/colombia-false-positives-killings-general-mario-montoya-trial.

8. See Alessandro Rampietti, "Why are Colombians protesting?," Al Jazeera, May 23, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2021/5/23/why-are-colombians-protesting.

9. See "Francisco de Roux," Comisión de la Verdad, accessed 19 February 19, 2021, https://comisiondelaverdad.co/la-comision/los-y-las-comisionadas/francisco-de-roux.

10. See Francisco de Roux, *La Audacia de la Paz Imperfecta* (Bogotá: Ariel, 2018), 78–79. The loss of the sense of self characterized by de Roux as a spiritual crisis could arguably be explained and accounted for by psychological, sociological, or anthropological approaches. While this notion of losing the sense of the self could be described as dehumanization or trauma, de Roux´s argument points at a wounded sense of self-transcendence by which one can connect with the other(s). De Roux comments: *"This spiritual crisis requires that we invest time in reflection and silence to become conscious of our own forgotten value, to encounter God, for those of us who are believers . . . , and to transcend ourselves; there is no other way to access the universal human experience—which is precisely what has been lost, and what is the precondition for justice and security,"* 80. (Emphasis and translation by the author of this

as a spiritual crisis signals how deep and severe the damage caused by decades-long violence has been to the whole society. Furthermore, it indicates how different dimensions of relating have been deeply affected: with the Divine (the ultimate Other), and with other human beings (the other).

In 2012, the Colombian government announced the beginning of a series of peace dialogues with the FARC-EP (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo*) guerilla group, leading to the signing of a peace accord in 2016. Amid these peace dialogues, the terms *reconciliation*, *justice*, and *peace* became common currency among politicians, church leaders, and civil society. These terms were framed and used both by people supporting and those opposing the peace negotiations with the FARC-EP. Consequently, it became urgent to explore and reflect on what reconciliation could be in the Colombian context. In this context the 13 September 2020 event—almost four years after the peace accords were signed—is very significant. It demonstrates the diversity of perceptions and images of reconciliation present in Colombian society.

Voices of Religious Leaders: Framing Reconciliation Theologically and Ethically

While not all parties involved in the conflict were present during the 13 September public event, the challenge was to give meaning and understanding to reconciliation as a process of overcoming injustice and violence. As part of this public event, three religious leaders presented their theological and ethical approaches to reconciliation.

The first to address the audience was *monseñor* Jaime Mancera,[11] who reflected on the biblical text of the road to Emmaus.[12] He emphasized the similarities between the victims and Colombian society as a whole and those walking to Emmaus. Both groups are trying to cope with the acts of violence of previous days. Mancera interpreted Jesus' appearance to the walkers to Emmaus as a sign of solidarity with the victims and a sign of hope. God's love, expressed in God's action of transforming violence and pain in the resurrection, has the ultimate word, not violence. For Mancera, reconciliation has to do with solidarity, with accompanying victims, and with hope.

chapter.) By framing it as a spiritual crisis, de Roux stresses how the encounter and union with God (for the believers), and with others (for both believers and non-believers) has been affected by the context of violence. In short, the depth of the wounds in Colombia makes it challenging to relate to transcendence and to transcend oneself to relate to others.

11. Canal Capital Bogotá, "Ceremonia por el perdón y la reconciliación," 25:30–40:00.

12. Luke 24:13–35.

The second religious leader was pastor Emiro Roa,[13] who explored reconciliation by focusing on the God-human reconciliation in Christ. He chose 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 for his reflection. Roa paid special attention to human wrongdoing and to the reconciling and salvific action of God in Jesus. Believing in Jesus, we can experience this reconciliation. For Roa, reconciliation involves forgiveness and forgetting, which must be based on repentance and non-repetition of wrongdoing. Following this logic, God gave humans the example of how to live in harmony: that is, by treating each other with respect and tolerance.

The final reflection came from de Roux,[14] who emphasized the sacredness of the ceremony itself. His point of departure was not a biblical text. Instead, he started from the experiences of the victims, which led him to reflect on how difficult it was to express their pain. The only way, he said, is to open our hearts to listen to their voices. De Roux then continued to argue that what had happened in Bogotá most recently replicated the long-term armed conflict in Colombia. Reconciliation in such a context involves restoring the "human community." This restoration is not easy since it implies forgiving the unforgivable and reconciling the unreconcilable. For such a restoration to be possible, truth-telling and justice are needed.

The three different voices reveal two key challenges. First, different understandings of the role of the church in society become obvious. Second, it is the tendency in the Colombian context to choose only the voices of leaders of big churches or denominations, mostly men, as *the* contribution of faith communities to societal issues. Other voices, like those of women, *campesinos* (peasants), indigenous people and Afro-Colombians, and voices of non-Christian faiths were missing here—although de Roux acknowledged the existence of different traditions and spiritualities, such as those of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. Including those voices might have brought a more complex view of reconciliation, stressing its challenges and offering different images and experiences. Furthermore, while the three approaches to reconciliation that were presented provide a rich theological framework, absent is the account of the experiences and wisdom of grassroots communities, who, based on their faith, have nonviolently resisted the armed confrontation. For many of these communities, the questions of reconciliation and peacebuilding are not hypothetical or abstract; rather they are real and concrete, which makes their experiences and voices crucial for imagining

13. Canal Capital Bogotá, 40:24–47:06.

14. Canal Capital Bogotá, 47:30–54:09.

reconciliation for this society.

In the ceremony of forgiveness and reconciliation, the testimonies and voices of the victims were heard only *after* the religious leaders had spoken. The victims stressed the depth of their pain and the need for accountability in terms of truth-telling and justice.[15] They all expressed their solidarity with other victims. Along those lines, Constanza, one of the victims who spoke in the ceremony and who's relative was wounded during the protests, also mentioned the injured members of the police forces. Bryan, whose sister died during the protests, read Romans 12:17, highlighting the call to avoid returning evil with evil. He expressed his hope that the events of the previous days could sensitize everyone, and that this could lead to an end to the violence in the country. As mentioned above, Mancera and de Roux imagined or tried to account for the perspective of the victims; and yet, the voices of the actual victims came only at the end of an event that intended to celebrate forgiveness and reconciliation.

A Transformative Pilgrimage to Heal Broken Relationships

The protests in Colombia show yet another key aspect involved in rethinking the challenges of reconciliation: that is, turning to the experiences and wisdom available in local communities of civil society. This approach enables us to comprehend that it is not the case that the people in Colombia are simply dominated by violence, but that active forms of resistance have existed throughout time. De Roux argues that, by looking at the Colombian context in terms of a spiritual crisis, one can recognize and find crucial meaning in the dignity of "those who in the avalanche of inhumanity were violently snatched from their beloved ones, and yet are able to overcome fear and confront their perpetrators to make clear that they were not going to be defeated, they were not going to run away, they were not going to be displaced, because, if they would have done so, their lives, the last patrimony they had left, would have lost all its greatness [*su grandeza*]."[16]

As they did in the protests, people and communities have resisted and have shown an alternative voice to injustice and violence. In this context, the challenge is to turn to their witness, wisdom, and experience as well as to their spiritual journeys, to clarify whether there are parts of the needed imagination and creativity for reconciliation in Colombia to be harvested here.

15. Canal Capital Bogotá, 54:4–1:04:26.

16. De Roux, *La Audacia,* 79. Emphasis and translation by the author of this chapter.

Here the metaphor of *pilgrimage* becomes helpful as a way to frame and emphasize the experience and wisdom of local communities with regard to reconciliation as a spiritual journey. In this understanding, I follow Dorothee Soelle´s understanding of the *mystical*. Soelle did not work explicitly on spirituality, but she used terms such as "spiritual freedom" and "mystical spirituality." Soelle describes mysticism as *"cognitio Dei experimentalis"* (the knowledge of God through and from experience),[17] which differs from an understanding of theology as "the rational knowledge of God."[18] The goal of the mystical or spiritual journey, Soelle argues, is to be in union with God and with the rest of creation. For Soelle, spirituality (mysticism) should not be seen as opposing theology, but rather as a needed dialogue partner. In that line of thinking, theologies of reconciliation should consider the spiritualities of communities to reimagine and envision what reconciliation is and can be in different contexts and realities. Thus, when emphasizing the communities´ spiritual journeys, I refer to their wisdom and knowledge of God through their experiences.

As part of my doctoral research,[19] I had the opportunity to explore how the metaphor of pilgrimage resonated with faith communities in Colombia who were confronted with the challenge of reconciliation. The approach used in working with the groups was a "pilgrimage of reconciliation." The pilgrimage metaphor was inspired by the current programmatic approach of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in its Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, officially launched by the 2013 Assembly in Busan. The WCC imagined this ecumenical pilgrimage as a spiritual transformative journey to which God invites us in anticipation of God's promises of reconciliation, justice, and peace.[20]

In this definition, there are at least three aspects to be highlighted. First, it brings to the forefront the spiritual aspect of reconciliation: people and

17. Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance,* trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 45.

18. Soelle*, The Silent Cry,* 37.

19. In the coming lines, I will build on the results of this research. For a more detailed approach and exploration of the metaphor of the pilgrimage of reconciliation and the path with three communities in Colombia, see Andres Pacheco Lozano, "Towards a Theology of Reconciliation: A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace to Heal Broken Relations in Colombia" (PhD diss., Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2020).

20. "An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace," 4 July 2014, World Council of Churches, para. 8, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace.

communities are to be transformed during the journey. While a spirituality of reconciliation has been considered in some of the prominent theological work on reconciliation,[21] the metaphor of pilgrimage not only adds the importance of spiritual accompaniment and the role of rituals and symbols in processes of reconciliation, but also emphasizes the value of celebrating gifts, visiting the wounds, stepping out of one's comfort zone, and placing oneself at the margins. All these elements ultimately lead to transformation.

Second, the pilgrimage metaphor provides the option to frame different dimensions of reconciliation as "stations" to be visited on a journey. In the case of the pilgrimage with the communities, four stations were taken as decisive steps in the process: (1) truth-telling; (2) memory; (3) repentance and forgiveness; and (4) reparation and justice.

The third implication of the metaphor suggests a methodology of "walking with," in this case, faith communities. Three communities took part in the journey: an ecumenical group of women, an urban Mennonite community, and a *campesino* (peasant) community. From August 2015 to January 2017, I walked the different stations with each of these communities by partaking in contextual and communitarian readings of biblical texts selected according to the content of each station.

Some key insights emerged from these journeys and from the transformative spiritualities of these three communities.

The views of campesinos

The *campesino* group has been struggling for continued access to their land, threatened by a landlord and illegal armed groups. They proposed at the beginning of the pilgrimage that reconciliation had to do with the healing of the broken relationship between God and humans. This resembles the way in which Roa framed it. Accepting Christ in one's life, often referred to as *conversion*, seemed to be a synonym for the possibility to reconcile. Furthermore, the *campesino* group interpreted the role of Jesus as mediator between God and human beings as key. There is always a need for a third party, a mediator, to assist in the process of restoring a broken relationship. This mediating role was seen as essential for addressing conflicts in close relationships such as family, friends, and sisters and brothers in the church.[22]

21. See for instance Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998).

22. Pacheco Lozano, "Towards a Theology of Reconciliation," 224–26; 298.

At the end of our pilgrimage of reconciliation, this community put more emphasis on the human-human level of reconciliation. On this level, the community stressed the need to prepare for reconciliation and to respect the fact that people are not always ready to reconcile. While reconciliation is indeed a way to transform conflict, it cannot be seen unequivocally as a Christian imperative. It is rather a path of preparation to engage with the other. Preparation here presupposes actions and decisions, which involve a proactive stance on the part of the parties involved.[23] A key for this renewed understanding of reconciliation was the rereading of the story of Jacob and Esau in the Hebrew Bible. The *campesino* group paid special attention to the process of transformation that Jacob underwent to prepare for the encounter with his brother Esau.

Contributions from the Mennonite community

For the Mennonite community, reconciliation was initially framed as the (re)creating of unity and/or of harmony in relationships. Very soon the group problematized whether a broken relation can be restored to the *status quo ante*—or if that was even desirable. Recreating harmony means developing a new form of relationship rather than returning to a previous state. In addition, this group presupposed two things: (1) reconciliation was about healing the wounds so that the restoration of the broken relation would be possible; and (2) it required a specific type of effort to do so.[24] As such, it is often not possible to determine when reconciliation begins or ends, and this prolongs the effort. The outcome of such a costly process is difficult to envision. For instance, given the history and nature of violations in Colombia, the very idea of having a victim and perpetrator meet is already challenging to imagine. It evokes skepticism about "automatic" or "forced" reconciliation, on the one hand, and hope about the willingness to radically embrace the other, on the other hand.

Toward the end of the journey, this community described the costly process of reconciliation as one that involves different moments:[25] visiting the pain and the wounds as much as celebrating the embrace with the other. The use of the image of *embrace* (*abrazar*) was inspired by the reading of the prodigal son.[26] This emphasis reinforces the idea that reconciliation is

23. Pacheco Lozano, 298.

24. Pacheco Lozano, 226–27.

25. Pacheco Lozano, 299–300.

26. Luke 15: 11–32). It is interesting to note that "embrace" is also used by Miroslav Volf as he articulates his theology of reconciliation—image/metaphor inspired by his reading

more a process than a status. While celebrations are a constitutive element of reconciliation, they are not its *only* indicator. Clear signs of conversion/transformation and guarantees of non-repetition are important elements of the journey of reconciliation.

The perspective of women

The group of women saw reconciliation as a spiritual journey. From the beginning, the ecumenical group of women emphasized healing and the need for transformation for victims *and* perpetrators in the journey.[27] Rituals and symbols play a key function in nurturing this spiritual path. For this group, the experience of the pilgrimage involves: (1) reading the different biblical stories from a women's perspective, critically exploring the role of women in the text; and (2) emphasizing what it means to be women of faith in the Colombian context, both in terms of the distinctive forms of injustice and violence they are exposed to and in their distinctive contribution to peacebuilding.[28]

One example of such a reading was their approach to Jacob's journey to meet his brother Esau. While other communities had identified Jacob's sending of gifts and messengers before him as a good strategy to gain his brother's goodwill, the women criticized this approach, judging Jacob´s use of others as a "human shield" to be a means of avoiding his conversion. And yet, even though Jacob's intentions were heavily questioned, the women considered how significant it must have been for Esau to meet all these different people sent by Jacob—so that when Esau finally meets Jacob (Genesis 33), he asks: Who are these people? The women concluded that those messengers, who included women, might have been instrumental in changing Esau's potential violent reaction—which seems to have been latent, since he appears with 400 men when he comes to meet Jacob. Along similar lines, the group stressed the role of women as mediators and agents of reconciliation and emphasized how crucial their role is in building a lasting peace in Colombia, both in local communities and at a macro-social level.[29]

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of the text of the Prodigal Son. See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

27. Pacheco Lozano, "Towards a Theology of Reconciliation," 227–28.

28. For an overview of the different forms of violence against women in Colombia as well as women's contributions to peacebuilding and the peace process, see Virginia M. Bouvier, *Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace Process* (New York: United States Institute of Peace, 2016), https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Gender-and-the-Role-of-Women-in-Colombia-s-Peace-Process-English.pdf.

29. Pacheco Lozano, "Towards a Theology of Reconciliation," 234–35.

Towards the end of the pilgrimage, the group of women strengthened their initial understanding of reconciliation as a spiritual journey rather than as a single moment, celebration, or simple encounter. In addition to theoretical reflection, the group decided to perform a ritual of reconciliation between Catholic and Protestant/evangelical women. During this act of reconciliation, the women addressed a historical conflict between Catholics and Protestants/evangelicals in Colombia in order to witness to what reconciliation could look like in the larger Colombian society.[30] Later, in 2017, this group of women invited ex-combatant women to their meetings, creating a space in which it became possible to connect and listen to the different stories of women in the armed confrontation.

While these spiritual approaches to reconciliation are not necessarily representative of all the perspectives of different spiritualities and communities in Colombia, they demonstrate how reconciliation is not a static and generalizable notion, but is rather a spiritual, changing, contextual, and embodied process. More than an exhaustive account of the different views, this exercise is an invitation to open the scope of voices needed in the conversation to envision what reconciliation can be.

Re-imagining Reconciliation: Learnings from the Spiritualities of Communities in Colombia

As result of walking the pilgrimage of reconciliation, the groups came to frame reconciliation as "a transformative journey to heal and restore broken relationships."[31] Insights from this pilgrimage can enrich the conversations about reconciliation, especially when brought into dialogue with the way in which the three religious leaders framed reconciliation during the celebration of forgiveness and reconciliation in Bogotá on 13 September 2020.

First, the "transformative" emphasis denotes the depth and complexity of the process of reconciliation. The communities characterized the process as (1) a spiritual journey, made explicit by the group of women in terms of reaching out to the other—a challenge especially for the offenders; and (2) as making space in the self for the other—a challenge especially for victims and the larger community. The communities interpretated texts such as Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21 from the perspective of the *campesinos* and their struggle for land, and Saul's conversion in Acts 9 as the encounter of two different transformative accounts, one from Saul's side as "offender" and

30. Pacheco Lozano, 308.

31. Pacheco Lozano, 361.

the other from Ananias' side, as representative of the "victims". These were opportunities to see how these groups identified and wrestled with the cost of the transformation achieved on the journey of reconciliation. The groups' emphasis on the experiences of victims, *campesinos*, and women—both in terms of the distinctive forms of violence experienced as well as in their distinctive contributions to peacebuilding—were key hermeneutical lenses to apply to reflecting on what it means to reconcile. In this sense, the groups supported de Roux's notion of the victims' costly path to reconciliation.

And yet, the process of seeing the victims' path as a transformative experience is not the same as demanding or imposing reconciliation on them. To name the victims' journey to reconciliation as transformative is not prescriptive. It is, rather, a way to comprehend and envision the depth of what it means for them to reconcile with the offenders. At the end, the groups recognized that such a difficult path—epitomized in Ananias´ hesitation and resistance to meeting Saul in Acts 9—can only be described as a transformative process. The groups captured the depth of the mystical dimension for different paths of reconciliation, stressing the need for the offenders´ active engagement. They avoided putting the weight of forgiveness and reconciliation exclusively on the victims' shoulders, yet they included the significance of the victims´ journeys.

Second, the groups used the pilgrimage metaphor, including the terminology of *journey*, to communicate the different moments or stations to be visited in the process of reconciliation. On the one hand, this notion of visiting the stations pointed to the need to prepare oneself for the encounter with the other. Reconciliation, in this approach, is a mystical experience that involves the coming together of different personal and communal pilgrimages. To paraphrase Soelle's description of the mystical life—particularly the experience of union with God: while reconciliation cannot be learned or taught, preparing for it can.[32]

On the other hand, the approach of viewing reconciliation as a journey recognizes that this path is both personal and relational. At times, this journey needs to be walked by oneself; at other times, one needs to walk this path with others. In this sense, the groups came close to Mancera´s exposition of what Jesus does with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. And yet, the groups could not imagine accompanying or walking with others without being

32. Soelle comments in this regard: *"The mystagogues know of a methodus mystica; in their view, mystical experience cannot be learned or taught, but preparing for it can" (The Silent Cry, 79*).

themselves transformed in the process. Mancera's emphasis on how spiritual transformation pertains to all parties enabled this clear understanding.

While some of the initial ideas about reconciliation were closer to conversion and restoring the *status quo ante*, in the end these notions became more nuanced as the communities brought their own experiences, locations, and context into dialogue with the different biblical stories. In this sense, they distanced themselves from an approach like Roa's, who focused predominantly on the God-human relation and included *forgetting* as one dimension of reconciliation. While the *campesino* community would have agreed with the God-human reconciliation, they would have deeply disagreed with the idea of forgetting. For the groups, forgiveness was about remembering the past with less pain,[33] and about making space in the self for the other.[34] In this view, forgetting is just another form of continuing the silence and perpetuating violence.

Third, just as Santiago de Compostela is a well-known destination of many pilgrims and pilgrimages, the notion of "healing broken relations" is an eschatological horizon. This perspective was seen in the way in which the groups engaged with the different stations of the pilgrimage of reconciliation. For instance, in exploring the stations of truth-telling and justice, the *campesino* group expressed their hope that truth was ultimately going to be revealed and that justice would eventually come, trusting in God´s action. Rather than leading to inaction or passivity on their part, this eschatological approach was an inspiration for their active involvement and participation, expressed in nonviolent resistance in the land. In a similar way, one could argue that this eschatological hope prevents the imposing of human reconciliation, acknowledging that this gift or mystical encounter cannot always be experienced or that people may not be ready to reconcile. To consider reconciliation in this eschatological horizon enables both a celebration and embrace of the experiences of reconciliation in the here and now. At the same time, it acknowledges the spaces of non-reconciliation, trusting that God will heal and restore the relations that we, in our human limitations, can and will not be able to restore.

By walking with these communities, the richness of the spiritualities of grassroots communities becomes apparent, making them legitimate and indispensable agents for theological and ethical reflections on reconciliation in Colombia. Challenges to and limits of reconciliation become evident through

33. Soelle, 262.
34. Soelle, 335.

the lived experience of people and communities for whom these questions are not mere abstract reflections but existential and practical dilemmas—sometimes even questions of life and death. While voices of religious leaders in events such as the celebration of forgiveness and reconciliation in Bogotá could potentially nurture the ethical and moral imagination in society, it is the concrete lived testimonies of faith communities that become the guidance and inspiration for reconciliation in Colombia.

IV

Transformative Spiritualities of Women

13

Drinking from the Wells of Our Mothers and Sisters: Transformative Spiritualities for the Women's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Korea

Hyunju Bae

The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) was held in Busan, South Korea, in 2013. With its prayerful theme, "God of life, lead us to justice and peace," the assembly launched the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. What would this pilgrimage mean concretely for the Korean people, especially for Korean women? It has signified a multitude of departures: from division and militarism, from nuclear threats, from colonial legacy, from economic inequality, and from patriarchy, to mention a few examples. Climate crisis adds a green exodus to this list, presenting fundamental challenges to the current civilization and a radical paradigm shift. The complicated nature of the pilgrimage in the context of the Korean Peninsula arises from the fact that "Korea has entered into the 21st century without having overcome the wound from the past. Despite its remarkable economic and social growth during the post-war period, scars from the previous era still bleed wide open."[1]

The modern history of Korea is characterized by high-speed changes and developments in almost all areas of society. The demise of the feudal regime of the Yi dynasty (1392–1897) and the Korean Empire (1897–1910) did not lead to an independent modern democracy but to Japanese occupation (1910–1945). In the very year of 1945, when the Empire of Japan was defeated and Korea was liberated from its grip, the division of the Korean Peninsula by the USSR and the US ensued. In Europe, it was Germany, a defeated nation at the end of World War II, that was divided. In Asia, it was not Japan, another defeated state, but Korea, a country yearning for a full

1. Hyunju Bae, "A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Korea: Exodus from Division and Nuclear Threats," blog post, World Council of Churches website, 28 July 2015, https://www.oikoumene.org/blog/a-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace-in-korea-exodus-from-division-and-nuclear-threats

liberation after the 35 years of Japanese occupation, that underwent division in accordance with the international conflicts and politics of the Cold War. The Korean War broke out in 1950 and continued until 1953. Its casualties reached almost five million people,[2] ravaging the entire peninsula. One of the most painful aspects of this tragedy is palpable in the experiences of around ten million separated families.

The Korean War came to an end not with a peace treaty, but with an armistice. Koreans have lived for 70 years in the state of an unfinished war. This military state of affairs has functioned as an underlying socio-political script, often labelled as the "original sin" of the Korean society, that has resulted in the instability of the Korean Peninsula even now. Its shadow is deeply and widely recognized in the political, economic, social, cultural, and religious realms of life of the Korean people. Militarism, conscription, the defence industry, and the conflict-ridden culture of polarization, unconsciously haunted by ongoing McCarthyism[3] in disguise are some examples. The US military presence in South Korea, deployed against the nuclear threat of North Korea as well as for its national interest against China and Russia, adds pressure to the already complicated history and culture of Korea.

Throughout the stages in the Korean historical landscape—ranging from the Yi dynasty, governed by traditional Confucianism, through Japanese colonialism, fratricidal war, and military dictatorship, to capitalist industrialization and globalization—a common thread linking all is the reign of patriarchy. Patriarchal culture underlies sexism, discrimination against women, and sexual and gender-based violence, whether direct or indirect. The tumultuous fluctuation of Korean history "resulted in the formation of militant and authoritarian masculinity as well as in the strengthening of uniformity and homogenization in the social life, which easily turns a blind eye to the importance of individuality and diversity, not to mention women's

2. It refers to the five million soldiers and civilians. https://www.history.com/topics/korea/korean-war.

3. McCarthyism "is the practice of making accusations of subversion or treason, especially when related to communism. The term refers to U.S. senator Joseph McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) and has its origins in the period in the United States known as the Second Red Scare, lasting from the late 1940s through the 1950s. It was characterized by heightened political repression and a campaign spreading fear of communist influence on American institutions and of espionage by Soviet agents" (Wikipedia, s.v. "McCarthyism," accessed 25 June 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McCarthyism)

equality and their sensibility that the personal is also political."[4]

Therefore, Korean women find themselves standing in a dual political, social, and cultural stance. On the one hand, they bear the brunt of the historical vicissitudes of colonialism, war, military dictatorship, and economic inequality and exploitation; and they resist these shackles together with their fellow people. On the other hand, Korean women struggle against patriarchy and androcentrism that has penetrated even into the solidarity for the liberation-oriented nationalist resistance and the democratization movement. The movements of prophetic Korean women toward peace and abundant life for all have to confront both explicit and implicit practices of sexism and gender injustice. These are derived from the accumulated historical habits of mind and the contemporary socio-economic structures, hampering the quality of everyday human interactions. Churches, instead of contributing to a solution, are often epicentres of patriarchy and androcentrism.

The WCC and the National Council of Churches in Korea[5] organized the Women of Faith Pilgrim Team Visit to South Korea on 13–15 July 2020.[6] It was the first virtual Pilgrim Team Visit that had occurred since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This visit, titled "The Korean War and Women's Life—The Journey Towards Peace and Reconciliation," was organized to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Korean War and to share and accompany Korean women's struggle to respond to the long-term fallout of the war and their aspiration to usher in a different world.[7] Together with the women's organizations of the four member churches of the

4. Hyunju Bae, "The Moments of Divine Eros in Luke 7:36–50: In Search of a Usable Past from a Korean Feminist Perspective," in *Religion, Ecology and Gender: East-West Perspectives,* ed. Sigurd Bergmann, Yong-Bock Kim, vol. 1 of Studies in Religion and the Environment (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2009), 36.

5. For the recent history of the Korean ecumenical women's movement, see The Gender Equality Committee of the NCCK, *The History of Thirty Years of the NCCK Christian Women Movement: 1982-2012* (Seoul: The Gender Equality Committee of the NCCK, 2014).

6. For Koreans, the year 2020 was a convergence anniversary of many landmark historical events: the 70th anniversary of Korean War, the 40th anniversary of the Gwangju Democratization Movement, and the 20th anniversary of the June 15 Joint Declaration of South and North Korea on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

7. Each day, the participants prayed together with two prayers chosen from the "Light of Peace" collection, which was produced by a WCC-initiated global prayer campaign for peace on the Korean Peninsula. This initiative took place from 1 March to 15 August 2020 with the overall theme "We Pray, Peace Now, End the War!" This campaign collected 70 prayers and stories corresponding to the 70-year duration of the unfinished Korean War.

WCC in Korea,[8] the major Korean ecumenical women's movement groups, such as the Korea Church Women United, the Korea YWCA Federation, the Korean Association of Women Theologians, the Korea Association of Christian Women for Women *Minjung*, and mission centres working for the women of the "camptowns"(US military bases), such as Sister's Center and the *Durebang*,[9] participated. The Women Making Peace, the 1448th Wednesday demonstration against the sexual slavery of the Japanese military, and War and Women's Human Rights Museum, were also sites that were visited virtually.

This essay attempts first to classify and describe the movements of the prophetic Korean women whom the WCC pilgrims encountered. Then it traces the distinct characteristics of transformative spiritualities that have enabled Korean women to engage in the struggle for justice, peace, and life. In conclusion, it reflects on the contribution of the WCC's Pilgrim Team Visit to Korea, considers the significance of the legacy of transformative spiritualities of the strong prophetic mothers and sisters for younger generations, and lifts up joy as the gracious gift for pilgrims marching together with a prophetic imagination for abundant life in peace for all human and earth communities.

Encountering the Movements of Prophetic Korean Women

The Pilgrim Team Visit, consisting of some thirty international women, visited different stations virtually. It had a gender-focused approach that brought to the fore the experiences, perspectives, and agencies of the Korean women in their historical and structural tribulations.

First, regarding the legacy of the Korean War—an ongoing war without a peace treaty—the pilgrims vividly felt its impact by hearing the stories of victims of landmine explosions during their visit to the demilitarized zone (DMZ) and the landmine zones. The DMZ, separating North and South Korea, and the Civilian Control Zone, just south of the DMZ, are among the most heavily mined districts in the world. Estimations of the number of landmines, planted in the Korean Peninsula during and after the Korean War,

8. The four member churches are: the Korean Methodist Church, the Anglican Church of Korea, the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, and the Presbyterian Church of Korea.

9. *Durebang* is a word derived from the Korean word *Dure,* signifying a place where women help each other as a community. Durebang "is an organization and counseling center that works to eliminate prostitution and human trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation within camptowns and to challenge militarism" ("About Durebang," Durebang website, accessed 25 June 2021, http://durebang.org/?page_id=5231

vary from some 800,000 to 2 million. They have caused the death and injury of a high number of people. Locating and defusing mines is a daunting, yet indispensable task. The efforts at demining the DMZ signal an improvement of inter-Korean relations towards strengthening human security.

Wonhee Anne Joh, one of the Korean-American pilgrims, shared her experience of visiting the DMZ, which turned out to become a life-changing experience for her. She described the area as the "open veins of Korea . . . a visible scar, a wound running along the body of Korea, unable to be healed even by its own body, and only gawked at by bystanders. This wound is constantly poked and torn open fresh with barely enough time to form a scab."[10]

In this regard, Korean women's initiative of physically crossing the DMZ in the 1990s marks a crucial and courageous peace movement. The Korean and Japanese women held seminars on "Peace in Asia and the Role of Women" four times from 1991–93. These were the first civilian-level dialogues ever after the ceasefire agreement in 1953. Ecumenical women's groups in South Korea, including the Korea Church Women United, the Women's Division of the National Council of Churches in Korea, and the Christian Women's Institute for Peace Studies, took active parts in organizing the second seminar, held in Seoul, in November 1991. The women from the member churches of the WCC played a key leadership role in this event.[11] The third seminar was held in Pyongyang, North Korea, in September 1992. The Japanese women held the first seminar in Tokyo in 1991, from 31 May to 2 June, and the fourth one in the same city in April 1993.[12]

The South Korean executive committee of these historic seminars decided to establish a women's peace movement organization. Its original goal was mainly to carry out North-South Korean women's dialogues and exchange

10. Wonhee Anne Joh, "DMZ as Open Veins of Korea," reflection in an unpublished paper shared during a session of the Women of Faith Pilgrim team visit to Korea, 13–15 July 2020.

11. Senior leaders included Oo Chung Lee, Sang Nim Ahn, Yoon Ok Kim (Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea); Tae Young Lee, Young Ae Yoon (Presbyterian Church of Korea); and Wha Soon Cho (Korean Methodist Church). The recognition of the WCC member churches to which these women leaders belonged was made by Jeong Soo Kim, Standing Representative of the Women Making Peace.

12. For a comprehensive outlook on these events, see Yoon Ok Kim, "Feminist Theology and Peace and Reunification of Korean Peninsula: Retrospect of the First Opening of Women's Exchanges of the North and South Korea," *Journal of Korea Feminist Theology*, no. 92 (Winter 2020): 156–71.

programs. So, Women Making Peace (WMP) was founded in 1997. Many of the first leaders of this civil organization were Christian women. The WMP launched the "Sharing Love, Sharing Food Campaign" on the Women's International Day for Peace and Disarmament, 24 May 1997. This campaign was a humanitarian aid campaign, delivering 26 tons of flour to support women and children in North Korea in their food crisis.

The global peace initiative of the "Women Cross DMZ" in 2015 made a rich contribution to awakening contemporary Korean women to recall the legacy of their foremothers, that is, their courageous and prophetic act of crossing the DMZ in the last century, and to see women' peace efforts in the Korean Peninsula in the larger framework of UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. The WMP advocated for this resolution so that the South Korean government would adopt a National Action Plan in 2014. The goal of this plan was to make women's participation in the Korean peace process meaningful and visible and to bring gender equality into the construction of peace in Korea. The South-North Korean women representatives have been engaging in intermittent dialogues since 2000, the year when the June 15 Joint Declaration was issued by the summits of the two Koreas. The latest South-North women leaders' meeting was held at Mt. Geumgang in North Korea with the theme of "Peace and Unification by Women's Power!" Together with two other women's civil organizations, the YWCA and the WMP initiated the Korean Women's Movement for Peace, which launched the campaign of "Korea Peace Now: Women Mobilizing to End the War" in March 2019, together with other global movements such as Women Cross DMZ, Nobel Women's Initiative, and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Second, the pilgrims visited sites related to the women of the "camptowns," as US military bases are known. The women in the camptowns were often the daughters of poor families with no educational opportunities who ended up in the dark life of prostitution for the US soldiers. A detention centre for women who failed the STD test was disparagingly named the "Monkey House." Examples of extreme violations of women's human rights by US military personnel are the case of Keum Yi Yun—a woman of a camptown murdered by a US soldier in 1992—and the killing of two middle school students by a US armoured vehicle in 2002. The Hyosoon Misun Peace Park was founded in 2020 as a memorial of the deaths of these two innocent girls. The crimes committed by the US soldiers in Korea triggered anti-US sentiment in the Korean society and sparked a movement for the reformulation of the US-

South Korea Status of Forces Agreement.

The Sunlit Sisters' Center (of the Korean Methodist Church) in Pyeongtaek, and *Durebang* (of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea) in Uijeongbu, are two representative church women's organizations that have been working for decades in the defence of the human rights of the women of the camptowns. These organizations have multiple purposes. They offer emotional and social support to the women in this sector, creating a space of shelter and refuge, in which women who have experienced sex trafficking can recover their dignity and be rehabilitated into a healthy life. They contribute to the development of the local communities. They resist militarism. Today, these organizations also take care of women from other countries, such as the Philippines and Russia, who now constitute the majority of women in the camptowns. In the same vein, it is a tragic reality that women defectors from North Korea are often trapped into sex trafficking in China.

Third, the pilgrims were able to recognize how the inhumanity of the sex trade around US military bases and the wounds of the women in the camptowns evoke the pain of women who suffered from a system of sexual slavery at the hands of the Japanese military during the Japanese occupation. The group called Justice for the (so-called) Comfort Women has been seeking and requesting official apologies for the sexual slavery perpetrated by the Japanese military. This has led to the Wednesday demonstration in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul, which began in 1992 and continues to this day. On 15 July, the pilgrims joined the 1448th Wednesday demonstration against the sexual slavery of the Japanese military.

The pilgrims also visited the War and Women's Human Rights Museum that was built in 2012. Some old women who were victims of Japanese sexual slavery offered the seed money for the construction of the museum, wishing to record the historical truth and educate future generation about the importance of peace. They also created the Butterfly Fund to help women worldwide who have been victimized by wartime sexual violence. The name of the fund signifies their aspiration that all women may fly like butterflies, breaking free from discrimination, oppression, and violence.

Fourth, the pilgrims experienced how the nuclear trauma and threats are a reality in the Korean Peninsula. The nuclear attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 caused a few hundreds of thousands of casualties, ten percent of whom were Korean. After the survivors came back to Korea, they were ignored and ostracized by society. Korean Church Women United took

the initiative of accompanying and supporting the nuclear victims and their descendants in the 1970s.[13] The YWCA played a key role in advocacy against nuclear energy, which in 2015 led to the decision of the government to close the most outdated nuclear power plant in South Korea.

The Wellsprings of the Women's Transformative Spiritualities

As the pilgrims have recognized, Korean women have persisted in perseverance, resilience, and creativity in responding to a crowd of historical challenges and traumatic impacts. Korean Christian women have often played key roles in the movements promoting peace, reconciliation, human rights, and justice in various sectors of society. What kind of spiritual sources and resources have enabled Korean Christian women not to lose agency throughout the period of enormous challenges? What sort of spiritual energies have empowered them to resist the heavy weight of powers and principalities? There are some key elements to be identified in the spiritualities of Korean women.

Prayer and resistance

In Jesus' parable of the widow and the unjust judge,[14] the action of the widow signifies her incessant prayer. Prayer and action are inseparable. Long-term resistance and active struggle are nourished by prayerful patience in waiting for God. A number of Korean women in the history of struggles embody this dual tradition of prayer and resistance. It is action in waiting. Throughout the troubled years, prayer gatherings of women, and those of women and men, have often been a catalyst for fierce resistance against colonialism, military dictatorship, and the abuse of human rights as well as the movements for peace and justice.

Women's or feminist interpretation of the Bible

The Korean Association of Women Theologians (KAWT) has been instrumental in introducing and dialoguing with Western and international feminist theologies. More importantly, it has cultivated Korean feminist perspectives through situating its theological enterprise in the Korean context—a context yearning for democratization, peace and reunification,

13. Soo-bok Park, *Children of the Atom-Bomb: The Cases of the Second Generation Atom-bomb Victims* (Seoul: KCWU, 1987).
14. See Luke 18:1–5.

gender justice, and abundant life for all. For four decades, KAWT has become an ecumenical theologizing space of, for, and by Korean Christian women and feminist theologians.[15] Churches and seminaries in captivity to patriarchal theology and culture have been one of the primary challenges.

It is interesting to recognize that the same title, "Jesus and Women," is present in the writings of Oo Chung Lee (1923–2002)[16] and Elisabeth Behr-Sigel (1907–2005).[17] Both women are remarkable mother figures within the traditions of Korean Christianity and Western Orthodoxy respectively. They are well-known in their context for their passionate and compassionate commitment to ushering in alternative realities in different ways. It seems to be a common thread in Christianity, across geographical and historical differences, that women's rediscovery of the relationship between Jesus and women, which is qualitatively different from the conventional cultural, theological, and ecclesial grammar of patriarchy, serves as a decisive anchor for pioneering Christian women's transformative vision for the church and society.

Strong mothers with Rachel's lamentation

The violence of the modern history of Korea has produced—following the Biblical account—a significant number of Rachels weeping for their children.[18] Just like the Mothers of the Disappeared in Buenos Aires, Argentina, who protested against the disappearance of their children during the dictatorship, the Korean mothers of victims would form groups of protest and mutual support, demanding truth and justice for their children. One of the representative groups is the *O-wol* (May) Mothers of the Victims of Gwangju Democratization Movement in 1980.

The mothers of the victims often turned to fierce activism with social maternity and a powerful prophetic imagination of a different and better world for the next generations. Sosun Lee (1929–2011) was the mother of Taeil Jeon, who incinerated himself in 1970 after all his attempts for dialogue with power failed. He had wanted to bring attention to the unresponsiveness

15. One of its numerous publications is devoted to the 10th Assembly of the WCC: Korean Association of Women Theologians, *Life Flowing through Korean Feminist Theology: The 10th WCC Assembly and Life · Justice · Peace* (Seoul: Dong Yeon Press, 2013).
16. Oo Chung Lee, "Jesus and Women," in *In Search for our Foremothers' Spirituality* (Seoul: Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, 1994), 106–11.
17. *Discerning the Signs of the Times: The Vision of Elisabeth Behr*-Sigel, ed. Michael Plekon and Sarah E. Hinlicky (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 95–99.
18. See Matthew 2:18.

of corporations and the government to the exploitative and dehumanizing labour conditions of workers, especially young girls. He became the catalyst and symbol of the movement for human rights and social justice. From the very day of her son's self-immolation, Sosun Lee herself became an activist for worker's human rights and for democratization—which led her to be later called "the mother of the workers." She founded and chaired the National Association of Bereaved Families for People and Democracy. This tradition of social mothers demonstrates the strength of the vulnerable. They advocate for the social cause of their children victimized by structural injustice in Korean society and commit themselves whole-heartedly.

The power of remembrance in the communities of sisters

The memory of God (*memoria Dei*) is a significant element of faith; the act of remembering the cloud of witnesses characterizes the profound nature of the communion of saints. The memory of those who lived their lives as friends of God and prophets brings a renewal of spirit, mind, and heart.[19] The turbulent modern history of Korea, fraught with disaster and suffering, gave birth to the pioneering Christian foremothers. Their social roles all together covered a wide range of commitments as theologians, ministers, educators, professors, social workers, labour activists, feminist activists, human rights activists, peace and reunification activists, political activists, politicians, and the First Ladies.

As the communities of intergenerational sisters, the Korean Association of Women Theologians and the Korea Association of Christian Women for Women *Minjung* function as spaces of remembrance that hand over the legacy of the lives and commitments of the Korean sisters who lived as friends of God and as prophets. The process itself often bestows on the younger participants the gifts of inspiration and renewal, the sense of rootedness in history, and the joy of being connected to the communities of the like-minded.

Towards saeng-myung feminism

"Life" is translated as *saeng-myung* in Korean. This word consists of two syllables that carry special semantic colours in Chinese. The term *saeng-myung* presupposes a heavenly ordinance for beings to live on earth and connotes a cosmological trajectory demanding the reverence for life. Today, when ecology becomes the central focus, and the ecological civilization is to be ushered in,

19. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

it is noteworthy that Korean women activists prefer the term *saeng-myung* to *saeng-tae*, which is a Korean translation of ecology.[20] Young-suk Yi proposes *saeng-myung* feminism as the Korean localization of the global eco-feminism. "The main epistemological structure and qualities of *saeng-myung* feminism comes from the premise that 'life is the subject.'"[21]

The awakening to *saeng-myung* could open a door to a mystic consciousness that could help one to disentangle oneself from the consumerist greed and materialistic hedonism and move towards the enjoyment of being itself in praise.[22] The sense that one is embedded in the web of life could expand and uplift the consciousness of those in captivity to egocentrism and individualism, so that they become aware of the interrelatedness of all beings, embrace the other, and welcome strangers. In the Korean cultural context, *saeng-myung* could serve as a common key concept for interreligious dialogue and cooperation. *Saeng-myung* feminism could offer one of the water-priming resources to future conversations between North and South Korean women, who have often found big epistemological gaps in dialogue since they come from different national and political frameworks.

One of the 2020 pilgrims commented, "Each site we visited had found ways to resurrect life from death." Her remark is significant as it recognizes the power of faith in the life of Korean Christian women as well as their reverence of *saeng-myung. Saeng-myung* feminism is to be cultivated, for it turns out to be a fertile ground for Korean feminist spiritual and theological enterprise in the postcolonial and post patriarchal era—in pursuit of a new civilization of eco-justice.

The visceral love and reverence of *saeng-myung* is sometimes discernible in the joy that Korean *minjung* women exhibit even during hard life conditions. In contrast to the rather serene and restful joy which the elites felt for nature, the *minjung*'s enjoyment came from their direct experience of living with nature, which was the precious site of production for their life sustenance.[23] A folk song of women divers in Cheju Island expresses this joy: "I dive into the wide open sea, fathom by fathom. Sea mussels and large clams stick out here

20. Young-suk Yi, "Gendered Life and Saeng-Myung Feminism: The Localization of Eco-Feminism in Korea," in Bergman and Kim, *Religion, Ecology and Gender,* 23–34.
21. Yi, "Gendered Life," 28.
22. See Luke 12:15.
23. Oo Chung Lee, "Traditional Culture of Korea and Feminist Theology," in Yi, *In Search for our Foremothers' Spirituality,* 11.

and there. Brown seaweeds are dancing in the waves. I lose myself collecting the brown seaweeds and even forget to breathe."[24]

These lyrics refer to the tradition of the women who "regard their work not as meaningless drudgery, but rather as something worthwhile and joyful. They understand the true meaning of living."[25]

Conclusion

The women of faith who joined in the Pilgrim Team Visit to Korea demonstrated that even the pandemic doesn't deter the will of women of faith for global solidarity; that women are rich in resilience, creativity, and strength; and that women's commitment to truth, peace, and justice continues even in an unprecedented era. It offered a chance for cross-fertilization at several levels, as international, inter-ecclesial, intergenerational, intercultural encounters, and mutual inspirations took place.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has led to the rise of unemployment and depression especially among young people, and the suicide rate of young Korean women has skyrocketed. At the same time, young women made a substantial contribution to the founding of the Women's Party, which today has over 10,000 members. One hopes that the legacy of transformative spiritualities of the strong prophetic mothers and sisters described here will remain inspirational resources for generations to come.

Pilgrims feed on rations on the journey. Among them, joy ranks high, which generates a love of life. Love of life is an antidote to necrophilia, the love of death, that shows itself wittingly or unwittingly in the arms race, the fascination with the nuclear weapons and energy, the patriarchal obsession with hegemony, and the destructive shadows of contemporary civilization. With joy, we can draw life-giving waters from the wells of our mothers and sisters who have dedicated their lives, past and present, to the vision of transforming the Korean Peninsula and the world into space where all the children can live in health, security, peaceful coexistence, conviviality, and eco-justice. Women pilgrims move with the desire for *saeng-myung*'s "ancient futures," in the parlance of Helena Norberg-Hodge.[26] They follow a collective

24. Lee, "Traditional Culture," 11.

25. Lee, 11.

26. Helena Norberg-Hodge, *Ancient Futures: Lessons from Ladakh for a Globalizing World* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991)

sacred prophetic imagination for abundant life in peace for all human and earth communities. In this journey of faith, they are often surprised by joy, the gift of costly grace.

14

Church Women's Organizations as Indigenous Expressions of African Women's Spirituality on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

Isabel Apawo Phiri

An examination of the literature generated by African women's theologians who are members of the Circle of African Women Theologians has shown that African church women's organizations are indigenous expressions of African women's spirituality.[1] These organizations are found both in mission and indigenous churches and their major characteristics are more or less the same. The purpose of this essay is to reflect on the spirituality of African church women as they participate in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. The article is divided into three parts. First, I locate African women's theologies as part of feminist liberation theologies and spiritualities. Second, I demonstrate the spirituality of resistance and transformation found in women's organizations within African churches as they interface with patriarchy in church and society.

1. In *Her Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa,* ed. Isabel Apawo Phiri, Betty Govinden, and Sarojini Nadar (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2002), see the following: Dorcas Olubanke Akintunde, "The Achievements and Hurdles of the Good Women Association of Nigeria (1943–2001)," 84–100; Esther Mombo, "Harahamisi and Jumaa: The Development of Women's Meetings in East Africa Yearly Meeting of the Friends (Quakers)," 59–83; Beverley Gail Haddad, "The Mother's Union in South Africa: Untold Stories of Faith Survival and Resistance," 101–16. Also see: Lynn Holness, "Women's Piety and Empowerment: An Observer's Understanding of the Methodist Women's Manyano Movement," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 98 (1997): 21–31; Isabel Apawo Phiri, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experiences of Chewa Women in Central Malawi* (Blantyre: CLAIM Publishers, 1997); Nyambura J. Njoroge, *Kiama Kia Ngo: An African Christian Feminist Ethic of Resistance and Transformation* (Accra: Legon Theological Studies Series, 2000); Rachel Nyagondwe Fiedler, *Women of the Bible and Culture: Baptist Convention Women in Southern Malawi* (Zomba: Kachere Series, 2005); Molly Longwe, "African Women's Organisations," in *Anthology of African Christianity,* ed. Isabel Apawo Phiri, Dietrich Werner, Chammah Kaunda, and Kennedy Owino (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2016), 949–56.

Third, I reflect on the spirituality of women in South Sudan as demonstrated through the work of the National Women's Programme of the South Sudan Council of Churches in peacebuilding

This essay is mainly based on a qualitative study of written documents. It also draws from what was heard during the Pilgrim Team Visit of May 2018, which was hosted by the Council of Churches of South Sudan. In each section, I draw attention to the dimensions of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: celebrating God's gifts, visiting the wounds (brokenness where healing is needed), and transforming the injustices.[2] Therein one finds true women's spirituality of life.

African Women's Theologies as part of Feminist Liberation Theologies and Spirituality

There is a common denominator in the discussion of spirituality of life in the Circle of African Women Theologians, the ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988–98), and the Women's Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). Mercy Amba Oduyoye is the common thread that runs through the three spaces for the development and articulation of women's spirituality for life. EATWOT had its first official conference in 1976. Yet, it was only in 1981 that women members influenced major changes in its theology and structure. Oduyoye tells the story of "an eruption within an eruption" happening within EATWOT. This led to the creation of the Women's Commission of the EATWOT in 1983; Oduyoye was its first female president (1997–2001).[3] Kwok Pui-lan´s description in 2010 shows what EATWOT stood for after it was transformed by women who had a vision for a spirituality of life. She says: "In the theological context, 'Third World' theologies develop out of the struggles against social and political oppression, cultural alienation, and injustice as a result of sexism, racism, classism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression. Theologians of EATWOT have advocated for the liberation of the poor, the integrity of creation, gender justice, racial and ethnic equality, and interfaith dialogue."[4]

2. See "An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace," 8 July 2014, World Council of Churches, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace.

3. Wikipedia, s.v. "Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecumenical_Association_of_Third_World_Theologians

4. Kwok Pui-lan, introduction to *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology,* ed. Kwok Pui-Ian (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010), 2.

What is important for this chapter is that the Women's Commission created space for women theologians from each region to articulate their contribution to feminist liberation theologies and spirituality. This is where I believe the seeds of articulation of African women's theologies and spirituality originated.

The aspiration for a spirituality of life was given further support when the World Council of Churches (WCC) established the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988–98). This decade was a follow-up to the UN Decade for Women (1975–85), which focused on policies and issues that impact women, such as pay equity, gendered violence, land holding, and other human rights. Similarly, but also going further, the Decade focused on:

- empowering women "to challenge oppressive structures in the global community, their churches, and communities"
- affirming the decisive contribution of women in churches and society "through shared leadership and decision-making, theology, and spirituality"
- giving visibility to women's perspectives and actions in work and struggle for justice and peace
- enabling the churches "to free themselves of racism, sexism, and classism, and from teachings and practices that discriminate against women"
- encouraging the churches "to take action in solidarity with women"[5]

The four priority topics of the Decade were:

- "violence against women in its various forms"
- "women's full and creative participation in the life of the church"
- "the global economic crisis and its effect on women"
- "racism and xenophobia and their specific impact on women"[6]

From 1987 to 1994, Mercy Amba Oduyoye was the deputy general secretary of the WCC. One of her responsibilities was to oversee the work of the Decade. It was also during this period that Oduyoye spearheaded the formation of the Circle of Concerned African Theologians, launched in 1989.

5. *Living Letters: A Report of Visits to the Churches during the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 13.
6. *Ibid*.

Within the spirit of the Decade, interest in women's spiritualities was further demonstrated in the publication of *Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life*.[7] This edited volume captures the reflections of global feminist liberation theologians who gathered in 1994 in Costa Rica for a conference held to discuss the impact of violence against women. Women's spirituality was considered in the context of economic, military, cultural, ecological, domestic, and physical violence as experienced by women in their regions. From this conference came a clear understanding of a spirituality for life.

Letty Russell summarized the conference discussions on spirituality, stating:

> Spirituality for life is a way of life for women in their resistance to the continuing violence. Women talked of spirituality as life itself, for it was the way they integrate their search for integrity and meaning into their struggle to resist dehumanization. Lastly we discovered that this struggle against violence is a core topic of feminist liberation theologies because women on the margins, and all women in a patriarchal society, suffer violence of many kinds that is legitimised both by religions and by societies of which we are a part. . . . Transformation comes only through resistance, interpretation and shared actions. It comes partially and slowly as small pieces of our cultures are lifted up and reshaped to support life-giving values and spirituality.[8]

Understood from this perspective, Russell added, the work of feminist liberation theologians is to contribute towards rebuilding Christian theology "with new paradigms which are neither sexist nor patriarchal, and whose basis, symbolism and language respect profoundly the integral creation of the human being as man and woman."[9]

There have been many articles written before and after this conference on the Circle of African Women Theologians and on African women's theologies.[10] A seminal text that captures this work is *Introducing African*

7. Mary John Mananzan, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Elsa Tamez, J. Shannon Clarkson, Mary C. Grey, and Letty M. Russell, eds., *Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996).

8. Letty M. Russell, "Spirituality, Struggle, and Cultural Violence," in *Women Resisting Violence,* 21.

9. Russell, "Spirituality," 25.

10. See Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, „What's in a Name? Forging a Theoretical Framework for African Women's Theologies," in *Biblical Studies, Theology, Religion and Philosophy: An Introduction for African Universities,* ed. James N. Amanze (n.c.: Zapf Chancery, 2012), 213-228.

Women's Theology,[11] by Mercy Amba Oduyoye. In this book, the Circle is described as part of the Christian liberation theologies, written from the experiences of African women as they encounter patriarchy in traditional African religions, Christianity, and Islam, and within African culture. It also illustrates a spirituality shaped by historical experiences of enslavement, economic exploitation by Arabs, Europeans and now, the Chinese. The aim of these theologians is to generate research literature based on specific experiences of African women searching for *ubuntu* relationships between women and men, based on wholeness. It is a rejection by African women of being victims of gender-based violence—in all its forms—and an embrace of becoming agents of transformation. It is also a refusal to join African male theologians in their uncritical defence of African culture and religions, opting instead to view them through the lenses of feminist cultural hermeneutics to reveal life affirming beliefs and practices for all African people and all of creation. It is a spirituality rooted in John 10:10, where Jesus says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." In the work of the Circle, one finds a spirituality of resistance from all death-dealing forces and involvement in actions that lead to transforming spaces of women's oppression. This is the framework used by the Circle when studying the spirituality of African church women's organizations.

African Church Women's Organizations: Space for Spiritual Renewal, Resistance, and Hope

When Christianity came to Africa a second time—during the 16th century through the missionary enterprise—it found the Africans deeply connected to their religious beliefs and practices, which promoted a communal worldview. This is well captured by the philosophy of *ubuntu*—in South African languages—and *umunthu*—in Chichewa, my mother tongue, from Malawi. In it one finds a spirituality that promotes harmonious relationships among people and with nature. Among the people, it prioritizes the value of community—which includes the spiritual world, those who are not yet born, the living, and those who have departed. It also includes extending kindness to the stranger, just as one would do to those with whom one is connected through blood. This spirit of welcoming the stranger into one's community is seen in how the missionaries were received and in the process by which Christianity was embraced—of course with variations in its expression from one community to another.

11. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001).

Many researchers of the history of mission in Africa have touched on the significance of the church women's organizations in Africa.[12] One of the outstanding works on the church women's organization is *Black Woman in Search of God*, published prior to the formation of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.[13] The importance of this book is that already here one can see the spirit of resistance to patriarchy, especially to violence against women, by African women who were empowered by their Christian faith. When the African women theologians started writing about the origins of the church women's organizations, they acknowledged the important role of the female Western missionaries and the wives of male missionaries in the second half of the 19th and the early 20th centuries. Among the Protestant churches, the main purpose of outreach to African women was to teach them about the Bible and to help prepare them to become future wives of African men who had become Christians and were either in the service of the churches or the colonial governments. By the middle of the 20th century, when most of the mission churches were gaining autonomy from overseas mission boards, the African church women's organizations had taken root and had spread in all mission and Indigenous African churches.

The church women's organizations bear different names in the local languages. An example is from the Church of Central African Presbyterian in Malawi, where we have three local names with the same meaning: *Chigwirizano* in the Nkhoma Synod, *Mvano* in the southern region, and *Manyano* in the northern region. The key concept in the name is *unity*. The women form a united community in their service for God. They see themselves as one body of Christ with a variety of God-given gifts to serve God, one another, the larger church, and the society in which God has placed them. What they have in common is their commitment to God expressed in service through evangelism, hospitality, and visiting the sick, the bereaved, the elderly, and those who are weak in their commitment to God. I see in the work of the church women's organizations a coming together of the African concept of *umunthu* and Christian teaching of being one body in Christ.

The oneness of the church women in these organizations is expressed symbolically by wearing uniforms whenever they are together or when attending church services and functions. Women from each denomination

12. See *Anthology of African Christianity; also Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa,* ed. Kenneth R. Ross, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

13. Mia Brandel-Syrier, *Black Woman in Search of God* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962).

wear a particular colour, including symbols and designs. Much significance is put on the process of taking educational classes to become a member. Upon graduation, a special ceremony is conducted in which the uniform is blessed; then the woman begins to wear it at the weekly meetings and on Sundays. In Malawi, this uniform is also worn at funerals and most women state that they wish to wear it when they are buried. It is a marker of belonging which is accepted with great joy and a sense of importance.

The research of Beverley Haddad has shown that for the Anglican Mother's Union in South Africa, the issue of uniform became a place of brokenness in relations between the women and church leadership.[14] It became an issue that triggered resistance when the white Anglican church banned the African church women who were members of the *Manyano* from wearing their church uniform. Most of the African women left the Anglican church and joined churches that allowed women to wear uniforms—until the uniform issue was settled. This sign of resistance made the church leadership resolve the issue of uniforms sooner rather than later, as it was affecting church attendance.

The church women's organizations are also celebrated as places of spiritual renewal. In her study of women's meetings in the East Africa Yearly Meeting of the Friends (Quakers), Esther Mombo has shown that the formation of church women's organizations was for the spiritual renewal and empowerment of women.[15] Bible readings, preaching, hymns, and prayers were geared towards the spiritual renewal of the women. Once the women understood the gospel, they went out to evangelize others. They organized revival meetings. Through their mission activities, the church in Africa has continued to grow.

The theme of spiritual renewal is also seen in Rachel Nyagondwe Fiedler's work about the *Umodzi Wa Mai* of the Baptist Convention in Malawi.[16] Here, spirituality is strengthened through weekly prayer meetings. This is the case in all church women's organizations in Africa. It is during the weekly meetings that women teach each other about principles of Christian living. It is also an occasion for women to celebrate women's leadership as a gift from God. Women's leadership is nurtured to develop to the full and is exercised not so much in the churches where women are denied leadership, yet they exercise leadership in secular society.

14. Haddad, "The Mother's Union," 108.

15. See Mombo, "Harahamisi and Jumaa."

16. Nyagondwe Fiedler, *Women of the Bible and Culture.*

Research has also shown that along with the celebration of the space that African church women have carved out for themselves is the perception by male church leadership that this is a threat—that the women are creating "a church within a church." One finds some cases where male leadership demands that a male church leader be present at all church women's organization meetings.[17] This is the case for *Chigwirizano* in the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian. In this synod, women continue to be denied any leadership position in the church.[18]

The African church women's organizations have also been used as a space of resistance to cultural practices that dehumanize women or that have been misinterpreted by mission Christianity. Nyambura Njoroge gives an example of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa's Woman's Guild, which in colonial times formed a council known as the *Kiama Kia Ngo* (the Council of the Shield) to resist female circumcision.[19] Even at that early time, without feminist theological training, the women knew that female circumcision was dehumanizing, and they spoke against it. Nyambura reports that the *Kiama Kia Ngo* evolved into the Woman's Guild in 1923.

In the case of the *Chewa* women of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian in the Nkhoma synod, the resistance was in the opposite direction. They demanded that the missionaries should keep women's initiation ceremonies because, they claimed, the initiation of girls and women was a process that validated the significance of women in a matrilineal society.[20] The missionaries gave in and started to include initiation ceremonies as part of church ritual. It did not take long before the Baptists, Roman Catholics, and Anglicans in Central Malawi followed suit. Although the Christian initiation ceremony version is filled with patriarchal biblical interpretation, this process bears witness to the power of the African church women to influence change on cultural issues that affect them. The same women who resisted the abolition of girls' initiation submitted to the exclusion of women in church leadership positions. One expected that they would draw from the *Chewa* spirituality that included women's spiritual leadership. Instead, traditional spiritual leadership was interpreted as evil and not in line with patriarchal biblical

17. Phiri, Women, *Presbyterianism and Patriarchy,* 80.

18. In 2013 the Nkhoma Synod rescinded a previous decision to allow women to become elders. In the Blantyre Synod and Livingstonia Synods, women may be ordained as ministers of Word and Sacraments.

19. Njoroge, *Kiama Kia Ngo*.

20. The Chewa initiation ceremonies have not involved circumcision, even in the pre-missionary era.

interpretation. From this perspective, I argue that when Christianity came to the *Chewa* people, it promised women a place to belong where their humanity was recognized and affirmed. However, it also stripped *Chewa* women of their indigenous right to spiritual leadership in the community of men and women, which they had held in the traditional *Chewa* religion and society.

Esther Mombo provides another example of church women making bold decisions to defend as well as resist culture. She refers to the East Africa Yearly Meeting of the Friends' (Quakers) ability to challenge culture by becoming Christians. However, the same women also challenged missionary attempts to ban the giving of bride-wealth in marriage and favoured "fair bride-wealth based on a gift system rather than on a price. For the women were aware that despite its limitations, bride-wealth is a customary means by which women obtained influence in a patriarchal society."[21] They also discussed issues such as polygamy and female circumcision. Mombo says, considering the prevailing culture at the time (1965), the Women's Yearly Meeting had great courage in addressing some of the issues that affected women, which the church saw as no longer problematic.

When one reads more literature on African church women's organizations from a women's perspective, it is easy to conclude that these organizations are promoting patriarchy and that they cannot be used in feminist literature as a symbol of transformation. However, I see many positive signs when one considers hope as described by Ursula King and Denise Ackermann.[22] Ursula King has argued that "the dynamic reinterpretation of Christian faith and practice rooted in the experiences of women is a sign of life, a sign of hope, and prophetic."[23] There was initial suspicion about the researchers from the Circle who came to listen and learn from the lived experiences of African church women's organizations—and in some cases, this suspicion is still there.[24] However, there have been many stories of true partnerships developing, which is a sign of hope.

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21. Mombo, "Harahamisi and Jumaa," 75.

22. Ursula King, "Spiritualities for Life," in *Women Resisting Violence,* 147–60; M. Denise Ackermann, "The Alchemy of Risk, Struggle and Hope," in *Women Resisting Violence,* 141–46.

23. King, "Spiritualities for Life," 150–51.

24. This was my experience and Fulata Moyo's as well. However, the suspicion did not come from the women themselves but from the male leadership. See Isabel Apawo Phiri, "Marching, Suspended and Stoned: Christian Women in Malawi," in *God, People and Power in Malawi: Democratisation in Theological Perspective,* ed. Kenneth R. Ross (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996), 63–105.

Denise Ackerman captures well the signs of transformation in the relationship between the Circle researchers and the African church women organizations. She says:

> To hope is to be lived. . . . To hope for justice and peace means to work to eliminate injustice and to be a peace-maker. Our actions again reinforce our ability to hope. . . . Hope is risky. . . to choose life is to choose to risk. . . . The challenge is to dare to hope and, in this daring, to wrestle with all that seeks to deprive us of hope and thus disempower us. Wrestling is risky. Our strength may fail us or we may emerge with further wounds and scars. Hope is not mere optimism, which sees the future through rose-coloured spectacles, negating the harshness of the present reality. . . . Hope is nurtured in community. When tempted to despair, when God appears silent, we need to be reminded that to lose hope is to lose life. Hope is also learning to wait. This requires patience and endurance, which are the opposite of resignation. Expectant waiting . . . is nurtured in community, and from it a spirituality of life can emerge.[25]

I see this kind of hope in the stories of African church women's organizations which have been captured by the Circle researchers. As Haddad says,

> Telling their stories of faith, survival and resistance is crucial to the African women's theology project. For it is the millions of women like them who have struggled to survive, literally, through decades of patriarchal colonial, apartheid, cultural and ecclesiastical oppression. We need to seek out the stories of these women whose voices are seldom heard and ensure that their contribution to the life of the church and community is not forgotten. But is simply recording and recounting these stories all that is required of us? . . . The stories of faith survival and resistance of power and marginalised women must not be an end in themselves. Their stories and their theological agendas must become the stepping stones to a collaborative partnership between the church, community and the academy. We, African women theologians, have failed in our task unless our theologising makes a difference to the lives of the majority women struggling each day to survive.[26]

With this in mind, what do we learn about transformation of injustices from the spirituality of church women who, in addition to hardships experienced from cultural and religious oppression, have also lived their lives in the context of decades of conflict?

25. Ackerman, "Alchemy of Risk," 144.
26. Haddad, "The Mother's Union," 114.

The Spirituality of Women in South Sudan

During the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace Pilgrim Team Visits to Juba in South Sudan in 2018, we experienced the work of the National Women's Programme of the South Sudan Council of Churches as a sign of hope for transformation in the context of experiences of decades of armed conflict.[27] One phrase we heard again and again is "I was born in war, grew up in war, and became a mom and grandmom in war."[28] The experience of war has shaped the spirituality of the women of South Sudan and the transformative response of the National Women's Programme of the South Sudan Council of Churches. The programme has earned the respect of all warring sides in South Sudan in its efforts to stop the civil wars and lay the foundation for sustainable peace.

The National Women's Programme of South Sudan Council of Churches is well known for using prayer as a tool for bridging tribal and political divides by organizing monthly women's national prayers. The prayers bring together women from opposing sides of the conflict and from different denominations. This is crucial because the conflict that started in 2013 is perceived as dividing the churches on ethnic lines. The meeting we had with church leaders revealed that when the December 2013 conflict started, the monthly national men's prayers stopped but the women's national prayers intensified. This has enabled the National Women's Programme of South Sudan Council of Churches to host neutral forums, where those engaged in the conflict can come together to discuss issues that led to it.[29]

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27. The Pilgrim Team Visits are within the spirit and commitment of the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan, 2013, where the ecumenical movement decided to deepen its approach of sending living letters for witness and solidarity to priority countries, most of which are going through armed conflict. South Sudan is one of the WCC's priority countries.
The International Pilgrim Team consisted of: Ms Maureen Jack, Church of Scotland; Rev. Kymberly Clemons-Jones, Presbyterian Church USA; Ms Lydia Adajawah, World Communion of Reformed Churches; Ms Esther Ngulwa, Christian Council of Tanzania; Rev. Dr Dorothy Akoto, Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ghana; Mr Geoffrey Alemba, All Africa Conference of Churches; Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri, WCC staff; Ms Jillian Abballe, WCC staff; Dr Nigussu Legesse, WCC staff.
28. The United Church of Canada newsletter attributes this statement to Agnes Wasuk, Coordinator of the National Women's Programme of the South Sudan Council of Churches, whom we also met on our Pilgrim Team Visit. See https://www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/KAIROS_MediaBrief_SouthSudan.pdf.
29. South Sudan Council of Churches' National Women's Program, Kairos website, https://www.kairoscanada.org/what-we-do/gender-justice/profile-sscc.

For adolescent girls, a negative side effect of the conflict is an increase in child marriages. A UN report has shown that "52 percent of girls in South Sudan are married before age 18, and 17 percent marry before they turn 15."[30] The marriage of children is a form of institutionalized rape.

We heard stories of armed men on all sides of the conflict using rape to degrade and demoralize those who are perceived to support their political enemies. We were told that thousands of women have been sexually assaulted. Women and men are not safe at home, in the camps, or in the streets or fields. With rape comes feelings of shame and stigma. Most of the women who are raped end up being divorced by their husbands. With this kind of experience, it is not surprising that according to a recent study by Plan International, which followed 249 girls between 10 and 19 years of age in South Sudan, one in four girls is suicidal, largely due to the fear of being raped, beaten, kidnapped, or killed.[31]

The National Women's Programme of South Sudan Council of Churches has introduced trauma healing workshops for the victims/survivors of the civil war, something that is needed for sustainable peace. The workshops are offered to accompany the wounded people on a long journey towards transformation and healing. This is an area that the global ecumenical movement is being asked to strengthen by increasing programmes for trauma healing.

The programme also works with men and boys to help them understand the importance of gender justice and equity for their society. In a cultural context where families prefer to educate boys before girls and where there are limited resources in the home, girls are confined to domestic work while the boys go to school. War has also increased parents' fear of sending girls to school and their preference to have girl child marriages. The programme helps parents and families to understand the evils of forced and child marriages, and the benefits to the families and communities if they encourage girls to complete their education.

It is this spirit of resilience and resistance that we saw in the women of South Sudan when we met them at the Council of Churches in South Sudan in May 2018. This motivated the global ecumenical women pilgrims to mobilize and accompany the people of South Sudan through weekly prayers

30. Associated Press, "Child Marriage Increasing in Civil War-torn South Sudan," News24, 29 August 2017, https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/child-marriage-increasing-in-civil-war-torn-south-sudan-20170829.

31. "Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from South Sudan," Plan International website, https://plan-international.org/publications/girls-crisis-south-sudan.

as part of the "Thursdays in Black" campaign.[32] The Thursdays in Black campaign was an outcome of the "Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women." In many countries going through conflict, mothers come together to speak truth to power by saying no to rape and any form of violence. They demand that governments follow up on disappeared children. Women and men are standing together every Thursday to say no to any form of violence and declare that another world is possible.[33]

Conclusion

This essay has shown that spirituality for life is what women do in Africa—and globally —when they act for justice for themselves and for those who are at the margins of the society. It is not just about knowledge of God and praying. It is grounded in faith in God and in fulfilling God's will for justice and peace for all of God's children and for creation. It is not enough to make pronouncements about the love of God and justice for all, when at the same time one is denying the humanity of some people who are on the margins of the church and society. Spirituality for life is about genuine love that embraces the people on the margins by actions of love. It is about aligning words with action.

32. https://oikoumene/what-we-do/thursdays-in-black

33. The WCC peacebuilding and disarmament work and the Just Community of Women and Men programme have also continued to accompany the churches and people of South Sudan in their pursuit for lasting peace with justice.

15

Transforming and Empowering Women's Spirituality

Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB

The Distinction between Religiosity and Spirituality

As a help to understanding, I distinguish here between spirituality and religiosity. The essence and starting point of all religions is an *experience* of something tremendous, something transcendent, that is then interpreted as an experience of God. Such an experience cries out to be shared; soon the person who has the experience gathers disciples. A community is formed. Structures, rules of conduct, and even a list of beliefs and practices begin to develop. After the death of the founder, their sayings and actions are written down in a scripture. Some groups who claim a connection to the founder assume the power to interpret the founder's words, actions, and mission. So there develops an institution, creed, rituals, ecclesiastical laws, scriptures, clergy and hierarchy, mission, theology, and so on. I illustrate this in the following diagram:

According to this description, the fundamental experience is in the realm of spirituality. All the elements developing around it constitute religiosity, or institutional religion. There are religious people, pious people, very conforming people, who nevertheless do not seem to have a deep spirituality. On the other hand, there are those who are not linked with any institutional religion but who exhibit a deep spirituality.

The following definition of spirituality by Aurobindo is one of the best I have come across:

Spirituality is not
a high intellectuality,
not idealism
not an ethical turn of mind
or moral purity and austerity.
not religiosity

> or an ardent and exalted emotional fervour,
> not even a compound of these excellent things:
> a mental belief,
> creed or faith,
> an emotional aspiration,
> a regulation of conduct according to a religious or ethical formula,
> not spiritual achievement and experience.
> These things are of considerable value to mind and life; they are of value to the spiritual evolution itself as preparatory movements of disciplining, purifying or giving a suitable form to the nature; but they still belong to the mental evolution, the beginning of a spiritual realization, experience; change is not yet there.
>
> **Spirituality is in its essence**
> an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul which is other than the mind, life and body,
> an inner inspiration to know, to feel, to be that, to enter into contact with the greater Reality beyond and pervading the universe which inhabits also our own being.
> To be in communion with It and union with It, and
> a turning, a conversion, a transformation of our whole being as a result of the aspiration, the contact, the union,
> a growth or waking into a new becoming or new being, new self, a new nature.[1]

This definition makes spirituality synonymous with mystical experience. As such, it transcends culture. But spirituality has another level of meaning. It is in the sense of externalizing one's experience of transcendence into a certain way of life, which develops according to fundamental options and decisions we make at certain crisis points in our life. These then shape one's spirituality into distinguishable characteristics. For example, as a child, one's spirituality may be characterized by duty, conformity, and a certain amount of fear. Then it may develop into a child-father relationship. The entrance to the convent may transform this into a more intimate relationship of friendship. Being involved in situations of injustice may then add a prophetic and liberational aspect. Exposure to some Asian forms of spirituality or mystical experience can lead to erasing images one has of that transcendence, and all of a sudden

1. Sri Aurobindo, *Growing Within: The Psychology of Inner Development,* comp. A. S. Dalal (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1992), 16.

one can no longer relate to "a God with a face" (the "nada, nada, nada" of St John of the Cross).[2] This is definitely contextual but still quite personal.

Development of Women's Spirituality by the Women of EATWOT

The spirituality of women described here is the result of the common reflections on various experiences by feminist theologians who belong to the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). The immediate context of this spirituality is the theology emerging in situations of injustice and oppression in so-called "developing" countries. It is also what has given birth to liberation theology and, in the case of the Philippines, the theology of struggle. Within this context, the women members of EATWOT realized that even within these politically progressive theological groups, there was still a subordination of women and discrimination against women. They felt the need to develop a feminist theology of liberation aiming to deconstruct the oppressive aspects of the Christian religion and to construct its liberating aspects. To do so, the women introduced an alternative reading of the Bible that includes the women's perspective. They showed that church history is replete with oppression and discrimination, such as the burning of millions of women as "witches" between the 14th and 16th centuries. The women from EATWOT compiled a critique of sexist practices, teachings, and rituals of the Church. As their hermeneutic principle, they echoed the statement of feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether:

> The critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women: whatever denies, diminishes, distorts the full humanity of women, and is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive. Theologically speaking, whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of woman must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine nor to reflect the authentic nature of things, nor to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer or the community of redemption. This negative principle also implies the positive principle: What does promote the full humanity of women is of the Holy, it does reflect true relation to the divine, it is the true nature of the thing, the authentic message of redemption, and

2. From Anna Terentieva: "'Nothing—nothing—nothing,' the sum of St John's doctrine of raising to God through 'the dark night of the soul' during which a soul is being purged by God from all without and all within, thus making the soul able to receive God in the most fully and in the most direct way" ("The Fearful Piety and "Nada—Nada—Nada' of St John of the Cross," http://www.orthodox-christian-icons.com/writing/nada_nada_nada.htm#_ftn7)

the mission of redemptive community.[3]

This theology from the perspective of women gave rise to a form of spirituality that women developed in order to arrive at their full humanity. This emerging women spirituality is:

1. Self-affirming. In contrast to the self-denying characteristics of traditional spirituality, the emerging spirituality enables women to affirm themselves: to value their strengths; to nourish their self-esteem; to strive for self-fulfilment as the only genuine basis to helping others. They exorcise themselves of useless guilt and allow themselves to bloom.

2. Empowering. Women have realized that there is within them a wellspring of limitless possibilities for growth and development—an inner source of power and strength that goes beyond their wildest dreams. Realization of their situation and renewed self-esteem have allowed them to tap this inner source, making them rise from their victim status not only to the status of survivors but also to that of agents of change, capable of empowering others to bring about societal changes that will lead to a more humane world.

3. Integral. Women living this spirituality transcend the dichotomies and dualisms of the more traditional form of patriarchal spirituality. Matter and spirit, sacred and profane, contemplation and action are necessary elements of life. Women flow with their positive and negative experiences, living life to the full and with vibrant intensity.

4. Liberating. Having gained self-knowledge and acceptance, women experience an inner liberation, especially from fear, guilt, and idols, as well as from bitterness and resentment. This does not mean that women no longer "feel fear," but they have learned to distinguish between substantiated and unsubstantiated fear and to act despite justified fear. They have transcended the tendency toward neurotic guilt and self-flagellation every time anything untoward happens to them or to their families. They have been freed from the shackles of peoples' opinions—opinions of people to whom they have been "enslaved" in the past by too much loving, and those of critical people, who have paralyzed them into

3. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 48.

inaction. Having experienced—without denial—feelings of bitterness and resentment, they have opted to eliminate these poisonous emotions from their hearts to set themselves free for creative action.

5. Contemplative. Women see the importance of moments of silence, reflection, and contemplation, in order to gain a better perspective, a certain distance to evaluate what is happening. These moments enable them to keep in touch with their inner source of life, and to retain their sense of humour amidst difficulties—thus acquiring an attitude of "committed carefreeness."

6. Healing. Women trying to live this way are healed from their psychic wounds. Having gotten in touch with themselves and having gained self-esteem, women transcend their traumas, regaining their spiritual health and vigour. And because of the integrality of matter and spirit, they find that even their physical ailments are alleviated. Like wounded healers, they are likewise able to help others heal with compassion and empathy.

7. "Easterly." It is a spirituality that is exuberant rather than austere; active rather than passive; joyful rather than mournful. It feasts more than it fasts. It is not cold asceticism but a glorious celebration of life. This spirituality does not remain with the sadness of Good Friday but goes on to the triumph of Easter Sunday.

8. A continuous process. This spirituality is not achieved once and for all. It is not even a smooth progressive growth. It has its peaks and abysses. It has its agonies and ecstasies. It can regress, but it can also have quantum leaps. It is open to great possibilities of life and freedom, and therefore to more and more opportunities to be truly, intensely, and wholly experienced.

Eco-Feminist Spirituality

As the consciousness of the ecological crisis spread, feminist theologians saw the close relationship of the ecological issue and the woman question. They embraced the eco-feminist view, which in turn influenced their theology and spirituality. The principles and practices of eco-feminism has several fundamental theological implications. There are differences between a *patriarchal*, sin-and-redemption-centred spirituality, and an *eco-feminist*, creation-centred spirituality, regarding the image of God and the

human being, and the understanding of faith, salvation, holiness, and the spiritual journey as a whole. For instance, in patriarchal theology, relations are understood mainly in a hierarchical sense, having a predominantly male image of God. In this approach, original sin is seen as the starting point; there is an underdeveloped theology of creation and of the Holy Spirit. This patriarchal theology is Good Friday-oriented and looks at holiness as a striving for perfection. Alternatively, eco-feminist theology is creation-centred, having as its point of departure God's creative spirit—רבד (*dabar)*. This eco-feminist approach includes a woman face of God. It has a well-developed theology of the Holy Spirit; and it emphasizes Christ not only in his historical reality but also in his cosmic and prophetic significance; and it regards spirituality as a total surrender to God who loves unconditionally.[4]

With regard to the spiritual journey, creation-centred spirituality—which can be described as an eco-feminist spirituality—points, according to Matthew Fox, to four pathways: (1) the *via positiva,* which is a celebration and gratitude for the gifts of life and creation; (2) the *via negativa,* which is an invitation to dare the dark and to surrender and accept what one cannot change in one's life; (3) the *via creativa,* which emphasizes the powers of creativity and birthing; and (4) the *via transformativa,* which calls for commitment, responsibility, and compassion.[5] These different moments guide women into self-reflection, into asking themselves: What am I most grateful for in my life? What "darkness" have I faced in the recent past? What have I "given birth to" in the past year? What concrete changes do I want to have happen in my life, in my family, and in my workplace?

Eco-feminist spirituality is a great enrichment of a transformative, empowering spirituality of women.

Interreligious Spirituality

The members of EATWOT are from different nationalities. Even if they see themselves as Christians, they are rooted and belong to different contexts and realities. For instance, those living in Asia are among people of different religions: Hindus, Muslim, Buddhist, Taoist, and others. For them, questions about encounters with other religions are not hypothetical but real and concrete. They have actually practiced inculturation and interculturation. The feminist theologians were exposed to many spiritual values from these

4. Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality Presented in Four Paths, Twenty-Six Themes, and Two Questions* (Bear and Company, 1983).
5. Fox, *Original Blessing.*

different religions and did not hesitate to incorporate these in their own spirituality, religious study, and practice. In light of their encounters and experiences, they have developed an interreligious spirituality, which includes characteristics such as the following:

1. Integral view. This spirituality transcends dichotomies and dualisms, such as matter and spirit, sacred and profane, contemplation and action. The importance of the body, of breath, of life force (*chi*) is emphasized. All are important elements of life. It goes beyond "either/or" to "both/and." One integrates relationships into oneself: the relationship to oneself, which is self-affirming; the relationship to one's neighbor, which is mutually empowering; the relationship with God, which is complete surrender; and the relationship with nature, which is rooted in interconnectedness rather than in hierachical relations based on control, exploitation, and abuse.

2. Life-affirming attitude. This spirituality is a celebration of life. It is full of awe and gratitude at the wonder of one's being and at the beauty and the grandeur of the universe. It fosters the *chi* that flows through one's *chakras*[6] by a healthy way of life (nutrition, exercise, Qi-gong) and by a conscious mind-body-spirit integration. It respects all life forms and avoids actions that endanger the life of any species. It is conscious of the global instrumentalities that are bent on unleashing the forces of death, and it establishes solidarity with those who resist these forces and who try to bring about a better quality of life for all.

3. Contemplative aspect. Its deepest insight is that God is not only everywhere but is primarily within one's own heart. "God is in you as you." It therefore gives importance to silence and stillness, not only of one's tongue but of one's thoughts and emotions—one's whole being. It gives priority to meditation as a way of going into one's depths to discover the inexhaustible source of strength, love, and joy within one's being. It aspires to transcend *belief* in God to a direct *experience* of God as the ground of one's being.

6. Various focal points used in a variety of ancient meditation practices, collectively known as Tantra, or the esoteric or inner traditions of Hinduism. See *John A. Grimes, A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy: Sanskrit Terms Defined in English* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1996).

4. Virtue of compassion. Compassion is not a condescending pity to the less fortunate. It is instead a fundamental sense of oneness with all beings, leading to a passionate empathy for all. The feeling of being one with all beings leads one to rejoice with the good fortune of others as well as to suffer with others' misery. One looks to all beings with loving-kindness and goodwill; one is ever ready to excuse and to forgive. An obstacle to embracing interreligious dialogue is self-righteousness—setting oneself apart as the only one with the whole truth. But if one feels empathy for others, one will also begin to understand their way of looking at the world and their values; one will learn to appreciate what they appreciate. This gives the readiness to learn from others and at the same time enables one to share with them what one finds valuable and what is the source of one's inspiration.

5. Life in the present. Without denying one's past and while making reasonable provision for the future, one tries not to dwell in either past or future, because they are not real. The past is not real anymore and the future is not yet real. The here and now is real, which means that one has to try to be fully alive in the present. If one is feeling continually guilty about the past or is filled with anxiety about the future, one will totally miss the present, which is actual reality. "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof"[7] Living in the present means to be in constant wakefulness and awareness. It means controlling one's thoughts, which often concoct for us imaginary fears, and weave illusions and delusions that unduly disturb us. The challenge here is not simply to accept or tolerate the present: one consciously needs to take full responsibility for it. "Approach the present with your heart's consent. Make it a blessed event."[8] It also means a life of surrender, of letting go, of detachment.

6. Committedly "carefree." In English, the word *carefree* sounds irresponsible and trivial, while *detachment* sounds cold, uncaring, and uninvolved. By *carefree*, I mean that one is concerned with people and with their suffering, but is not grim and determined

7. Matthew 6:34 (Douay-Rheims Bible).

8. Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, Siddha yoga message for 2001, 1 January 2001, Gurudev Siddha Peeth.

about it. One is relaxed, knowing oneself to be important but not indispensable. One does not take oneself too seriously. Feeling oneself loved unconditionally enables one to surrender oneself fully to God. And in this security, one can live in joy and bliss. One can dance with the playful consciousness of God.

Conclusion

The feminist theologians of EATWOT try to live this rich spirituality in their own personal lives, among each other, and with the women they accompany, in their common journey towards transformation and empowerment. After some years of cultivating and sharing their experiences of living this spirituality, they decided to document their experiences in a book entitled *With Passion and Compassion*.[9] They believe that this title expresses and describes, in one phrase, the transforming and empowering spirituality they are living. It is a *passionate and compassionate* spirituality.

9. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, eds., *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988).

V

Transformative Spiritualities in Christian Traditions

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Bearing God's Face for a World of Pain: Contemplative Spirituality and Peace-making

Betty Pries

When I was in my early 20s, I had the privilege of working as a pastoral intern at a downtown church in a large urban centre. A woman called to the office one day and asked for money to tide her over until her next welfare payment. Given that most of the staff and key volunteers were away on holidays, it was up to me to respond to this woman's request. Over the course of our conversation, the woman expressed her anger at the congregation for not doing more for her and, as I was a representative of the church, she threatened to come by the church to shoot me. I deflected this comment, but I also knew I needed to visit this woman. I was nervous.

As I boarded the subway for this visit, I prayed that somehow, I would see God's face over the course of my meeting with this woman. I arrived and for a while we talked. I had mostly forgotten about my prayer when suddenly it happened. We were bent over the door of her empty fridge, when she looked up at me, and there it was: the face of God radiating out from this woman toward me. I was in awe. This woman—who by the world's standards did not measure up in any way—was radiating the face of God to me.

I was still awash with this memory as I boarded the subway to come home. And then, there it was again—the face of God—this time on the face of first one subway rider, then another and another and another. Everywhere I turned, the face of God radiated back at me. By now, I was reeling in awe. An insight slowly dawned on me. If the face of God was present in this woman and in each of the subway riders, could it be that the face of God was also present in me? I had not considered this before. In that moment I felt like I had been hit by a tsunami of a love, and an insight too great for me to grasp.

Bearing God´s Face

I have reflected on this experience often since that time. What does it mean to be the bearer of God's face? What does it mean to be bowled over by a love so great our legs become weak with the grandeur of the moment? And what does it mean to practice fidelity to the face of God imprinted upon us? The answers to these questions, I believe, capture the essence of what it means for our peace witness to be formed and transformed by contemplative spirituality.

Contemplative spirituality goes by many names: mysticism, mindfulness, meditation, centring prayer. It is perhaps best defined as the direct encounter with God's presence: with an openness to being bowled over by God's love; with a dawning awareness that our truest home is found in the heart of God; and with the deep and sometimes awkward acceptance that our home in God is also the home of all of those with whom we share this earthen journey, friend and foe alike. This, one could say, changes everything.

Among Western Christians, the contemplative tradition has been undergoing something of a renaissance. While it has always been present as a spring flowing through many expressions of Christian faith, in the West it has been upheld primarily in monasteries and convents until approximately 100 years ago. At that time, the tradition began slowly to break out of its monastery walls to arrive at the place where it resides today, in the lives of people from across the Christian spectrum. Contemplative spirituality has deepened the expression of faith in multiple Christian traditions and finds resonance with contemplatives from many other traditions, including Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and indigenous spiritualities.

What does it mean to be the bearer of God's face? Contemplative spirituality recognizes that our separation from the Source of our life is an illusion. So also, is our separation from one another. To be the bearer of God's face is to recognize that when all our defences, attachments, and aversions are stripped away, when the masks we present to the world and those we save to present only to ourselves all fall aside, we are left only with our naked selves and the breath that gives us life. This breath is the truest and deepest form of our selfhood. It is the face of God alive within us. At this "place," we are not our strengths nor our weaknesses, not our moments of glory nor our failures. We are neither our thoughts nor our emotions. Here, we are not even our gender. Here, we simply are.

Liminal Space

When we strip away all to which we have become attached and all that creates our sense of identity, we enter a strange, liminal space. For most of us, this is unfamiliar territory. In fact, we often experience our first encounter with this space with trepidation, not joy. Initially, this space can feel like a strange and empty cavern. Christian contemplative Thomas Merton describes this space as the point of nothingness. And how sweet it is. If we allow it, we discover that this space is holy, sacred ground. It is the place of perfect union with God. It is the place where we find ourselves showered by a love so great that we know beyond a shadow of a doubt what it means to be alive in our bodies and as a part of creation. As Merton writes:

> At the centre of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is so to speak His name written in us, as our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our sonship. It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely. . . . I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere.[1]

Herein lies a curious mystery. It is not only union with God that we encounter at the place of our nothingness. It is also a oneness with all of creation. Naturally, the person sitting in the room next to me is someone other than me; yet at the place where that person and I are each one with God, we are also one with one another. We are told that the point of nothingness is the truest reflection of our selfhood, yet, ironically, this space not ours alone: it is the selfhood we share in unity with all others. It is our common selfhood, found in the heart of God. This may sound beautiful, and often it is beautiful; but if we are truthful with ourselves, it is also disturbing. If we believe this oneness to be true, then we are one with those we love, but also with those we might consider to be our enemies.

1. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Image Books, 1989), 158.

Loving our Neighbour—and Ourself

It is sometimes said that we must love our neighbours because they too bear the image of God. There is truth in this: We are, each of us, made in the image of God—even if we do not always live according to the likeness of God.[2] Through the lens of contemplative spirituality, however, loving our neighbour is somewhat more complex, and, perhaps, more compelling. We love our neighbour *as* ourselves because our neighbour *is* ourselves.

To better understand this reality, we must detour briefly to understand the nature of our selfhood. Each person, it seems, is comprised of three selves: our deeper or true self, our descriptive self, and our defended or false self.

1. Our deeper self we have already described. This is our selfhood stripped of all attachments and aversions. It is the location of our oneness with God and creation. In a sense, our deeper self is a type of unifying formlessness pulsating in and through us as the breath of our life.

2. Our descriptive self is the individualized "cloak" each of us was given to wear at our birth. If our deeper self is formless, then our descriptive self is our form. It includes our characteristics, the circumstances of our birth, our strengths, our limitations, and our foundational human needs like security, recognition, belonging, meaning, and self-determination. Our descriptors reflect the unique expression of our selfhood. This is what some call our authentic self. Our athletic ability, our way of leaning into the world, our academic inclinations, our social skills, our racial and ethnic heritage, our body shape, our gender, the quirks of our personality—all of this is our descriptive self and all of it is neither good nor bad. It simply is.

3. Then, there is our defended self. Unfortunately, what is perfectly neutral is often seen otherwise in the eyes of the world. Some characteristics are regarded as better than others; some limitations are considered worse than others. Indeed, our social construct is driven more by comparisons, judgments, and an inclination to separation and domination, than it is by an appreciation for the unique cloak each has been given to wear. To survive, we beco

2. The distinction between the image of God and the likeness of God is borrowed from Richard Rohr. See for example, https://cac.org/in-the-beginning-and-the-end-2017-12-31.

> me attached or averse to one characteristic or another; we cover ourselves with ego and shame. As we do so, our equilibrium tips and we fall headlong into our defended or false self. This is the self of our pretending, believing we are someone we are not. This is the location of our wishing that we had been given different characteristics. This is the self of better-than and lesser-than. This is also the self of our prejudice and racism. This is the space that allows us, whether consciously or unconsciously, to regard some as more worthy than others. Collectively, this is the self that allows systemic discrimination to flourish, reserving privileges for some and minimizing the rights of others. This is the self of wars against others in the pursuit of self-interest, whether at a personal, group, or international level.

Human Form and Divine Breath

How do we live with the complicated nature of our selfhood? Contemplative spirituality proposes that we might discover an answer to this question in the incarnation of Jesus, who reveals to us something of the mystery of our own creation. Through Christian history, Jesus is described as both human and divine. In and through his human form, Jesus incarnates the formless presence of God in the world. Herein is a great mystery: Through our human form, we too incarnate the formless presence of God in the world. The unity of human and divine lives also in us. The deeper self, after all, is divinity alive within us, the breath of God that gives us life. Our descriptive self is our humanity, the container we have been given to inhabit. For us this means that Jesus is the great forerunner, the exemplar of what it means to practice fidelity to the union between our divinity and our humanity, our deeper and descriptive selves. Jesus, we could say, enfleshes God's presence by giving form to the formlessness of God. As bearers of God's breath, we too enflesh God's presence in the world, giving form to the spirit of God in the world.

There is also more to the example Jesus sets for us. With Jesus, there is no spiritual bypassing. Jesus does not escape into a spiritual reverie while avoiding his humanity or the humanity of those around him. Nor does Jesus favour his bodily existence to the degree that he avoids the breath of God coursing through his body, the voice that calls him beloved. Jesus honours body and soul: both the form he is given to inhabit and the breath of God that gives his form life.

It is tempting to divorce our form from its formless centre. This leads to false-self consequences. For example, if we are only our human form, we lose our grounding in the breath of God coursing through us—the Spirit that awakens in us the virtues of goodness, generosity, and grace. We also lose the capacity to see our descriptors and those of our neighbours neutrally. Then we fall into our defended, false, and often conflict-driven self. But the converse is also a problem: If we are only our deeper selves, we become blind to the needs of the human form, including that of our neighbours. We may be spiritually at peace, but the world around us is burning. Instead, we are invited to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We are invited to keep our human form and the divine breath that flows through us in a perpetual dance with one another.

Becoming One: Seeing the World through God´s Eyes

Now let us return to the question of loving our neighbour. What does it mean to say that we must love our neighbour because our neighbour *is* ourselves? We have already suggested that in the heart of God, self and other are one. But our oneness is also more than this. Our oneness is also found, ironically, in the locations of our twoness: our descriptive self and our false self. When we are rooted in God, our enslavement to a spirit of judgment that regards some as better-than or less-than begins to fall away. A deep capacity emerges within us to accept our diversity humbly and equitably. While this may not be oneness, it is not entirely twoness either. Without judgment, we see the world through God's eyes. The other's needs become our needs, their pain our pain.

But there is more. None of us can avoid the fall into the defended, false self. Life happens. We experience hurt; an ego attachment creeps into our being; we become defensive; we lash out; our unconscious biases reveal themselves; we choose our "own" first; we deny opportunities to those who differ from us, we become nationalistic—the list could go on indefinitely. There are a multitude of ways by which our false-self system contributes to harm, injustice, and conflict. One of our greatest temptations and a limiting factor in our conflict transformation or peacebuilding work is our ability to see the splinter in the other's eye while ignoring or not even seeing the log in our own. We see how the other is living from their false self even as we disregard our own false-self complicities. We stand by the oppressed but ignore the way we dehumanize the oppressor with our judgments. We want peace with our neighbour but ignore how our inner talk has seen our neighbour as less-than. We accuse the other of having caused harm, even as we too have caused harm. In fact,

it appears that we are not only one at the level of our deeper self. We are also one at the level of our defended and false self. While the pain we create may differ from one person to the next, the reality is that each one has "sinned" and fallen from the heart of God.

Taken together, it appears that we are more one than we are two. Our separation is an illusion. While all that is good and lovely finds a mirror in my soul, so also does all that is broken and unlovely. Acts of harm and works of mercy—each finds resonance in our souls. The sins of the other are also our sins. The goodness of the other is also our goodness. Contemplative spirituality, by its nature, compels a spirit of humility to awaken in our souls. We are, each of us, innocent and guilty. The harm we do to the other is the harm we do to ourselves. The love we give to the other is the love we give to ourselves. When we see this—when we *really* see this—we are transformed by a deep and abiding compassion.

To regard self and other as deeply one while still being two is to grasp the nondual nature of reality. We cannot hate the oppressor and hope to build peace. While we advocate for justice, we cannot incline to one party and disregard the other. Nor can we show compassion to the other while regarding ourselves with hatred. Contemplative spirituality offers hard news to would-be mediators and peacebuilders: we must learn the language of love, both for the vulnerable and for those who abuse the vulnerable, for the other and for ourselves. This does not mean we cannot hold ourselves or another accountable. Nor does this mean that we avoid healthy boundaries. We must recognize what is ours to carry and what is the other's to carry. The problem is that it is impossible to know how to meaningfully practice accountability or to know what is ours or the other's to carry when we are caught in hatred or ensnared by our ego attachments. Transformation occurs more readily when we recognize the image of God in one another. It occurs more readily when we recognize that our separation is an illusion. It occurs when, with compassion and humility, we to see the full and broken and glorious humanity of the other, even as we recognize our own full and broken and glorious humanity.

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Stability as a Factor of Transformation: Learnings from St Benedict´s Spirituality

Guido Dotti

Spirituality, Tradition, and Pilgrimage

Can spirituality transfigure our lives? I offer three brief premises on the transformative capacity of spirituality. The first is my personal reluctance to speak of *spiritualities* in plural, with attached adjectives delimiting them in time (patristic, medieval, modern, contemporary, and so on); in space (Western, Eastern), in ecclesial belonging (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant; or in further declinations, (for example, Tridentine, post-conciliar, Byzantine, Slavonic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, or Pentecostal) or with reference to any specific form of following Jesus (such as Benedictine, Franciscan, or Jesuit). I do not deny that there are different aspects in the various epochs and ways of incarnating the gospel and its proclamation in the history of humanity. It is true that some of these elements characterize in a specific way a given epoch, geographical and cultural area, or charismatic intuition. But Christian spirituality remains unique because it is the life of the Spirit in *every* believer and in *every* community of *every* time and place. I will therefore speak of the transformative capacity that Christian spirituality as one spirituality can have: it is the one Spirit, that transforms and transfigures every daily reality into a time and space in which the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ acts, as we long for his return in glory.

The second premise is that my reflections are of a Roman Catholic Christian, member of an ecumenical monastic community in Italy, composed of brothers and sisters of different Christian denominations. We live the discipleship of Christ in celibacy and common life, inspired by the great tradition of monasticism, especially from the first millennium of the Christian era.

Finally, the insights the reader will draw from this paper are the fruit of the abundant gifts I received during the World Council of Churches (WCC) Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and the meetings I had with brothers and sisters in churches on five continents. And I will start from one of the reflections of our Theological Study Group[1] in order to address the transformative potential of stability. In regard to spiritual Christian living, the relationship between *land and displacement* is key to understanding the dynamism inherent in stability.[2]

Mobility and Precariousness

Globally, mobility seems to have become the hallmark of our society.[3] For Italians, from the second half of the 19th century until the 1970s and 1980s, mobility meant, above all, emigration: to overseas lands, to other countries in Europe, and within Italy itself. But it was a relative mobility. People uprooted themselves from their homelands with hard work, sacrifice, and suffering, hoping to settle only temporarily in another country. They cultivated the dream to return "home" one day, where their affections remained for a long time. Alternately, for some professions, mobility was linked to a specific job, carried out over years in different places: A "permanent" job could require one to move from one city to another, even abroad.

Today, mobility means forced migration for an increasing number of people worldwide. It is caused by ongoing bloody conflicts, climate change leading to famine or flooding, desertification or rising oceans, and lack of food resources or decent work. These factors force millions of people to leave their homelands and to move to another place that soon may turn out to be even more precarious than the one they left behind.

Even people with decent standards of living in their own country may experience their jobs and places of residence as precarious. Those who stay in the same place now do their work in a hurry, attentive to the possibility of sudden change in their situation. They become accustomed to seeing the

1. To give shape to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, an International Reference Group has been set in place. Besides that, a Theological Study Group has been installed to reflect theologically on the pilgrimage.

2. The Theological Study Group has identified four major themes occupying local communities in different regions: land and displacement; truth and trauma; gender justice; and racial justice.

3. Guido Dotti, "Racism, Xenophobia, and Migration in Italy, a Post-Catholic Country," *The Ecumenical Review* 72, no. 1 (January 2020): 37–47.

same people next to them for only a short time. Relationships and emotional ties become precarious as well; stories are reduced to adventures, perhaps fascinating and intense, but short-lived, without roots in the past or hopes for the future. Patience, waiting and putting down roots become obsolete legacies of an outdated past.

The Stability Response

Faced with a culture change of this magnitude, one is led to think of St Benedict's sixth-century spiritual and cultural intuition: to gather different people into a community, binding them together with the commitment to stability, to remaining in a particular place for life. As has often happened historically with new forms of religious life, Benedictine monasticism included countercultural elements that were reactions to the mainstream way of thinking and acting. In Benedict's time, the Italian countryside—owned by noble landowners but worked by slaves or serfs—was abandoned because of foreign incursions from the Visigoths. The latter took over the land or plundered the fruit of hard work. At the same time, another element of instability emerged: dual legislation in one single territory. Roman law was gradually giving way to the law and customs of the peoples from central Europe.

Precisely in this context, Benedict offered everyone the opportunity to live, whether free or slave, Latin or Goth, under a single rule in a community rooted in a precise place. The monks would have to learn to live—reclaiming, cultivating, preserving, and enriching a specific piece of land—until they became *amatores loci* ("lovers" of that site). With monasticism came the first free human beings in Europe who chose to work the land with their own hands in order to draw direct sustenance from it.

To institute this reinterpretation of the link with cultivating land, Benedict realized that he had to establish a particular form of stability as a foundation for the monks: *stabilitas in congregatione*.[4] This did not condemn the monks to lifelong imprisonment; rather it offered the possibility of finding a place to take root and grow in fraternal charity, finding peace with God, with others, and within oneself. The stability of the place, in fact, served the stability of the heart, and the unification of one's own existence with the communion of life with one's brothers.

4. *Sancti Benedicti Regula Monasteriorum: Editio-Critico-Practica,* 3rd ed., ed. Cuthbertus Butler (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder and Company, 1935), chapter 4, verse 78.

It is not by chance that the commitment to stability was united with that of *conversio morum*, "conversion of morals": a continuous change in one's thinking and acting. [5] The place where one freely decides to establish one's dwelling also becomes the place where it is possible to start one's life anew every day, renewing relationships and rediscovering the secret heart of things.

Dynamic Identity

What remains in place to constitute identity in our current experience of constant change, whether chosen or endured? What makes us a son or daughter of our own people, a citizen of a particular state, a member of a faith community? Is our concept of identity a static one, like a photograph taken once and for all? Or a dynamic image, a progressive evolution? Above all, do we think of our identity as a monolithic or polyphonic reality, as uniform or polychromatic?

These questions concern our Christian identity as well. No human being is born a Christian, but after a short time or many years, we may become one, thanks to others. We remain Christian, also thanks to others, and to the Lord who uses them. Ignatius of Antioch, a 2nd-century bishop and martyr, said that only at the moment of his death, after he had been thrown to the lions, would he begin to be a disciple.[6] The desert fathers echoed Ignatius. When asked who a true monk was, they answered: "A monk is the one who daily asks himself, 'Who is a monk?'"[7]

Anyone who wishes to verify the extent to which their spiritual life can transform their way of thinking, speaking, and acting may ask themselves some simple questions. When I speak of my identity, am I thinking mainly of my past (perhaps locking it up in a stereotyped fashion): who and what contributed to building my identity and defining it in terms of ethnicity, language, culture, traditions? Am I thinking of my future—of who and what I am called to become precisely because of my past? Or am I thinking of who I am being called to become by that faith incarnated in a specific time and place?

5. Different translations show different accents in the interpretation of this commitment. For example, one finds the concept translated as "conversion of life" in the *Rule of St Benedict* used at Burford Priory, Burford, 2002. It is referred to as "amendment of manners" in *The Rule of St. Benedict,* trans. Cardinal Gasquet (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2007), and even as "fidelity to monastic life" in *The Rule of St. Benedict in English,* ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1982).

6. See *To the Romans*, an Epistle by St. Ignatius of Antioch, 4:2

7. Anonymous apophthegma taken up by Thomas Merton, André Louf, among others.

Two images suggest a way to grasp the essence of life. The first is a dazzling insight contained in Dag Hammarskjöld's journal: "Denied any outlet / the heat transmuted / the coal into diamonds."[8] This *haiku* draws our attention to a fact well known to ethnologists and anthropologists: in order to get to the roots and heart of a behaviour or phenomenon, a personal or collective identity, one must analyze it in its simplest form. It must be reduced to its essentials, devoid of ulterior motives and subsequent adjustments or encrustations. We must see it in its "primitive" form. Similarly, from Michelangelo to Meister Eckhart, a whole host of artists, sculptors, philosophers, and mystics use the example of a sculptor who does not invent anything but discovers, reveals, brings out from a block of marble or wood the figure that was already inside. They do this by removing material rather than adding.

In the spiritual life that we lead every day in human fellowship, what is a symbol and what is reality? "The habit does not make the monk," says an adage that has lost none of its truth, nor does the *habitus*, that is, a set of customs. What then is essential to our life? What is the coal that we yearn to make into a diamond? And what is the instrument of this much-desired transfiguration? Prayer, the loving dialogue with the Lord, or the prayer formulas that teach us a language? The search for God in daily difficulties, or the tried and tested recipes for finding God? Brotherly love, or the instruments in a given historical era and cultural context that attempt to express it?

The Transformative Dynamics of *Stabilitas*

Significantly, the Rule of Benedict, as demanding as it is in its requirement for stability—of place, of brothers or sisters, of heart, of mind—does not ask for stability of customs. On the contrary, *conversatio* (or *conversio*) *morum* (conversion, the change of customs and habits) suggests a change that does not take place only at the beginning of the journey. It becomes a daily commitment, a daily transfiguration of the thoughts we generate, the words we speak, and the gestures we make.

Here, the temptation is to safeguard the stability of a *society*, to defend one's identity by making habits unchangeable. This temptation affects not only monks or Christians, but men and women of every time, place, culture, and religion. So many questions that run through a monk's day become very human questions that concern each one of us. What use are fixed hours of silence if we do not silence our thoughts, or if we say meaningless words at

8. Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, 6th ed., trans. Leif Sjöberg and W.H. Auden (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 158.

other times? What is the use of listening to, reading, or meditating on the word of God, if it does not shape our will and our actions? What is the use of fasting, if it is a prelude to binge eating, or if we do not learn to discern in our meals what is good and what is bad for us? What is the point of having no contact with those outside our living space—monastery, family, clan or tribe—if, as soon as the opportunity or chance is offered, we do not master the limits and quality of our relationships?

Others Transform Us

Paradoxically, when we juxtapose the terms *stability* and *congregation*, we affirm our stability. Think of Mary at the foot of the cross. Her icon, sung in stupendous choruses of *Stabat Mater*, depends on dwelling in a dynamic reality, one that is on the move. Etymologically, *congregation* evokes a flock called to stay and move together: a living body that is formed to be together with others. Every community, just like every fellowship—every human *societas*—is a reality in which the members are "called together" to move together, to make *syn-odos*, a common path.

But a congregation of people who have freely decided to stay together in the name of faith, an ideal, or a life project, cannot decide to stay in one place. Even if the congregation wanted to and could remain immobile, the world and the others around it would still be moving. The members of that immobile reality would be like the travellers on a stationary train who see the train on the next track leaving. They would find themselves in a reality other than the one they were in before.

It is up to each of us to decide in which direction to move our lives. Having a firm foothold that does not waver or fail is a condition for being able to leap forward, to transform our lives and the lives of others. Moreover, experience reminds us that the flow of life involves changing the vision and understanding we have of reality and of others and transforming the image and perception others have of us. Even if we change nothing in our ideas and behaviour, we are changed, if only by the effects of the passing of time.

Stability in our human community, rooted in a precise reality, together with others while continuing to do the same things, transforms us through the daily change of our companions and our understanding of their presence. As a monk, I am more and more convinced that there is no such thing as a monastic vocation in the abstract. There is no Platonic world where the idea of my monastic vocation is to be found, which can then embody itself in any place called a monastery. No, those who live permanently with other people

have not chosen the monastery because of their relationship with individual monks. They have done so in response to a precise encounter with a specific community, present in a certain place in a specific time. This is a community made up of real people—these people and not others; this place and not another one; in that season of their own and others' lives.

And yet, "that" community is no longer there, even if all those there when I arrived were still alive, even if no others had ever been added. The community is never the same as it was. This is not only because I had an ideal image of it, but because reality changed even if the ideal remained the same. The real community has changed; it has been transformed precisely because the ideal pursued together has *not* changed.

Roots, Wings, . . . and Feet

There is a popular wisdom saying that "the greatest gift parents can give their children is to give them roots and wings." Children must have roots to stay firm, to draw nourishment from the land where they were born and raised, from the cultural humus that formed them, and from the customs and traditions that educated them. They must have wings to fly, to hover over and contemplate the earth from another perspective, to migrate to other places where they can live, and to know new skies and new earth. This is very true and beautiful.

But human beings are neither trees nor birds. Our contact, our adherence to the earth is through our feet. And feet, as we well know, are there to stand upright. They show the dignity of those who bend down before other human beings just to embrace them and help them up. Feet are essential for walking, for moving from one place to another, for leading the whole body to discover new realities, for going out to meet other people, for being a neighbour to those in need. We say, "Let's keep our feet on the ground!" to express the necessary adherence to reality. However, it is precisely because reality changes around us that walking feet are the best to adhere to reality, even in its incessant change.

Conclusion

St Benedict offers us a transformative Christian spirituality, a lesson to be remembered in a time when we are afraid of the term *fidelity* and what it implies: fidelity to people, to commitments made, to promises given; fidelity to those who have the right to expect something from us because of what we have been, and what we have said and done. Whether this person is a lifelong

or a short-term companion, if fidelity is lacking, all trust in one another is lost, the reliability of institutions is undermined, and civil cohesion and human solidarity are shattered. If the vicissitudes of life oblige us to live in mobility and precariousness, then stability, both inner and in relationships, can help us not to lose our way. Stability can help us transform anxious and changing restlessness into fruitful dynamism. Stability enables us to look at ourselves, others, and the world with a renewed gaze, and with the capacity for memory and forgiveness. To persevere and to remain steadfast will mean rediscovering trust and offering it as a small daily gift that allows us to build houses on rock and not on sand. And to walk in the light.

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Witnessing Peace and Love Through a Transformed Spirituality: An Orthodox Approach

Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima

In our times, there is no doubt that there is an awareness of the Christian Churches to constantly struggle finding out new ways to adapt their spiritual tradition to the needs of today's society. Meditations on spirituality and religious works as literature are integrated into the curricula of some educational systems. Many people are seeking meaning for their lives in the rapidly changing world of the 21st century. Others, either ecclesial or public, have been reticent to discuss religious or spiritual issues with their people because of the constitutional principles that separate Church and state. With the appearance of character education, there has been a renewed emphasis on values in various educational systems. These sometimes integrate spirituality into counselling practice and programs, attempting to provide troubled youth with renewed respect for themselves and others.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the importance of spirituality in the Orthodox tradition and how it is transformative within the present reality, in a world where peace and justice are challenged and, in some places, is completely absent. The traditional living spirituality and its relation to the Church life leads us to a transformation and to facilitate a culture and life of respect.

This chapter discusses how the principal faith traditions in our society contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding in our communities today. Spiritual development in humankind sets the tone for humanity's tolerance and respect of others. Many are asking for training programs, which are surveyed to determine if they include an element of spirituality. A review of the research on how peace, including violence prevention techniques and programs, provides the background for the Church's intervention. Finally, suggestions to integrate spirituality into everyday practices and programs to enhance violence prevention are examined.

The phenomenon of violence has become one of the main concerns among humankind.[1] If humanity could respond to this sociological and human preoccupation, then most of the other problems in this world would also find a solution. To understand the issue of violence, one must first understand the role which Christ has given to "violence and desire," and how spirituality could become a transformative instrument of peace and justice.

What is Spirituality for? A Christological Approach

Is spirituality about living in the moment, feeling one with God, asking profound questions, sensing the inner divine? Does it involve cultivating faith and love, discovering inner peace, serving others, following religious commandments, coping with pain and grief, seeking the meaning of life? Can it mean surrendering to the effortless flow of pursuing a just world for all, confirming the essential truths of religion, transcending the ego, receiving guidance from angels or spirits, or finding the sacred in everyday life? These are but a handful of the innumerable ways that people describe the purpose of spirituality. How does all this fit together to answer the question: What is spirituality for?

Generally speaking, spirituality refers to the individual meaning we create about life from our religious education, everyday experiences, and moments of sacred relations and connections. In other words, our spirituality represents the personal conclusions we have reached about the nature and purpose of our existence, God, morality, and the universe. It is not surprising that so many different definitions of spirituality exist.[2] This also helps to explain how spirituality differs from religion to religion and culture to culture.

1. See, for example, the following works by René Girard: *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure,* trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965); *To Double Business Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); *Violence and the Sacred,* trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); *The Scapegoat,* trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World: Research Undertaken in Collaboration with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort,* trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); *Job, the Victim of his People,* trans. Yvonne Freccero (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987). See also: James G. Williams, *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred: Liberation from the Myth of Sanctioned Violence* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991); Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled*: Humanity at the Crossroads (New York: Crossroad, 1995).

2. John Robinson, "Transformative Spirituality," *3rd Act Magazine,* Winter 2019, https://www.3rdactmagazine.com/lifestyle/reinvention-spirituality/transformative-spirituality

Our spirituality often serves as a steppingstone from formal religion—with its history, scriptures, theology, and practices—to the first-hand mystical experience of the divine, where we encounter the revelations of religion for ourselves.

Spirituality is part of humankind's universal religious search. We sense a divine reality or principle within or behind the material world and endeavour to know its function in our lives. Countless mystics, famous and anonymous, have described profound experiences of the sacred, validating this intuition and giving birth to the great religions of the world. We tend to believe that the pain and confusion of life, and indeed all that befalls us, is somehow related to this divine order. That is why, when we are in trouble, atheists and believers alike, often instinctively cry out to one of God's many names. Finally, in the depths of the human personality lies the religious "soul" (*psychê*), the numinous centre of the personality that is itself divine and whispers its secrets in that "still small voice within."

Thus, Christology is fundamentally a hermeneutical task for our spiritual transformation. It attempts to mediate between the Jesus of the past and the present-day belief in Christ. The task of Christology, according to the eminent and well-known Lutheran theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, is to establish the true understanding of Jesus from his history.[3] Christology means going behind the New Testament to the historical Jesus.[4] It also tries to combine scientific knowledge with belief.[5] If the breach between science and faith is too pronounced, theology, and in this context, Christology, has a problem of legitimacy. Christology usually begins with the historical Jesus. According to Jürgen Moltmann, "a universally relevant Christological conception of the incarnate Son of God, of the redeemer or of the exemplary human being cannot be Christian, without an indispensable reference to his unique person and history."[6]

3. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 12.
4. Svein Rise, *The Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Identity and Relevance,* trans. Brian Macneil (Lewiston: Mellen University Press, 1997), 14–15. Pannenberg's Christological position can be seen in his critique of Bultmann who lets existence determine the content of Christological thinking.
5. Rise, *The Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg,* 11.
6. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 103.

Violence and its characteristics are studied by specific expressions within faith and science, particularly with the understanding of Jesus in history.[7] One of these expressions is the interrelatedness with love.[8]

Philosophy and Spiritual Formation

Spirituality cannot be totally separated from religious and ecclesial traditions. Beverly Daniel Tatum, a philosopher and historian,[9] has stated that religion is a formative part of our identity. If this is the case, then a few thoughts must be expressed here about the major religious traditions that influence the development of both our personal and our collective identities, the essence of spirituality.

Christianity provides believers with a set of values and beliefs, an explanation of the mystical or transcendent elements in the world, and a connection with the divine persons or entity. An examination of the predominant Orthodox spirituality is relevant here: that belief includes teachings for peace and harmony as well as defence of one's beliefs and traditions against nonbelievers, at times with violent ramifications.

If religion is a formative part of our identity, as Tatum proposed, then spirituality may not be less but more than religion. It may be a characteristic that does not inhibit identity but transcends it. Common spiritual values of respect, tolerance, and harmony may be a way to reduce violence.

Spiritual formation usually takes place within the family, culture, and religious affiliation. Human beings are influenced by the religion and experience of their intellectual and spiritual inheritance, as Raymond Paloutzian affirms.[10] In Jean Piaget's model of general human development, the larger community, including the "macrocosm," plays a role in the development of religious beliefs and spirituality. It provides responsible relations, which emphasize the values

7. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

8. See James G. Williams, *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred: Liberation from the Myth of Sanctioned Violence* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991; Raymund Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 73.

9. Beverly Daniel Tatum, President Emerita of Spelman College (Atlanta, Georgia, USA), is the author of several books, including *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

10. Raymond F. Paloutzian, *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion,* 3rd ed. (New York: Guilford Publications, 2016).

of respect for others, cooperation, and learning to live in a diverse society in a deep spiritual context.[11] Sometimes values and rules are questioned and rebelled against; but religious values and spirituality may also be questioned. Paloutzian pointed out the paradoxical approach of human beings to religion: they may be more religiously involved, but at the same time more sceptical about traditional or literal religious teachings and traditions.

In the 1970s, another philosopher, Landon Elkind, proposed a cognitive developmental model stating that intellectual needs that are satisfied by religion change with age, and are explained through a series of increasingly complex stages, finally arriving at a pure and healthy spirituality.[12] Elkind described the need for connections between things and events in our present environment. The search for comprehension is the final stage that takes on a specific role in our search for spiritual nourishment. As spirituality develops, religion—through traditions, dogmas, doctrines, and theological perspectives—explains aspects of life and the world that are not readily understood.

Spirituality unites the human being's inner meaning and beliefs with outside relationships such as a specific set of religious doctrines, group membership, a special mentor, nature, or a supreme entity. Two social factors greatly influence the religious and spiritual development of adolescents. The peer environment, which sometimes includes cults and cultures, may be very influential. A second critical social influence is the spiritual environment, which can promote non-violent values and a culture of respect.

God of Love and God's Love

Many of us imagine God as we want Him to be. To our desires, we add expectations. We expect God to encourage us when we are afraid, to comfort us when we are hurt, to forgive us when we fail, and to give us what we think we need.

What is love? Love is a relationship with dimensions. It is the strongest chord between two people. First Corinthians gives us the definition of love: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it

11. Peter Sutherland, *Cognitive Development Today: Piaget and His Critics* (London: Paul Chapman, 1992).
12. Landon D. C. Elkind, "A Case Study in Formalizing Contingent a priori Claims," *Res Philosophica* 97, no. 4 (October 2020): 571–91.

keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away."[13]

If this is the definition of love, I believe God is the only one who loves like this. True love is undoubtedly the noblest thing on earth because it is a reflection of God Himself. Human beings love, but God *is* love. Love is His very nature and essence. Deep down in the hearts of all humankind is a hunger for God. This longing itself is a proof that God loves us.

The nature of love is forgiveness, not punishment. Therefore, any religion that preaches punishment for sins is not a religion of love. We justify punishment for the mistakes committed because we think that anybody who has made a mistake should be punished. This conviction does not arise from the perspective of love. Therefore, those who fight for a religion that believes in punishment, or in killing those who do not believe in their religion and worldview, are doing wrong. Once they recognize this truth, they will stop fighting and violence will come to an end.

Many, like Pullikattil Simon, affirm that the cause of violence in the world, other than the desire for food and lodging, is "religion."[14] Thousands believe that their religious affiliation is the only true religion, and that all the others are false. They are willing to kill and die for their religion, but the irony is that their own religion tells them not to kill. How can we prevent religious mania from being the cause of world violence?

An atheist once wrote upon a child's slate the words "God is nowhere," but the innocence of the child was triumphing over the unbeliever and read it as "God is now here." How true it is! He is truly and indeed omnipresent. God's infinite love is seen in that a sinner is not abandoned. Instead, God loves the sinner. He hates sin, but He loves sinners. God has proved His love in so many ways, but mainly in the words of John 3:16, which I feel is the

13. 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. This and all other scripture passages in this chapter are from the New International Version of the Bible.

14. See Pullikattil Simon, *Life and Death. Self-Improvement: Spirituality,* December 6, 2007, https://ezinearticles.com/?Life-and-Death&id=866929. How can we overcome the fear of death? To all of us, life is an unknown quantity which often will end in desolation, agony, and sorrow. Yet we like to talk about life. But when we think of speaking about death, we are horrified and mortified. Pullikattil Simon is a retired research microbiologist, philanthropist, and author of many articles and two books: *The Missing Piece to Paradise* (2000) and *The Philosopher's Notebook* (2008).

most valuable sentence in the Holy Bible: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

The greatest power in the world is not the hydrogen bomb, but the redeeming love of God. The hydrogen bomb may destroy the whole world, but only the redeeming love of God can make it anew. John 15:12 says: "Love each other as I have loved you." This clearly shows that He loves us and above all He is the only One who loves us unconditionally. His promise is that "whoever comes to me, I will never drive away" (John 6:37).

The Power of Love-And the Presence of Violence

There is no doubt that love is what God would like to get worked into our souls and personalities.[15] Even non-believers, atheists, and agnostics can see the power of love and its ability to change people and lives when it is properly lived out.

The patristic tradition and its literature have made innumerable statements on the power of love—especially the special love that occurs between a man and a woman, with God, in an *eros* or *agapé* (love) relationship. The quality of love is truly universal, as it literally transcends peoples, nations, and religions. Love is the universal language of this world, and people from all different walks of life recognize it and understand the power that is in it.

So, if the quality of love is recognized by all peoples and all nations, why is it that throughout the course of our human history there have been so many wars, so much hatred, so much crime, and so much inhumanity and violence against our fellow human beings and neighbours? If everyone knows what love is, then how could so many people commit evil and atrocious acts? Why do people have to rob, rape, kill, plunder, and steal from one another? No matter what one's religious beliefs and ideologies may be, there is simply no excuse for the horrible, barbaric murders, assaults, abductions, robberies, and rapes that are committed daily. Even Holy Scriptures tell us that the love of many will grow cold in the latter days—meaning that things will actually go from bad to worse in future years.

As Christians we all know that part of the answer as to why human beings cannot love one another as God would like us to, is due to the fallen natures that we have all been born with as a result of the curse of Adam and Eve. That

15. This was affirmed by Michael Bradley, of Bible Knowledge Ministries, n.d., http://www.bible-knowledge.com.

is why Jesus had to come to die and be resurrected for all of us, because we have all sinned and have fallen far short of the glory of our God.

However, even "born-again" believers have problems in walking in the quality of love to the degree that God intends for us. We all know that God expects us to walk in His love, but we still have problems in loving our God, our families, our friends, and even ourselves to the degree and intensity that He would like us to. If we all have the Holy Spirit living and operating in us, then why is it that we cannot seem to draw more of His love into our personalities?

Too many Christians are trying to walk the quality of love operating out of their own strength, their own emotions, and their own flesh. Of course, God the Father wants us to do the best we can to put this quality into the core of our personalities, so as to overcome violence and live peacefully. But we have all been born with these fallen, imperfect, and sinful natures. This means that we are not capable of walking in perfect love in our own natural strength, no matter how hard we try. So, what is the answer then?

It seems that the answer lies in the understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. There is only one way for believers to truly walk in the love of God. This is to learn to draw that love from the Holy Spirit, who releases His love to us, and to be willing to enter into a true sanctification process with the Lord, where God starts the process of making you holy, as He and His Son Jesus are. There is no other way! There are no shortcuts that you can take to get this accomplished. It is only when the love of God Himself starts to flow into us personally that we can even begin to love God, love ourselves, and love other people to the degree and intensity that God would like from us.

Once the Holy Spirit begins this sanctification process in our lives, He will start to transmit his grace and mercy into our hearts and lives. Once the Holy Spirit starts to transmit His quality of love into us, then we can act against the devil forces of violence. However, in order to reach this level of love, repentance, *metanoia*, and forgiveness are absolutely needed.

It is one thing to "say" that we forgive someone; it is quite another to actually do it. Forgiveness is not a state of mind; it is a state of the heart. Being able to forgive someone from the bottom of our hearts is not something that comes to us naturally. To forgive we need to remember how God has forgiven us. When we grasp the depth and breadth of God's incredible love and forgiveness toward us, we are motivated to forgive others. We understand who we really are before God; we are just as wretched as everyone else. Only

our pride and self-righteousness will cause us think otherwise. Taking a serious inventory of our own sins will help to put things into perspective. The challenge that we face is to bring our hearts to a point where we can accomplish acts of repentance. God is kind, compassionate, and abounding in love. He does not treat us as our sins deserve.

For a Life-Centred Spirituality: In Dialogue with Youth

In the new millennium we already experience unprecedented disasters, sometimes caused by nature. These tragedies add to the sense of meaninglessness and uncertainty that human beings, and especially youth, are facing—often as a result of human-made tragedies, like wars, violence, poverty, and unemployment. These are times when people question, pray, and yearn for spirituality.[16]

Indeed, spirituality is a word used frequently and widely today, in different contexts and with different connotations. In Christian life, spirituality means being with God. This is the very meaning and purpose of Christian life. God became human in Jesus of Nazareth to be with us. The evangelist describes Jesus Christ as *Emmanuel*, meaning "God is with us." In fact, in Christ, God became like us and for us to restore His fallen image in human beings. Through the incarnation, God recovered the authentic humanity in human beings. In Christ, God became the true life of the world.

Christian spirituality invites us to acknowledge Christ in word and deed as the centre of our life. Christian spirituality challenges us to follow Jesus Christ as the only way of our life. Christian spirituality is life-centred. It is rooted in Christ. The Christ-event is the recreation of life. Hence, whoever is in Christ is endowed with a new quality of life, with "fullness" (John 1:16). As Christians, a life-centred spirituality must undergird our reflections and actions. Life-centred spirituality must guide our life in a world full of life-destroying forces of violence.

However, millions of people lose their lives each year because of HIV/AIDS; millions of children die because of hunger and poverty; millions of people are killed each year due to natural disasters. We are all shocked watching on our TV screens the horrible images of people, men and women, children and elderly, dying in Africa, particularly in Sudan, because of genocide, HIV/AIDS, and malnutrition; or in Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, and Bangkok because of tsunami disasters.

16. Aram I (Keshishian), *The Christian Witness at the Crossroads in the Middle East* (Antelias Lebanon: Armenian Catholicosate Of Cilicia, 2002).

Human beings, who are endowed with God's gift of life, are every day and everywhere destroying life itself in its human and ecological manifestations. Life as the supreme gift of God must be respected, preserved, and enhanced. This is a foundation of our Christian faith.

Many of us feel that we are living in precarious times. This perception is true and the reason it is so is because Jesus destroyed the mechanism of sacred violence once and for all. When we resort to sacred violence anyway, we split society into small groups, each united around one victim or a group of victims. Since these acts of "redemptive violence" no longer "work," violence escalates.

It seems, and this should be our expectation, that our youth in all parts of the world will sustain and enrich their lives by the spirituality that is rooted in the Holy Scriptures, experienced and witnessed for centuries by the Church of Christ. The world of today offers many kinds of "spiritualities" with attractive names. Our youth are called to neglect the false "spiritualities" that cause moral decay, endanger identity, and destroy community. False spiritualities abuse religious principles and promote violence and death. They are listening to many voices coming from various cultural and ethnic situations and traditions. But the main thing they are struggling to find for their daily life is the sincere voice of the Church explaining how to live a spiritual life without violence and in peace.

The good news is that God continues to gather all of us to the Kingdom of God's peace through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the *paraclete*, is our advocate, our lawyer for the defence. We have, of course, to realize in the depths of our hearts, with God's grace, that the Holy Spirit is the advocate of *everybody*. Following Jesus means becoming an advocate of all of God's people. God does not exclude anybody from the Kingdom.

Moral Perfection is Life in Christ

We return to the quality of our desires. A sociological analysis of human behaviour suggests that when the desires of two or more people become entangled in one another, conflict is the usual result. This conflict is not inevitable, however. It was possible for Jonathan to desire the kingship for David rather than for himself.[17] The more our human desires are enmeshed in the desires of Christ, the more we desire that the life God offers to each one of us be given to all other people. Then, and only then will we have the courage to model ourselves according to Jesus, who laid down his life in the faith that

17. See 1 Samuel 20.

the heavenly Father desired: life in abundance.

Orthodox spirituality has been described throughout the centuries as life in Christ, striving for moral and spiritual perfection. The mystical union in Orthodox spirituality is the communion of the person with God. Orthodox spirituality envisions the meeting of the human person with the divine Person in a mystical way. Spiritual persons are those who purify themselves of all worldly and moral defects in order to be united with the love of Christ. The mystical experience takes place in this world, yet the cause, God, is from beyond the material world. Orthodox spirituality, as well as the whole thinking of the Church, is based on the revelation found in the Old and New Testaments. Studying the patristic interpretation of the Christian truths, one can see the mystical vision of the divine energies of the Christian, experiencing the divine presence internally, envisioning the uncreated light and energies of God.

The Holy Eucharist as the Sacrament of Union with God

It is especially through the sacrament of the holy Eucharist that we experience the mystical union with our Lord. Christ says: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). Frequent participation in the most blessed sacrament of the holy Eucharist is the preeminent means for our salvation and spiritual perfection. Jesus said: "For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink" (John 6:55). Thus, Christ's statement makes clear that the "body and blood" of our Lord are necessary for our spiritual perfection. The Eucharist, therefore, is not received merely as an act of obedience to the command of God or of the Church; it is especially an antidote to sin and death. It is a prerequisite for the perfection in our life in Christ.

An important interpretation by Saint John Chrysostom makes this clear.[18] St Paul does not speak of participation, but of communion, because he wishes to express a closer union. For, in receiving holy Communion, we do not only participate in Christ, but we unite in him. In fact, as this body is united with Christ, so by the bread we are united with Christ. Paul says that we are identical with this body. For what is this bread? It is the body of Christ. And what do we become by receiving this bread? The body of Christ: not many bodies, but only one.

18. Philip Schaff, ed., *Saint Chrysostom's Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, vol. 12, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007).

The holy Eucharist serves as the bond of unity in love. The holy Eucharist unites us with Christ and with one another. This is the makeup of the mystical body of Christ: The Church. This concept of the Church as the mystical body of Christ is very dear to our Orthodox tradition because it expresses the reality of Christ in the world and the unity of the Church, which is real only when Christ is the central figure. The Orthodox Church strongly emphasizes the fact that the mystical union with Christ is a reality in His Church. The whole life of St Paul was "a perpetual system of morals in action."[19] Only because of his personal commitment to Christ and his mystical encounter with the divine Lord did St Paul attain spiritual perfection.

Conclusion

Orthodox spirituality differs distinctly from any other "spirituality," be it an Eastern or Western type.[20] There can be no confusion among the various spiritualities because Orthodox spirituality is God-centred, not human-centred.

In concluding these reflections, we can see that spirituality in the Orthodox Church means the everyday activity of life in communion with God. The term spirituality refers not merely to the activity of the human spirit alone, mind, heart, and soul, but it refers as well to the whole of the human's life, as inspired and guided by the Spirit of God. Every act of a Christian must be a spiritual act. Every thought must be spiritual, every word, every deed, every activity of the body, every action of the person. This means that all that a person thinks, says, and does must be inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit so that the will of God, the Father, may be accomplished as revealed and taught by Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

19. George C. Papademetriou, "An Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality" https://www.goarch.org/introduction-articles/-/asset_publisher/zg5D5ENaCTK9/content/an-introduction-to-orthodox-spirituality, 5.

20. Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) of Nafpaktos and Aghiou Vlassiou, "The Difference between Orthodox Spirituality and Other Traditions," in *Orthodox Spirituality: A Brief Introduction,* trans. Effie Mavromichali (Levadia, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, Levadia, 1996).

19

Touching the Wounds:

Trauma and the Transforming Experience of Footwashing in the Tradition of the Peace Churches

Fernando Enns

Pandemic Experiences—The Need for Physical Proximity

Keep your distance! Wear a protective mask! Do not sing together! Better to stay at home! Yes, we have learnt to follow these important rules during the COVID-19 pandemic. A close friend's terrible experience of being infected by the virus and spending weeks in intensive care taught me how serious this is. Two colleagues at the University in Amsterdam have been infected as well, still struggling for full recovery months later. In addition, the shocking news from relatives in Brazil—the country where I was born—makes me very angry. A lot of deaths could have been avoided if politicians had not downplayed the high risk of the virus, refusing any care for the impoverished. Reports from friends in India and the USA keep reminding me: People are dying! A student from Colombia cannot come to Europe to study with us, because now that his family members have lost their jobs, he has to contribute to their financial survival. In all of this, one thing has become very clear: This pandemic is further deepening the rift between the privileged and the underprivileged in the society in which I live and globally. At this moment we cannot even estimate the full extent of the virus' impact. Will we listen to what the "subaltern" are saying to our ecumenical institutions?[1]

Living in a privileged situation myself, I have experienced the COVID-19 lockdowns mostly as a restriction that also bears gifts. I had not witnessed the overwhelming beauty of spring so intensely in a long time. I have enjoyed not being on the road all the time, spending much more quality time at home instead. I can easily meet my colleagues from the university via video conference. I have also become used to teaching online—and the students

1. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern speak?," in *Reflections on the History of India,* ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Colombia University Press, 2010), 21–80.

are engaging with it wonderfully, being so creative with all the digital tools at hand. In addition, I have been able to participate in beautiful services from different churches every Sunday, comfortably from my home, via livestream. And even my extended family, who live scattered all over the place, now meet more often than before, as we arrange family video calls. In fact, I feel very privileged. I really cannot complain, staying connected virtually. I even wonder, is there something missing? Do we need physical proximity? Touch?

In our privileged societies, the elderly have suffered a lot. Those living in retirement and nursing homes have said: "I miss feeling the touch of a hand so much." Caregivers report that the condition of people with dementia deteriorates without bodily touch. On the other end of the age spectrum, young people are frustrated because they cannot meet their friends. They miss parties and dancing. School children miss the gentle and comforting touch of their teacher when they fail at a project or when they struggle with rising frustration at home. And, despite the wonders of the online world, I sense a huge fatigue from my students after more than a year of being restricted to online meetings. When physical proximity is missing, it seems we are stripped of a major part of what makes us human.

If spirituality is *not* restricted to an individual, intellectual exercise, but has a social, even political dimension, our bodies come into play. In fact, I have come to believe that physical proximity is the precondition for spirituality—if is true that spirituality can be transformative for addressing the injustices around us. And yet, I sense a deep neglect of the body, especially in the Protestant traditions, and most prominently in Western theology.

I suggest that we explore this dimension anew by revisiting the celebration of the sacraments of the church since the bodily experience is an essential part of receiving the sacraments. More specifically, I want to examine the ritual of footwashing as an example of a Christian practice that can nurture a *transformative* spirituality—by touching "the other" in a specific way.[2]

2. I will not enter the deeper theological discussion on the interpretation of sacraments here. Ecumenical debates have helped to foster convergence among the different understandings of *sacrament* and *church ordinance*. See, for example, *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition,* Faith and Order Paper No. 210 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2011).

The "Sacrament" of Footwashing as a Peace Practice —Lost and Rediscovered

To engage in footwashing we must meet physically! Footwashing is a ritual that is based on touching one another and being touched by the other. This might also be the reason why it is lost in most Western, intellectual circles. Is it too intimate? Does it make us feel too exposed? Are we uncomfortable about smells from another body? In the part of the world where I live, a lot of people would feel insecure, even ashamed, to practice footwashing, especially if they had not previously experienced it in a safe, liturgical space. I understand that.

Yet, footwashing is also one of the most common rituals mentioned in the New Testament, and it has been practised in many cultures. In first-century Palestine, it was common for hosts to wash guests' feet as an act of welcoming them into their homes. Jesus introduced a deeper meaning to this rite.[3] He invited his disciples, and us, to follow his example:

> It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."
>
> "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered,

3. See Luke 7:44–46: "Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.'" And, as recounted in 1 Timothy 5:9, 10, the Apostle Paul taught that washing the feet of "the Lord´s people" was a qualification for a widow's acceptance into the church widows' group. These passage and the others in this chapter are from the New International Version of the Bible.

> "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.
>
> When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:1–17).

Especially among monks, the custom of footwashing, "in the name of Christ," became widely practiced as a form of hospitality. St Benedict's Rule referred to the hospitality function of footwashing, in addition to communal footwashing, as a prescription for humility.[4] It was also practiced in the circles of the Radical Reformation movement in the 16th century—the fertile humus for what became the Historic Peace Churches: the Mennonites, Amish, Quakers, and the Church of the Brethren.[5] As a sacramental act of humility, it fit well with these groups' inclination toward communalism and their emphasis on self-effacing egalitarianism among their members.[6] The so-called "Anabaptists" preferred the Gospel of John's explanation of the mystic union with Christ, which they experienced in celebrating the last supper as an *agape* meal, as well as in the mutual washing of feet. Both rituals became paradigmatic expressions of practicing the love of Christ.[7] Menno Simons (1496–1561) mentions the practice at least twice in his writings. More explicitly, Dirk Philips (1504–68) provides detailed teaching on footwashing

4. *The Rule of Benedict,* trans. Leonard Doyle, Chapters 51–73, http://archive.osb.org/rb/text/toc.html.

5. Fernando Enns, *The Peace Church and the Ecumenical Community: Ecclesiology and the Ethics of Nonviolence* (Kitchener/Ontario: Pandora Press; Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007). Note: Traditionally, Quakers have not practiced footwashing.

6. William Gay, "The Origin and Historical Practice of Foot-Washing as a Religious Rite in the Christian Church," (MA thesis, Columbia University, 1947). See also Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, "Feetwashing," by Harold S. Bender and William Klassen (1989), https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Feetwashing.

7. John D. Rempel, "Abendmahl und Fußwaschung in der Mennonitischen Tradition," in *Die Mennoniten*, ed. Fernando Enns (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming).

as an ordinance of the church.[8] Among Dutch Mennonites, footwashing became a common practice in the 16th and early 17th centuries. The first confession of faith in this tradition to mention footwashing is the Waterlander Confession (1577), which instructs that footwashing is to be done most of all for visitors from a distance, particularly refugees. The Amish who originated in the 1690s in Switzerland remain fully committed to footwashing to this day. Some churches were even built with anterooms to practice the ritual of mutual footwashing.[9] For those congregations that have preserved the practice, footwashing is often observed immediately following the lord´s supper. Among others, it occurs at a preparatory service on the day preceding communion.

I was raised in the Mennonite tradition. Yet, the ritual of mutual footwashing had long been lost in my branch of our global community.[10] Now, in my home congregation in Hamburg, Germany, we celebrate it again, at least on Maundy Thursday, the day before Good Friday. I am most thankful for having rediscovered this ritual, and for practicing it again, not only within my own church but in diverse ecumenical settings as well. I observe that the ritual is being rediscovered by many. In 2016, Pope Francis washed and kissed the feet of Muslim, Christian, and Hindu refugees, both men and women, during a Maundy Thursday mass with asylum seekers at a shelter in Castelnuovo di Porto, outside Rome. What a valuable illustration.[11] Will the power of this sacrament transform the reality of stranded refugees on the shores of Europe? To do so, transformation must start with those involved in the ritual. To become healers, we need first to be healed.

8. Dirk Philips, *Enchiridion, or Hand Book of the Christian Doctrine and Religion: Compiled (by the Grace of God) from the Holy Scriptures for the Benefit of All Lovers of the Truth,* trans. Abram B. Kolb (Aylmer, Ont.: Pathway Publishing Corp., 1966), 388–90.

9. Global Anabaptists Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, "Feetwashing."

10. "In the Hamburg congregation under Dutch influence the question arose in 1628 whether footwashing should be maintained or not; see *Inv. Arch. Amst.* 1, 576" (Global Anabaptists Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, "Feetwashing").

11. Elahe Izadi, "Pope Francis Washes the Feet of Muslim Migrants, Says We Are 'Children of the Same God,'" Washington Post, 25 March 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/03/25/children-of-the-same-god-pope-francis-washes-the-feet-of-muslim-migrants.

"Differently-Abled"—Accepting Bodily Pain to Touch the Other in *Agape* Love

One of the regular meetings where I have introduced this ritual is at the annual gathering of Mennonite theology students in Europe. This is a theological conference, including great interaction, lectures, and lively discussions. Yet, when the moment comes to practice mutual footwashing, the spirit of the meeting changes completely. It happens every time, and every time I am overwhelmed by what this body praxis does to me, to my way of relating to others. It is an experience of transformation, every time anew.

During one of the latest meetings, I started the liturgy, simply, as always, with music, and a trinitarian formula to affirm that we were meeting in the presence of the creative, the reconciling, and the healing Divine. We sat in a circle. At the centre was a Bible, a cross, a candle, a bucket of water, and a towel. Everyone left their shoes at the entrance. After reading from John 13 and praying aloud, I picked up the bucket and the towel, and knelt in front of my neighbour. We began with eye-contact to check whether we were in agreement that this ritual would happen. Cautiously, the person put their feet into the bucket, and I poured some water over them. I washed the feet, then dried them, and rose again. We exchanged eye contact for a second time. There was peace between us. Then my neighbour took the bucket and turned to their neighbor, and so on. It was a slow procedure, with quiet music in the background. Everyone seemed to feel safe.

This time, a student with a walking disability took part. I had not thought about this. While his feet were washed, I said to myself, he will not be able to kneel down to wash the next person's feet! So, I slowly approached him, bowing down, softly explaining, that he did not have to wash his neighbour's feet. He looked at me calmly, insisting that he was going to try. He got up from his chair, which always took some time, and then slowly made his way to the floor. Everyone could see that this was quite painful for him. Finally, he sat on the floor before the other—kneeling was impossible for him—and washed the next person's feet in total peace. The ceremony continued.

It was a remarkable sign of accepting pain in order to serve the other, a transformative moment during the ritual of footwashing that I will never forget. Besides teaching me that I still need to learn so much about creating inclusive liturgies, the example of this student spoke to me. Participating in footwashing involves more than letting go of pride and superiority by kneeling down in front of the other. This student´s example demonstrated

that touching the other in order to practise *agape* love may come at a cost, here even bodily pain. It was more than a symbolic act.

Without physical proximity, we would not have experienced the transformative power of the ritual. We nurture a spirituality that dives into the suffering love of Christ, not as an end in itself, but in order that we may live that love among each other, and so that our social relations may be transformed.

Touching the Wounds of El Garzál

The ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace invites us all to a new, embodied spiritual experience in order to more fully relate to one another in Christlike ways.[12] When the World Council of Churches started this journey in 2013, we borrowed wisdom and words from Dorothee Soelle.[13] Soelle explores three interrelated dimensions of a mystical journey; the *via positiva* (to celebrate the gifts of creation), the *via negativa* (to visit the wounds), and the *via transformativa* (to transform the injustices). "Mystical spirituality of creation will very likely move deeper and deeper into the dark night of being delivered into the hands of the principalities and powers that dominate us," Soelle explains in her book *Silent Cry*.[14] We pilgrims of the global ecumenical family must not allow ourselves to be unrealistic about the traumas beaten into bodies by exploitation and violence. Boldly, we stated, "The pilgrimage will lead us to the locations of ugly violence and injustices. We intend to look for God's incarnated presence in the midst of suffering, exclusion and discrimination."[15]

True pilgrimage involves bodily presence, moving from one´s own comfort zone to spaces unknown and unpredictable. Some years ago, I traveled to Colombia with the students in our Master-program on "Peace, Trauma, and Religion."[16] We set out to meet with people who are exposed to direct

12. See Susan Durber and Fernando Enns, eds., *Walking Together: Theological Reflections on the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2018).
13. "An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace," 8 July 2014, World Council of Churches, www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace.
14. Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance,* trans. Barbara Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 92.
15. WCC, "Invitation to the Pilgrimage," 3.
16. This is a one-year master's degree program offered by the Faculty of Religion and Theology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands. See https://www.religionpeacejustice.com/peace-trauma-and-religion.

violence. In Bogotá, we met Mennonite communities, representatives of peace organizations, politicians, and people who had fled from the countryside to escape threats to their life, now living in the liminal space of the mega city. We heard about murder, abduction, rape, land theft, flight—and the challenge to forgive in order to make reconciliation possible after 60 years of civil war. There was hardly anyone who had not suffered wounds. Many were and are traumatized.

As we were about to leave for El Garzál, a remote community of *campesinos*—farmer families, whose identity is attached to the land that provides their living—we heard that it would be too dangerous to go. Armed men dressed in black had appeared in the village again, and the community did not know exactly what they wanted. This is nothing new for the inhabitants of the village. Because they refuse to cede their ancestral land to a large landowner who claims ownership over their property, some have been murdered. At times, guerrilla groups have offered to protect the *campesinos*, but only if residents join their armed struggle—an offer the *campesinos* have bravely refused as well. At other times, government troops have come and devastated parts of the village, accusing the *campesinos* of complicity with the guerrillas. To this day, the *campesinos* have non-violently resisted all of them: armed men, guerrilla groups and government troops alike. Instead, they hold public worship services while taking turns spending nights as human shields around the house of the community's pastor. "If they want to kill him, they'll have to kill all of us," is their bold strategy. Many of *the campesinos* cannot read nor write. But they know the stories of their Bible. They pray a lot and stick together. They have offered hospitality to everyone who has come to their village but have withstood the temptation to join the cycles of violence around them. In court, they continue to fight for their right to the land their ancestors farmed.[17]

Given the dangerous situation in the village, our group made the decision to meet halfway, in a place only known to us. Because of the presence of the armed men, the pastor, Salvador, and some of the most threatened villagers had to hide again anyway. We sat tightly packed on chairs, old sofas, and the floor. The room was narrow, but the wind blew pleasantly through the open windows and doors. The *campesinos* told us their traumatic stories, some of them used Bible verses, one woman sang a song on her guitar, others had tears

17. For more information on the spiritual life and the non-violent struggle, see Andrés Pacheco Lozano, "Towards a Theology of Reconciliation: A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace to Heal Broken Relations in Colombia," (PhD diss., Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2020).

running down their cheeks. It was a long Saturday afternoon that ended with a shared meal and many small conversations. New friendships were built, and there was laughter, too.

The following Sunday morning we planned to celebrate a church service together. Footwashing seemed to be the most appropriate way to express mutual appreciation and fellowship in the presence of Christ. What else could we have done? After all, this ritual would allow us to express care for these most vulnerable sisters and brothers. When the moment came to celebrate the footwashing rite in the liturgy, I knelt down in front of Salvador; he hesitantly placed his dirty feet in the blue plastic tub. I gently wet his feet, then cautiously placed them on my leg and rubbed them with the clean cloth. I took my time. When I looked up at him, I saw his tears. My gaze also clouded. He reached out his hand to me and helped me up. We hugged and blessed each other: "Peace be with you!" Others in the group followed suit. During the long prayer that followed, Salvador gave thanks for the gift, that we had "touched their wounds." He believed that through this touch they could be healed.

There is deep meaning associated with including the experience of our bodies consciously in the celebration of the sacraments. Its effect is not something to be grasped only intellectually. We need to feel the touch of someone; we need to touch the other. We need our bodies to kneel down and be raised again. We need our bodies to allow others to serve us in *agape* love. Physical proximity is essential to experience this ritual as transformative—in order to transform. If this is true, then spirituality shall not neglect the body, but rather learn to cherish it as that part of our identity which serves as a resonance space of a truly transformative experience.

Revelation through Physical Proximity—the Risen One is the Wounded

A text in the New Testament points explicitly to a physical encounter. In John 20:19–29, Jesus, the risen One, does not join the disciples by video conference. Instead, he enters bodily in their midst. And even more, Thomas, traditionally called the "doubter," demands that he must touch Jesus, otherwise he cannot believe. Obviously, more happened here than a livestream could ever provide:

> On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came

> and stood among them and said, "**Peace be with you!"** After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.
>
> Again Jesus said, **"Peace be with you!** As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."
>
> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."
>
> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"[18]

Since my footwashing experience with the students, and in Colombia, I read the text differently! The disciples had barricaded themselves behind closed doors on Easter Sunday evening, fearful and traumatized by the brutal violence inflicted on Jesus, their friend and rabbi, on the cross. Then Christ appears to them with the words, "Peace be with you!" And he shows them his wounds! Why? The disciples are delighted to see their Jesus, but do they really "get" who is standing before them? Jesus has to repeat again: "Peace be with you"! 'Wounded, I send you, but the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, will be with you.'

A week later the disciples are still hiding, locked behind closed doors. Thomas, who was absent from the first meeting, is now present. The risen One turns directly to Thomas and invites him to put his fingers in the wounds. The reaction of Thomas is an unequivocal profession of faith! It is only as he touches Jesus' wounds that he recognizes Jesus: the risen One is the Wounded! The Wounded is the risen One! "My Lord and my God!" he exclaims.

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18. In our Bible translations, the pericope ends with these words: "Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" Some commentators, however, claim that this is a later addition. Emphasis above added by author.

In the original Greek text, "wounds" are called τραύμα (trauma), indicating that someone is beaten by violence and injustice. According to Shelly Rambo, traumas are "encounters with death."[19] They are experiences beyond our ordinary comprehension, causing us to fundamentally question what we previously accepted as true and certain. Those of us who have experienced war and direct violence know this. Everyone who loses a loved one, suddenly, by accident, illness, or a pandemic virus, knows it. Trauma is what remains, even when the danger is over. It is "inscribed" in our bodies. After a traumatic experience, life and death are no longer simply in opposition to each other. No, after trauma, life remains constantly threatened, and vulnerable. Living with trauma means standing between life and death. And it seems to be precisely here, at the edges of life, this liminal space, at the limits of our comprehension, that we discover the true Christ. The question of God's presence—or absence—is radically posed in suffering.

While practicing the ritual of footwashing, I saw with new eyes: Salvador's wounds are Christ's wounds. The wounded, the violated, and the abducted of El Garzál—their 'traumas' are Christ's wounds. When I touched the *campesino's* wounds, I understood, perhaps as Thomas did, that the risen One meets me in this very way. If I want to confess Christ, I cannot fearfully close myself off, protecting myself from the pain, and keeping the wounded at a distance. By touching the people of El Garzál, by putting my finger "in their wounds," I recognize that God chose to be vulnerable in Christ, exposing Godself to violence in order to assure each and every traumatized person: "I not only perceive your wounds, I bear them, I make them my own." Christ does not cover these wounds with shallow consolations; nor does Christ simply show solidarity with the wounded. Christ incorporates the wounds into his own body so that the wounded may be resurrected in and with Him. Their traumas are no longer concealed. Instead, they become visible and tangible in the resurrection—just as Jesus' wounds were resurrected with him. If the wounds are not touched, they remain unhealed. If the traumas are not resurrected, then the resurrection is transfigured into a bloodless and bodiless event that cannot really be "grasped."

19. See, for more on this phenomenon: Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2017); Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

My Wounds too—and the Wounds of the "Subaltern"

I live in a context of supposed security. We have set ourselves up nicely in our homes. Our church in Hamburg holds beautiful services. Yet often, like the disciples, it seems to be that we meet behind closed doors. This is no obstacle for the crucified risen Christ, however. He enters into our midst and exposes also *our* hidden and suppressed wounds, especially when we share the sacraments. These wounds are not healed with trivializing words, mild gestures, or hasty actions: acts that would be too superficial, like surface bandages on deep wounds. With this type of covering, our wounds simply break open again at the next opportunity, with blood, pain, and possibly violence.

By recognizing the presence of Christ among us—the wounded risen One—the wounds of the other, even those of the "subaltern" may speak to us. We become aware of the wounds inflicted by the latent and structural racism in our society, by the subtle anti-semitism, xenophobia, by the (non) secret stigmatization of the other, and by the fitful clinging to our way of life at the expense of the other, the subaltern. In our daily lives, we manage to keep "them" at a distance, especially those at the outer borders of our European countries. The traumatized refugee child, unattended teenager, the tired and horrified adults, numbering in the thousands, they are stranded on the liminal peripheries of our region of the world. We refuse to be exposed to their wounds and vulnerabilities, because their wounds reveal our fragility, our fears, our indifference. When we celebrate Christ´s presence in our midst, we touch His wounds and recognize, that His wounds are in fact the wounds of the other, the subaltern.

Since I touched the *campesinos* in Colombia and washed Salvador's feet, I have felt myself, like Thomas, encouraged to put my fingers into wounds. And now I know again why I do not want to go on living as I have done in these virtual, disembodied pandemic times, without any touch. I recognize, I confess, with my body. The traditional interpretation of "doubting Thomas" is that he was the one who had to be taught that he should believe without seeing. But this does not invite me to see that the risen One carries the traumas of all the wounded of this world on his own body—yes, including my own traumas. Revisiting John 20 through a bodily experience of footwashing, it has become clear to me *how* God is present in the liminal, traumatic spaces: as the resurrected, visibly wounded One. In this transformative experience, I have begun to understand why meditating on the wounds of Christ has been so important to the spirituality of the mystics of all times.

The risen Christ bears the wounds of violence and injustices, exposing them for everyone to see. He invites us to put our fingers in these wounds, to be healed and to become healers. "Receive the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you!" says the wounded, risen One. And I confess with Thomas: "My Lord and my God!

20

A Pentecostal Pilgrimage toward (Racial) Justice?

Tanya Riches

Pentecostalism's founders include people of colour. Globally, Pentecostalism is ethnically and racially diverse. However, the movement has resisted analysis of race or of the power structures present in its worship space.

The year 2020 cracked open the picture of global Pentecostalism, revealing its inequalities. This had the effect of repeated earthquakes, bringing grief to many communities as fractures opened and became clear. As the January bushfires burned hot and bright in Australia where I live, Pentecostal youth mourned the neglected art of creation care. In March, the pandemic forced state borders to close, and we were suddenly divided by state legislative and administrative boundaries. Church services were forced to migrate online with different technological platforms separating congregation members. Large meetings were designated by health officials and the media as potential "super spreader events." The itinerant preachers were grounded. Global conferences were postponed, and then cancelled.

Into this lockdown world, a video of George Floyd's death was shared. Following this, the hashtag #BlackOutTuesday took hold globally on social media. Thousands who had never before spoken out on #blacklivesmatter initiatives suddenly posted online in recognition of a need for justice for black lives, and they followed up by attending various types of protests. Yes, 2020 will be counted as the year that even white megachurch Pentecostals took to the streets. While some critique the Black Lives Matter movement, many have found themselves on a spiritual journey with Jesus related to the pursuit of racial justice.

This chapter proposes that Pentecostals can frame this engagement with racial justice in their own tradition's terms by reclaiming a revised practice of lament. Lament was common in early Pentecostalism. In fact, it still features today in parts of contemporary Pentecostal life. In Korea, for

example, Pentecostals seek the release of *Han* through weeping in prayer.[1] British Black and Caribbean Pentecostals speak of capturing the groaning of the oppressed.[2] Samuel Solivan describes Hispanic Pentecostals in New York using portable cassette players filled with praise tunes to acknowledge and counter their existential realities of poverty.[3] Even the Pentecostal emphasis on healing has been proposed by scholars to be an indictment of the failing health care systems in the countries where many Pentecostals live.[4] Can Pentecostals lean on lament in order to better engage with black Christians and their experience?

Pentecostalism: An Experiential Form of Faith

Pentecostalism is an experiential form of faith that has exploded in size over the last century. Pentecostals share a commitment to changing, growing, and adapting as the Spirit speaks. Generally, a Pentecostal commitment indicates an openness to transformation in the power of the Spirit. More specifically, Pentecostal churches emphasize Spirit baptism with speaking in tongues as well as an unmediated or direct experience of the presence of God via the spiritual gifts.

Due to this emphasis on verbal communication, Pentecostals don't usually write things down. At least, historically, Pentecostals *didn't* write things down. To decide to write theology is an individual choice and a practice that largely runs off-script. As a Pentecostal picks up the pen, a chasm seems to emerge between their own world and their community's vital spirituality. To whom belongs the power to write a community's history in defining ways? In other words, who can narrate the testimony of the Pentecostal church? It's unclear. There *must be* a way of inscribing what the Spirit is doing in the global Pentecostal communion that adherents will endorse with a resounding "Yes and Amen!" There is an indisputable need for a contemporary history that records matters of importance, such as justice, in light of the ideals of many Pentecostal Christians, even if relevant only for their participation in ecumenical and interfaith activities.

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1. Sang Min Han, "Han as the Eschatological Pathos for Yearning the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit: Han and Korean Pentecostal Reality," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* [한국기독교신학논총] 87, no. 1 (2013): 175–90.

2. Robert Beckford, *Jesus Is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, Ltd, 1998).

3. Samuel Solivan, *The Spirit, Pathos and Liberation: Toward an Hispanic Pentecostal Theology* (Sheffield: Academic Press Ltd, 1998).

4. R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

But if there is such writing, it is uncertain where it is kept. It is also unlikely that it would be published by a theologian. Theologians do not generally fill Pentecostal pulpits or board rooms. Furthermore, if such a task was undertaken, it should not involve footnotes. Footnotes are unnecessary in the oral context. Pentecostalism assumes that everything can (and should) be remixed, reused, reformed, reiterated, and reconstituted. Pentecostals, of course, do acknowledge those who go before them in general terms. But in the oral context, everything is shared and communal. To footnote may allow individuals to take undue credit for the ideas formed around (and inside) them. By allowing the powerful to take credit, we may miss the unlikely carriers of the Spirit, such as those in the cloud of witnesses whom the Bible leaves unnamed. No, the *better* way, Pentecostals argue, is to live in the immediate: to honour knowledge as given by God and to contribute in the *now*. Scripture is written; personal histories and anecdotes are spoken. Theology is best within temporary forms that can be revised continually as the community is led.

Worship is Primary

The unflinching Pentecostal commitment to oral theology (and experience, or immediacy) is sometimes the focus of criticism, but it emerges from an admirable foundation, the worship of Jesus. This is because to be Pentecostal is to *worship together*. Scripture comes alive in the community of God. Pentecostals maintain a commitment to the worship gathering as the central, primary, and (at times the only) mandatory expression of their faith. Corporate worship is where baptism and communion happen. Musical praise and worship time are vital as they allow individuals to express themselves emotionally and physically before God. The word preached enables Pentecostals to sit at the feet of Jesus, the teacher. As the church gathers together, the Spirit speaks.

Pentecostal leaders remind us of the importance of the physical worship gathering in an increasingly disembodied world. It must be protected at all costs. Even pastors with influential online platforms promote "being in the room." This is not because the physical rooms in which the church gathers have importance in themselves: far from it. The Pentecostal worship sanctuary is usually stripped bare, with blank concrete walls and large television screens. This becomes its latent potential. An experience of the Spirit is central to understanding what's really happening in this present world. Each Christian contributes to the atmosphere, which pulsates with the church's vibrant

life. As screens are filled with colour and sound, worshipers respond and experience further revelation.

Early Pentecostals gathered in comparable ways. In the liminal space of worship, they argued, all believers are entirely equal. The origin story of Pentecostalism, which is told and retold in its various forms, functions as a tale of equality and freedom. Frank Bartleman's famous claim was that at Azusa Street the "colour line was washed away in the Blood [of Christ]."[5] The legacy of African American leader William Seymour is lauded as an example of the lived nature of this claim. While there is no doubt of Seymour's significance in modern Pentecostalism, the legend does not always match the character described by historians such as McClung:

> Despite the sudden success of his ministry, biographical sketches of William J. Seymour assess him as 'a meek man' and 'a man of prayer.' Believing that he and the other Azusa Street worshipers had received the promised gift poured out on the early church, Seymour knew they must share this gift with the world. From behind his pulpit of shoebox shipping crates, a new missiological paradigm for the 20th century emerged.[6]

Besides other omissions by historians related to Seymour's ministry, most written accounts also fail to include the history that he was denied ordination a decade later at the establishment of the Assemblies of God denomination.[7] He is notable as a black leader locked out of his institutional church after drawing crowds of thousands. The founding events in which Seymour was involved were undoubtedly extraordinary and should be celebrated in the Pentecostal church today.

On the Road

The felt need to transform the church is unquestionably strong. But do Pentecostals go on pilgrimage? Yes and no. Besides a few individuals who have walked the Camino de Santiago, I have never met a Pentecostal who framed their faith or life experience with the metaphor of pilgrimage.

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5. Jennifer A. Miskov, "Azusa Street Revival: The Color Line Was Washed Away in the Blood," 8 May 2020, https://jenmiskov.com/blog/azusastreetrevivalunity.
6. Grant McClung, "Pentecostals: The Sequel," *Christianity Today 50, no. 4* (1 April 2006), https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/april/7.30.html.
7. Leonard Lovett, "Black Origins of the Pentecostal Movement," *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins,* ed. Vinson Synan (Plainfield, N.J.: Logos International, 2005): 123–41.

Nonetheless, when Pentecostals talk about worship, they do often speak in terms of a journey: as generatively "alive," powerful, or potent. In each gathering in the shopfront, warehouse, or auditorium, an encounter with God is held to be paramount. Therefore, as each worshiper steps through the doors of a Pentecostal church, they enter liminal space. Here, God works from outside the confines of time to rupture the "now." Only the Spirit knows where a meeting may end! As a worshipper's senses discern the moods and shifts, they note the "suddenlies," as in Acts 2:2 ("Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting" [NIV]). This acknowledges the departure from what is known, which also becomes an arrival, a transportation to another "place." In other words, something uninspired and mundane can in a single moment be "lit." In these illuminated moments, peace is gained within challenging circumstances, and what have been mere ideals of justice can become the benchmark for action.

Pentecostal worship is also designed to be extremely portable.[8] The movement is truly global. Worship is not in *a* physical location; it is everywhere. One Christian with a guitar is enough. Pentecostals move effortlessly through time and space, proclaiming the Spirit's message. In fact, Nigerian American scholar Nimi Wariboko posits Pentecostalism as its own city, a "network of networks" which flows between a thousand or more real cities "from London to Buenos Aires, from New York to New Delhi, and Rome to Lagos."[9] Accordingly, Pentecostals are deeply committed to being a community of faith in transit in multiple ways, walking in the footsteps of the unlikely men and women who have gone before them. Their faith experiences are shared or narrated via a life of song, prayer, and the word proclaimed. Most scholarly accounts of Pentecostal worship emphasize movement—through time, space, tempo, and metaphor.[10] There *is* some foundation, then, for the act of Pentecostal worship to be likened to pilgrimage. But is there potential for the community to move towards justice: more specifically, racial justice?

8. Thomas J. Csordas, "Introduction: Modalities of Transnational Transcendence," in *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization,* ed. Thomas J. Csordas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 1–30.
9. Nimi Wariboko, *The Charismatic City and the Public Resurgence of Religion: A Pentecostal Social Ethics of Cosmopolitan Urban Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1, 41.
10. Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 70.

The Biblical Basis for Pilgrimage

It is important to note the biblical basis of pilgrimage in Luke 24:13–35. The road to Emmaus provided the archetypal pilgrimage text for medieval Christians.[11] Here, Christ himself is perceived as pilgrim. Notably, the experience of Cleopas and his unnamed travelling partner shows similarities to a contemporary Pentecostal encounter of Jesus. Cleopas and his friend have no carefully prearranged itinerary. But as these two disciples walk away from the site of their Saviour's crucifixion in the preceding verses, they are quietly accompanied by Jesus. "Stay with us," they urge this man. Only later in verses 30–31, with the breaking of the bread, is Christ revealed.

As affect is so important to Pentecostals, it is useful to recognize it within this text. Susan Durber notes the prevailing mood on the walk in this biblical passage as "profound disappointment." She says,

> This story can speak to us when we feel that we are not on a positive journey forward, when both justice and peace seem far away, and when we feel that we are simply retreating or walking slowly into a future that we dread or fear. This story speaks to those who might think they have no energy for anything as positive as a pilgrimage at all, and whom God comes to meet as they struggle to put one foot in front of another. It is a story that is very honest about hopelessness and loss, but also about how God comes to find us in those places. It shows how God walks beside us and can transform even the deepest bereavement and loss into a journey of hope. This is a story that invites those who are deep in sorrow to walk in hope again. [12]

The tension between sorrow and hope describes exactly where much of the global Pentecostal communion finds itself at this moment.

Black Lives Matter, Period

Inequality amongst Pentecostal believers was finally publicly acknowledged in 2020 due to the Black Lives Matter movement. George Floyd's death undoubtedly proved to be a turning point for many white Pentecostals. In the weeks and months after this event, it became clear that many earlier requests for solidarity among Christians on matters of race had been ignored. For

11. Simon Coleman and John Elsner, eds., *Pilgrim Voices: Narrative and Authorship in Christian Pilgrimage* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 2.
12. Susan Durber, "'The Walk to Emmaus' (Luke 24:13–35)," *Bible Studies on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace,* 9 May 2018, World Council of Churches, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/luke-2413-35 .

the first time, despite the Pentecostal preference for oral theology, written statements on race were issued by many significant churches. For example, Global Senior Pastor Brian Houston wrote,

> Hillsong Church is opposed to racism, and we believe black lives matter. The needless and tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, and the much deeper systemic issues towards African American people his death has highlighted, must lead to radical and permanent change. Racism must stop, and my prayer is that this moment in history will be a moment of lasting equality, transformation and change.[13]

Housten's statement was placed prominently on the website for any and every congregation member to see. A journey had been initiated. But triumph over the release of public statements quickly turned to disappointment. The ideals and energy of this moment included an interest in accountability, and a desire to see action from Christian leaders. Unfortunately, white church leaders and pastors often fell short. For example, Louie Giglio, an influential leader amongst Pentecostals and the founder of the Passion movement, was forced to apologize on Instagram for attempting to reframe the racial conversation: "I just wanted to come directly to you today and sincerely apologize for use of the phrase [on] Sunday, 'white blessing,' and I would like to extend my apology to every single person listening to me right now . . . and most importantly I extend my apology to my black brother and sisters. Like so many I am burdened by what is happening in our nation right now, and I'm heartbroken about it."[14]

Similarly, North American Pentecostal congregation Bethel Church was forced to provide a press release distancing their church from worship leader Sean Feucht, who potentially risked the lives of many by gathering without social distancing during the pandemic.[15] His determination to lead a praise and worship service in downtown Portland was critiqued on racial terms by African American worship leader Jelani Greenridge:

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13. Brian Houston, "An Open Letter to Hillsong Church," 6 June 2021, Hillsong Church, https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2020/06/an-open-letter-to-hillsong-church/#.YCaeJmNxUdU

14. Louie Giglio, Twitter video, 16 June 2020, https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2020/06/an-open-letter-to-hillsong-church/#.YCaeJmNxUdU.

15. Bethel Church, "Sean Feucht Hosts 'Let Us Worship' Gathering in Redding, CA," press release, 23 July 2020, https://www.bethel.com/press/press-release-sean-feucht-hosts-let-us-worship-gathering.

> Just a few days ago, Feucht . . . held a worship rally in downtown Portland, just a few blocks away from where protestors have been tear-gassed, brutalized, and unconstitutionally detained for expressing their First Amendment right to proclaim that "Black Lives Matter." Now, I understand the desire to bring healing and to usher in the revival of the Holy Spirit in an environment where there has been frustration, anger, and discord. Because I understand this, I will give Feucht and many of his followers the benefit of the doubt that they were not trying to be offensive. But intent only goes so far. Given the context, their efforts were tone-deaf, unresponsive to the needs and mood of the people who've been engaging with the hurt and chaos on the ground. Feucht and his ilk riding in from out of town to "bring Jesus to Portland" (a sentiment I've heard used repeatedly in reference to these and similar gatherings) is disrespectful to the local Christian ministers of all denominational stripes who've been doing their best to live out the words and mission of Jesus for decades.[16]

Even at Hillsong, despite the clear public statement in support of black justice, Brian Houston had to publicly apologize for the actions of a Hillsong London pastor.[17]

The prevailing emotional atmosphere could be said to echo the disappointment of Cleopas as he reflects upon the role of the leaders ("The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him") in the disappearance of Jesus ("but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel,"), and his dashed hopes for the future ("some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.").[18]

Across the world, many continue the journey of their faith, dejected in the realities of these events. Due to being locked out from the usual physical locations of worship, there has been many a tearful prayer lifted within study and lounge rooms across the world.

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16. Jelani Greenidge, "Don't Understand This Sean Feucht Controversy? Stop Talking & Listen," 10 August 2020, https://jelanigreenidge.medium.com/dont-understand-this-sean-feucht-controversy-stop-talking-listen-ed70ba828285

17. "I was disappointed to learn today that comments were made by one of our pastors in last weekend's UK online service which I'm sure he deeply regrets, have caused hurt and offence, and for that I am deeply sorry" (Brian Houston, Hillsong Church Facebook post, 1 June 2020, https://www.facebook.com/hillsongchurch/posts/i-was-disappointed-to-learn-today-that-comments-were-made-by-one-of-our-pastors-/10159688655560410.

18. Luke 24: 20, 21, 24 (NIV).

Walking with Saint Augustine

It was in this context that I opened Professor James K. A. Smith's book entitled *On the Road with Saint Augustine: A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts*.[19] This Pentecostal author's take on the journey of Augustine[20] is woven throughout time and space. He folds quotes of songs and films with images of ancient sculptures from sites across North America and Europe in true Pentecostal form but also in a scholarly format, with footnotes. The structure provides an initial orienting or mapping section for the pilgrim before Smith grapples with the detours and distractions common to both Augustine and Pentecostals in our journeying towards God. This includes discussion of the importance of finding freedom *for* rather than freedom *from*; negotiating ambition and aspiration; the temptation of sex and power; dependence and independence from mothers; the belonging of friendship in modern loneliness; how to insert oneself within narrative; "how to believe"; "how to protest"; coping with the deep brokenness of fatherlessness; and, finally, "how to hope beyond the grave." The final chapter, "Homecoming," stages a Pentecostal altar call moment for conversion.

Smith maps his journey through some of the European sites in which Augustine lived and others where he, or his mother Monica, appears in popular culture. This occurs alongside research into Augustine's books and reflections upon the themes of authentic and faithful interiority. This voyage into African and European theology and their interconnections, has a very North American and postmodern twist. The book is not raised to suggest that Augustine (or Smith, for that matter) offers a way forward for our current social rift, or that either of them addresses the context of white supremacy. Instead, it offers us a way backwards. The goal of Smith's pilgrimage (and his offer to the reader) is to make Christianity "plausible" or "believable" again: in other words, to re-stoke the passion that is required for us to continue on this path. He says,

> Augustine will unapologetically suggest that you were made for God—that home is found beyond yourself, that Jesus is the way, that the cross is a raft in the storm-tossed sea we call 'the world.' But what I hope you'll hear in this is not a solution or an answer, not merely a dogmatic claim or demand.

19. James K. A. Smith, *On the Road with Saint Augustine: A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts* (Michigan: Brazos Press, 2019).

20. Augustine of Hippo, known as St Augustine, was a North African church leader. He lived from 354–430 CE.

> For Augustine, this was a hard-fought epiphany that emerged after trying everything else, after a long time on the road, at the end of his rope.[21]

Just like Augustine, Pentecostals can now discern via the Spirit that we couldn't have stayed where we were in 2019. The church as it was configured was not enough. None of us was truly at home, although, knowing no better, we proclaimed it as such.

Pilgrimage begins, as Smith explains it, when we acknowledge a longing or loss for something unknown. We cannot articulate why, but we are compelled to go. Pilgrims do not always know their destination. But as we leave the place we inhabited, we realize we had been pursuing other things, chasing the wind, and clutching at images we thought offered us something—celebrity, validation, or political influence. We realize that we have been shaped by our worship of these wrong things. Now, thrust into exile, as refugees, we can acknowledge that we didn't know who Jesus was, not entirely.

The human self is transformed to be like the object of its affection. This is how we were created: we are what we love. There is no one better to explain this than Smith, who outlines a liturgical manifesto in his earlier volumes. He declares: "Where we rest is a matter of what and how we love. Our restlessness is a reflection of what we try to 'enjoy' as an end in itself—what we look to as a place to land. The heart's hunger is infinite, which is why it will ultimately be disappointed with anything merely finite."[22]

It is in our departure from what was that we become able to change. Here, we have an arrival, or a revelation. In that, our disappointment allows us to recognize the truth, that Christ has failed to keep our trust not because he is untrustworthy, but because we sought Him in all the wrong ways. The converted self in this brave new world must be awakened to Jesus the pilgrim illuminating this truth while walking the road.

Perhaps God is asking the Pentecostal church to journey from where it has been so we can again recognize Jesus. Smith states:

> A refugee spirituality does not make false promises. . . . It is not a prosperity gospel of peace and joy in the present. It warns of the allure of imagining one could settle in and for the present. An émigré spirituality is honest about what is not granted to our generation, so to speak—what is

21. Smith, *On the Road with Saint Augustine,* xii.
22. Smith, 13.

> not granted to the human condition in this vale of tears. Hope is found in a certain art of saying goodbye, but also in looking ahead to the day when Someone will greet us with, "Welcome home"—and knowing how to navigate in the meantime.[23]

We are in this meantime; we are in transit. We are between what we were and what we will be. It is at times exhausting, but it is better than it was. As we go, any rest we find on the road is sweet, and a precursor of what is to come. We will be welcomed by the God from whom all justice issues, and indeed we will enter His rest.

Where to Now?

As I write this text, the pandemic still rages internationally, with small percentages of the global population having access to the vaccine. Many worship communities have moved online, but true Pentecostal innovation in these practices and technologies has not yet occurred. The infrastructure suitable for the new world is only just beginning to be imagined. As such, it is emerging out of the ashes of what has been.

For Pentecostals, as I hope I have demonstrated here, the pilgrimage passage of Luke 24 offers us the right to walk on the road to Emmaus, dejected but hopeful that God will indeed encounter His church on the way. We will return to Jerusalem and find it changed because we found a deep and unshakeable hope and formed a better understanding of Jesus. There is precedent for this in the Pentecostal tradition, even if pilgrimage is not immediate in its language. Personally, I appreciate that Jesus does not offer "toxic positivity" to take away from the pain that Cleopas and his travelling partner feel. In fact, he allows them to express it fully, revealing himself as God only in the breaking and the blessing of the bread. There are no quotable quotes or cliches here, no fancy rhetoric or spin. The enlightened traveler is Jesus, the broken body demonstrated before them. He does not deny the pain of watching the crucifixion at the hands of religious leaders. But there is also the hope of resurrection, a renewal that arises from Jesus' very body. Empire has been utterly vanquished, and it does not even know it yet. Its destruction is simultaneously the world's rebirth, based on a new understanding of Jesus.

23. Smith, 46.

I know that such a reflection may be considered to offer up limited conclusions about the pursuit of justice and peace. However, within Australia, hope is envisioned with the regeneration of land, and as steps being taken towards reconciliation with our Indigenous brothers and sisters. Within a scene of charred devastation, seeds are starting to sprout. This is also true among many Pentecostal communities who continue to pray, "let thy will be done, let thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven."

VI

Transformative Spiritualities in Sister Faith Traditions

21

Jewish Transformative Spirituality—for Justice and Peace

Daniel Polish

For many people the words "justice and peace" cannot possibly appear in the same sentence that includes the word "spirituality." So often we hear the observation that religion is the root of intolerance, injustice, and war. This view has been represented in two different ways.

The first is represented in the Jewish tradition in a story told about the *Chofetz Chayim*—Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838–1933), a renowned sage of Eastern European Jewry. Once visited by a group of distinguished visitors, he was questioned by his guests about why he had virtually no possessions. He responded by asking his visitors why they had brought none of their possessions with them. When they replied that they were only passing through, he answered, "So am I." To the *Chofetz Chayim* and to like-minded members of many other religious traditions as well, life in this world is secondary to a more glorious home in the world to come. As stated in the Jewish text, *Pirkei Avot* 4:16–17[1]

> This world is like a vestibule to the world to come,
> prepare yourself in the vestibule
> so that you are prepared to enter the banquet hall….
> An hour of contentment in the world to come
> is better than all of life in this world.

To adherents of this perspective, worldly matters, including justice and peace, are of little concern compared to the significant aspiration of life in the hereafter.

The second argument against the association of religion with justice and peace is expressed in an anthem of the "Wobblies," the redundantly named International Workers of the World, a US radical labour group in the early twentieth-century: "Work and pray, live on hay, you'll get pie in the sky when you die." The song gives voice to the conviction, articulated explicitly by Karl

1. For an explanation of the *Pikei Avot*, see "English Explanation of Pikei Avot 4:16," n.d., Sefaria, https://www.sefaria.org/English_Explanation_of_Pirkei_Avot.4.16?lang=bi

Marx, that religion is nothing but a sham perpetrated by the ruling classes to distract the marginalized and disenfranchised lower classes from the miseries they experience in this world. In this construction, religion is not merely indifferent to justice and peace but inimical to it: indeed, an active adversary.

Normal Mysticism

In the face of such divergent scepticism, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace seeks to ground itself in the spiritual resources of its own and other traditions. Some assume that the quest must begin in the mystical elements of those various traditions. And, in truth, we can recognize that in Jewish history and Jewish life there have been remarkable expressions of mysticism. We find mystical elements already in rabbinic literature. The Talmud adverts to various practices and perspectives that are worthy of that name. Most famously, we find the mystical stream of Jewish thought expressed in the late Middle Ages in Kabbalah—articulated most profoundly in the urtext of all subsequent Jewish mysticism, the *Zohar*. And we find it lived out in our day in the Chasidic movement with its many variants.

And yet for all the profundity in the teaching of the mystical streams of Jewish tradition, it has not seen the formation of monastic communities familiar in the Christian tradition or the *sangha* in the Buddhist tradition. Jewish mystics have lived as part of the broader community. Whatever their unique perspectives or idiosyncratic practices, they have always adhered to the normative practices of Jewish teaching—as if to underscore that the fundamental teaching of the tradition, itself, expresses the profound truths that undergird any of the elaborations upon it.

The author Rabbi Max Kadushin (1895–1980) described the conventional practices and beliefs of Jewish life as "normal mysticism." From this perspective one need not turn to the mystical expressions of Jewish life to find supernatural teaching. Rather, every Jewish teaching and practice testifies to a perspective that would, in other contexts, be called mystical. The shared store of learning and actions that are common to every spiritually engaged Jew involve what might elsewhere and otherwise be described as mystical.

It is to that normal mysticism informing all Jewish life that we now turn: the understandings and actions that are ingrained in every faithful Jew. Ordinary Jewish life inculcates a sense of self-transcendence, the ability to see that in the map of reality we are not at the centre. Faith in G-d makes clear to the believer that they are not, and cannot be, the be-all and end-all of creation. In Jewish life, prayer is not confined to formal events. By one calculation

the faithful Jew is called to offer one hundred blessings each day: when you eat, wash your hands, perform normal bodily functions, see a rainbow or an awesome sight. Such a spiritual discipline cannot but ingrain an awareness that we are contingent, part of a great network of creation. It cannot but compel one to see oneself *subspecies aeternitatis,* an infinitesimal part of a greater design. A person so inculcated cannot imagine themselves or their needs as possessing supreme or ultimate worth. And such an understanding is reinforced in the round of daily, festival, and Shabbat/Sabbath prayers which are woven into the fabric of the week, the year, and the Jewish life cycle.

A Communitarian Project: Relating to the Other

How does this translate to the realm of justice and peace? In our relations to our fellow human beings, such a deeply ingrained attitude must invalidate any reflex to self-absorption, narcissism, or solipsism. One of the givens of Jewish practice is that formal worship is not a solitary practice. A duly constituted worship service requires a *minyan*—a quorum of ten men.[2]

The worshipping Jew is reminded that they do not exist in a vacuum but depend upon a wider community to live out their life. Indeed, Jewish life is best characterized as a communitarian project. Judaism is not an individualistic faith. Jewish life throws one into engagement with a world beyond the boundary of one's own body. Jews are conditioned by the nature of Jewish faith to be dependent on and to extend themselves to others.

The insistence on seeing oneself in connection to others is reinforced by the way that Jews read their sacred texts. The Torah becomes not a collection of stories about some group of "them, back then." Jews read scripture in terms of a continuity of which they are part. It is not "their" story, but "mine." Indeed, the Passover Haggadah, the text that one reads during the Seder on the first night of Passover, instructs Jews that "every Jew should regard themselves as if they themselves had gone out of Egypt" (Pesachim 10:5). Indeed, that text defines someone who refuses to think of scripture using the first-person pronoun, "I," as being "wicked." The key to the Jewish reading of all of scripture is found in the Pesachim formulation. In engaging with sacred texts, Jews remind themselves that they are not alone in the universe. They are opened to the perspective of seeing themselves as part of an ancient lineage, one reaching back through the millennia. And by extension they are inculcated with the idea that they are part of the entire flow of Jewish history.

2. The gender-specific nature of this requirement is rejected by the liberal streams of Jewish life today and is being actively contested in the Orthodox world as well.

What does this have to do with justice and peace? The practices and understandings of the tradition habituate a person to see themselves in a broader perspective, beyond the limited horizon of what has been characterized as "looking out for number one." That mindset is viewed as unhealthy and narcissistic self-absorption. By virtue of participating in normal Jewish life, the engaged Jew cannot escape thinking of themselves in relational terms.

How, then, are we to regard and treat those others with whom we share this world? This is the fundamental question of justice. Indeed, the precious balance between appropriate self-concern and attention to the demands of others has been explicitly articulated in Jewish texts. In the Mishnaic text *Pirkei Avot* 1:14, we read the words of Rabbi Hillel who taught, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? Yet if I am for myself alone, what am I."

The formulation of the dictum is interesting. We cannot fail to note the pronoun in the second part of the teaching. Hillel asks, "*What* am I?" not as in the first part, "*who*." This formulation implies that an uncaring person becomes a thing, an object, virtually other than human. This consequential dialetic which moves the faithful to see themselves in perspective is expressed in a teaching by the Chasidic Rebbe Simcha Bunim (1765–1827). Simcha Bunim said that everybody should have two pockets with a note in each one. In one pocket we can be encouraged that "for me the world was created" (Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin, 37 BCE); and in the other admonished to "remember, 'I am but dust and ashes'" (Gen. 18:27).

Words Set upon Your Heart

Respect for the other is embedded in one of the principal activities of Jewish life: study. For generations, the most normative practice for Jewish men[3] was the study of the Talmud: a text often denigrated by Christians and sadly misunderstood by many contemporary Jews. In truth, historically, the Talmud has functioned as a second scripture of Judaism, much as the New Testament is a second scripture of Christianity. In practice, it has often been studied even before intellectual engagement with the Hebrew scriptures themselves. And so, the very nature of the Talmud, if not always its contents, has been formative of the character of Jewish life.

3. Once again, we encounter gender inequality. And once again, that inequity has been transcended by the liberal branches of Judaism and is currently being challenged vigorously in the Orthodox sector.

How has the Talmud shaped Jewish character? The Talmud is a record of centuries-long discussions, debates, and arguments about a whole range of issues. Remarkably, it preserves both sides, indeed the many perspectives, of every issue under consideration. As a result, both sides of the argument are accorded a certain validity, an attitude reflected in the Talmudic assertion, "Both these and those are the words of the Living G-d" (Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 13a). It is a common anthropological observation that Jews appear to be uniquely contentious or disputatious. Actually, it is the very structure of the Talmud that has shaped Jews. It has inculcated Jews with openness to expressing—and hearing—opinions, even diverse and divergent opinions. Such a cultural idiosyncrasy cannot but instil in its members a fundamental respect for people of differing, even opposing, perspectives; a certain openness of spirit, which is a wholesome seedbed for justice.

To be an engaged Jew means to hear the words of the Torah regularly. The Torah is read at services every Shabbat, during holidays, and during the week every Monday and Thursday. Its words are repeated and echoed in the Jewish liturgy, and, of course, form the point of reference in the Talmud and any authentically Jewish text or discourse. To be immersed in the world of the Torah throughout one's life to the degree that they are "set upon your heart" (Deut. 6:6) and echo constantly in your consciousness cannot but shape one's understanding of the world and mold one's values.

One of the tropes of the rabbis of the Talmud was the attempt to find a *clal,* a single verse of the Torah that encapsulated the entire work. Christians may recognize this rhetorical strategy from the Gospels, where Jesus is depicted as identifying not one but two "greatest commandments."[4] In this, he is engaging in the same pedagogical process as the rabbis of that time. What is revelatory are the verses that various rabbis have selected as their *clal.* Rabbi Akiva cited Leviticus 19:18, "love your neighbor like yourself." Later generations extended the sense of Akiva's teaching by focusing on the Hebrew of the biblical verse. They elaborated on the meaning of the Hebrew word *camocha*, or "like." We are not merely to love our neighbors as we would love ourselves. Instead, they taught, we are to recognize that those neighbors are just "like" us. We are to view our neighbor empathetically.

Of course, all of what we have explored thus far can be processed by some in narrow, parochial, particularistic terms. But awareness of others need not, nor cannot, and usually does not, stop at the borders of one's own community. In

4. Matthew 22:35–40; Mark 12: 28–31; Luke 10: 25–28.

the search for a *clal,* other rabbis found other *clals* that speak to this broader awareness. For example, Hillel taught, "what is hateful to you do not do to any person" (Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 31a). Ben Azai taught that an even greater *clal* was, "This is the book of the generations of humankind, when G-d began to create humans G-d made them in the image of G-d"[5] With this, Ben Azai taught that every human being is made in the divine image. Ben Azai alludes here to a frequent theme in rabbinic commentaries on Genesis: Why does the Torah speak of G-d creating humanity in terms of the creation of a single human being? Among the answers given is that as a result of this teaching, no one can say, "My ancestry, my pedigree is better than yours" (Mishnah Sanhedrim 4:5). This means that every single life is equivalent to the whole of what G-d created on that sixth day. By extension this idea leads to the understanding that whoever harms a single life, it is as if they have harmed the whole of creation. Whoever saves a single life, it is as if they have saved the whole of creation (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:9). Other rabbis cite texts such as Micah 6:8, "Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your G-d" and Isaiah 56: 1, "Keep justice and walk with integrity" (Babylonian Talmud Makkot 23 a–b).

Imitatio Dei: Justice and Mercy

What can we take away from all this? We are reminded that although Jewish faith has been commonly mischaracterized as legalistic or focused on the minutia of ritual practice or obsessed with rules of purity, the injunction most frequently repeated in the Torah is the commandment, repeated 36 times, to not oppress the stranger, even to "love the stranger." Let us remind ourselves that the teaching that holds pride of place in Hebrew scriptures is not "love your neighbor," but "love the stranger." With this we are clearly in the realm of justice.

Hebrew scriptures even offer a remarkable definition of holiness, *imitatio deii*, in Leviticus 19. In this text, we are enjoined to be Holy as G-d is Holy. Perhaps unexpectedly, this text says nothing about the attributes of G-d; instead, it includes an extensive list of actions, most specifically about our actions towards our fellow human beings in all categories of life. The list commands that we do not harvest the borders of our fields or vineyards, or collect the fallen grain or fruit, but instead leave them for the dispossessed and marginal: widows, orphans, and strangers (Deut. 24:19).[6] It demands

5. Sifra 89b; commentary on Genesis 5:1.

6. A biblical commandment which seems to challenge the primacy of private property.

justice in business transactions, not placing a curse on the deaf, or placing any kind of impediment before the blind. In other words, the text includes the fair treatment of hired workers and exhorts the listener not to harm people in ways that they are not even aware of. As elsewhere in the Torah, it condemns injustice in legal proceedings.

Elsewhere we read of the prohibition against taking a person's garment as security for a loan and the forbidding of going into someone's home to collect a loan (Ex. 22:26; Deut. 24:10). Exodus 22 warns that if an oppressed person cries out, G-d will surely hear their cry and will visit that oppression on the oppressor.

What are we to understand about the specifics of how we are expected to behave? According to Hebrew scriptures, justice is demanded from everyone, even the ruler. We read in the Book of Psalms:

> May [the king] judge Your people with righteousness
> And Your poor with justice. . . .
> May he judge the poor of Your people
> And save the children of the needy
> Crushing oppression (Ps. 72:2, 4).
>
> Let them praise . . .
> The strength of the king who loves justice
> Establishing equity
> Working justice and righteousness
> in Jacob. (Ps. 99:3–4)

As for the rest of us? We have already referred to Micah's well-known dictum: "It has been told you O human what is good; and what the Lord requires of you only to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God" (6:8).

Justice and mercy are not identical. Indeed, they are often at odds with one another. And yet, the prophet calls on us to hold on to both, to engage in that delicate, complicated, and challenging balance: to be both merciful and just. As we are taught in Leviticus 19, we are to show preferential prejudice on behalf of the poor, but in occasions such as legal proceedings where strict justice is at stake not to "favor the person of the poor." Justice demands reflection and careful analysis in every circumstance.

No one reflected on the themes of spirituality and justice more profoundly than the prophet Isaiah, with surprising, even shocking, results. The actions that he prescribes in chapter 58 are not the actions that you would expect to characterize religious life. Remarkably these words are read on the morning of Yom Kippur, a day that finds Jews in synagogue, fasting. We might expect to hear words about the efficacy of their fast. Instead, we read:

> Cry aloud, spare not;
> Lift up your voice like a trumpet;
> Tell My people their transgression,
> And the house of Jacob their sins.
> Yet they seek Me daily,
> And delight to know My ways,
> Like a nation that did righteousness,
> And did not forsake the ordinance of their God.
> They ask of Me the ordinances of justice;
> They take delight in approaching God.
>
> 'Why have we fasted,' *they say* and You have not seen?
> *Why* have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?
>
> Because in the day of your fast you find pleasure,
> And exploit all your laborers. . . .
> Is this the fast that I have chosen,
> A day for a man to afflict his soul?
> *Is it* to bow down his head like a bulrush,
> And to spread out sackcloth and ashes?
> Would you call this a fast,
> And an acceptable day to the Lord?
>
> [No] Is this not the fast that I have chosen:
> To loose the bonds of wickedness,
> To undo the shackles
>
> To let the oppressed go free,
> And that you break every yoke?
> *Is it* not to share your bread with the hungry,
> And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;
> When you see the naked, that you cover him,
> And not hide yourself from your own flesh?
> Then your light shall break forth like the morning,
> Your healing shall spring forth speedily,

> And your righteousness shall go before you;
> The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
> Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
> You shall cry, and He will say, 'Here am I' (Is. 58:1-9).

A medieval commentary on Psalm 118 reflects how thoroughly the perspective of Isaiah has taken possession of Jewish consciousness:

> When a man is asked in the world-to-come: "What was thy work? And he answers: "I fed the hungry," it will be said to him: "*This is the gate of the Lord* (Ps. 118:20). Enter it, O thou that didst feed the hungry."
>
> When a man answers: "I gave drink to the thirsty," it will be said to him: "*This is the gate of the Lord.* Enter it, O thou that didst give drink to the thirsty."
>
> When a man answers: "I clothed the naked," it will be said to him: "*This is the gate of the Lord.* Enter it, O thou that didst clothe the naked."
>
> This will be said also to him that brought up the fatherless, and to them that gave alms or performed deeds pf lovingkindness.[7]

Shalom—Humanity at One with Itself

So, justice. The ideal of justice burns brightly in the Torah, rabbinic texts, Jewish liturgy, and Jewish aspirations. And yet, justice may well not be the end in itself, but a means to an even greater end. We turn again to *Pirkei Avot* and are warned, "The sword comes into the world by Justice delayed and justice denied" (5:8). Injustice leads to the sword. The highest goal of decent human behavior is peace—but a peace that is not merely an end to war. The Hebrew Word for peace, as is well known, is *shalom*. But that word, *shalom*, is built on the triliteral root Sh L M, which connotes wholeness and integrity. As George Foote Moore writes, *shalom* "has a wider meaning than the English 'peace.' For the individual it is welfare of every kind, sound health, prosperity, security, contentment, and the like. In the relations of men [sic] to their fellows it is the harmony without which the welfare of the individual or the community is impossible: aggression, enmity and strife are destructive of welfare, as external and internal peace, in our sense, is its fundamental condition."[8]

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7. Midrash to Psalm 118:17, in William G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press,1959), 243.

8. George Foote Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 195.

It is true that Jewish mystics, like those of all traditions, teach about the complete integration of all creation, an absolute unity, a cosmological and ontological harmony. But completeness, wholeness, are also reflected for all Jews in normative Jewish teaching. Normative Jewish teaching points us toward the great goal of *shalom*. When we aspire to *shalom*, we are not only looking forward to an end to war, but to all conflict. What Jews long for is a humanity at one with itself, living in mutuality and respect. *Pirkei Avot* 1:17 underscores this connection when it teaches: "Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel used to say: the world stands on three things: On justice, on truth and on peace, as it is said: 'execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates'" (Zec. 8:16).

Justice and peace are inextricably intertwined. Justice is the necessary precondition of peace. But *shalom*/peace is the ultimate goal. The word *shalom* runs like a crimson thread through the liturgy of every service in prayers such as, "Grant [us] peace, goodness and blessing, grace, steadfastness, and mercy."[9] The words that conclude each portion of the liturgy in every service offer, "May the One who makes peace on high make peace for us and for all Israel."[10]

Perhaps the most consequential of Jewish practices is Shabbat/the day of rest. Shabbat is characterized as a foretaste of the world to come. Jews look forward to the day that the world will be completely Shabbat. And what we wish for one another is "Shabbat shalom"—a day of Shalom: rest, perfect tranquility.

The great goal of a world whole and in harmony is epitomized in the visions of Isaiah and Micah, parts of which have been incorporated into the liturgy:

> It shall come to pass on the end of days . . .
> They shall beat their swords into plowshares
> And their spears into pruning hooks
> Nation shall not lift up sword against nation
>
> Neither shall they learn was any more. . . .
> But they shall sit each one under their vine
> And under their fig tree
> And none shall make them afraid (Is. 2:1, 4; Mic. 4:4).

9. Author's translation of traditional prayerbook.

10. In more recent times, many Jewish liturgies have added as a concluding phrase "and on all the world."

In more recent times, this vision of a perfected reality has been expressed, in a prayer attributed to the Chasidic master Nachman of Bratzlav (1772–1810):

> May it be Your will, Lord our God and God of our ancestors,
> to put an end to war and bloodshed on earth,
> and to spread a great and wonderful peace over the whole world,
> so that nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
> neither shall they learn war anymore.
> May all inhabitants of this planet come to recognize and know the
> ultimate truth:
> We did not come to this world for conflict and strife,
> nor for hatred, envy, mockery or bloodshed;
> We came to this world only to know You,
> may You be blessed for all eternity.
> Therefore, have mercy on us, and fulfill for us what is written:
> "And I will grant peace in the land,
> and you shall lie down and none shall make you afraid.
> I will drive the wild beasts from the land,
> and neither shall the sword go through your country." (Lev. 26:6)
> "And justice will well up like water, righteousness like a mighty stream"
> (Amos 5:24).
> "For the Land will be filled with knowledge of the Lord
> as water covers the sea" (Is. 11:9).
>
> May this be Your Will. And let us say: Amen.

22

Verse as Spirit in the Quran: Transformative Spirituality from the Perspective of a Muslim Woman

Azza Karam

My studies were as secular as can be: economics, business, politics, international development, and environmental science. My work, for the last three decades, has been devoted to the intersection of religion with human rights, politics, and conflict. I have no formal authority to speak on behalf of Islam. Indeed, it was recently insinuated to me—probably for the thousandth time in my 53 years—by a prominent male scholar of rising international repute (much younger than me, but as an Arab male immediately asserting himself as far superior), that as an unveiled woman, my allegiance to my faith is, well, questionable. So, as you read these words, feel free to judge as you will.

I am a believer and a seeker of the Divine. And I am very much in love with the Divine in all its manifestations. Religions, to me, are pathways to the Beloved. As a lover, I oscillate between feelings of deep unworthiness vis-à-vis the indescribable grandness of Allah—the Divine, God, the Lord, name as you will—and a sense of the unbearable lightness of the Divine being that, in all too rare moments, is not "felt," but rather "overwhelms."

Because I am in love with the Divine, I have faith in faith itself. And because of my deep and abiding love, I see the Divine in every living element of nature. And because I am in love with the Divine, and a student of politics with multiple experiences working in the most secular of global institutions, I find myself a fierce defender of everything faith-related. Using religion or vested interests (whether secular or religious), beyond serving each and all species out of love, feels like a physical assault. Instrumentalization of religion, now unfortunately a frequent occurrence in development, foreign policy, and security circles, feels like an attack on my spirit and my body. In the struggle against this phenomenon, my own spirituality is my sacred space, my shield, and my armour. As I seek to be diligent in protecting, nurturing, and bowing

to the Divine spirit, my spirituality, like planet Earth, is in a constant stage of rotation and transformation.

So where does this transformative spirit of mine come from? The Quran!

The Quran as a Spiritual Home

Speaking of the Quran as the foundation of Islamic spirituality, Syed Hossein Nasr, a prominent Islamic philosopher, writes:

> The Language of the Quran is the crystalisation of the Divine Word in human language. . . . The supreme miracle of Islam, is, in fact, considered to be the eloquence (balaghah) of the Quran, which is, for the Muslim, the prototype of language. This eloquence, much debated and discussed by Muslim scholars over the ages, does not reside so much in the ordering of the words into powerful poetic utterances, as in the degree of inspiration as a result of which every sentence, every word and every letter scintillate with a spiritual presence, and are like light congealed in tangible form.[1]

My earliest recollections are of listening to the Quran—on the radio; later, on TV; and most recently, I must admit, on my iPad and iPhone. As I studied my way through school and universities, I heard the Quran as background to conversations, street noises, the sighs of the walls in buildings in the quiet of the night. It mattered not whether the outside noises were in India, Romania, Italy, the UK, or the Netherlands: the reciting of the Quran was the call of the spirit to "home."

The Quran is what I heard in the mornings as I got ready for school, then college, then work; on weekend afternoons and evenings before bed. The Quran is the text recited as a Muslim couple is engaged, during wedding preparations in lower middle-class homes (in hopes that the *barakah* (blessings/protections) words permeate and prevent the vagaries of fate), and at the wakes of those whose souls have left us.

When I emigrated to New York in late 2000, I experienced this gravitational call of spirit as I walked down a street from Grand Central Station in midtown, heading to my office. Parked on the corner of 44th Street and one of the Avenues, in one of the many wheeled carts serving as food, there stood a man selling grilled hotdogs, bagels, and pretzels—listening to the Quran. The sound was an instant grounding, a recalling not only of memories, but

1. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (New York: Crossroads, 1997).

of a sense of being itself. The Quran as spiritual home is not a metaphor, it is a reality.

The recital of the Quran in that food cart in New York was before September 11, 2001. About three weeks after that day, I passed the very same spot and what was, for all intents and purposes, the very same cart. But this time the man was wearing a rather visible wooden cross hung by a leather "chain," over his thick, checkered coat. I clearly remember the deep sense of empathy I felt for this man. We did not know one another, and he and I had not spoken beyond the bare greeting and my request for a sandwich or a drink, perhaps twice a week. But it was as if I had known him all my life. Fear is a powerful emotion. Seeking a sense of safety behind religious symbols when living with fear feels as old as time itself. I understood then the deep resonance between word and symbol, and the intimate overlap between fear and faith.

The cart no longer operates. COVID-19 has put an end to many of those livelihoods. Meanwhile, many are horrified when I share this story. People feel a sense of sacrilege, how and why should the Quran and the cross be interchangeable, they ask with thinly veiled disdain. Yet to me, the interchangeable use of symbols or beliefs is not what moves me. What resonates is the sense of distress. Of course, it is likely that these were two different men, one a Muslim and the other a Christian. What matters to me is that both wore their faith on their chest, so to speak. One listened to the word of the Quran; the other wore the symbol of Christ's death and resurrection close to his heart. Both sought Spirit. Both needed it.

The sound of Quranic recitals is the backdrop to my very life. Although many of the words remain unclear, for the language is a universe to be studied over one's lifetime, still, the words touch my soul. As I listen, I traverse various levels of awareness. The Word has a spiritual presence in and of itself, I believe. And as we contemplate its meanings, we swim deeper into the Spirit of the Divine presence.

Verses Defining the Pulse of My Life

In the following paragraphs, I share a couple of the instances where the words, the *aya*s, or verses, of the Quran, have consistently anchored me since my earliest days, and where I, almost daily, marvel at the words and their meanings. The words of the Quran I share here are some that define the pulse of my life: words that to me are Spirit and Conscience and Being, all in one. These verses have rich learned interpretations, and over many centuries there have been multiple schools of theological thought about them. I am guilty

of not providing any exegesis, nor learned jurisprudence. Indeed, I read and share these verses not as I have learned and pored over them in years of study, but as I hear them, and as they breathe Spirit into me. As I listen, read, and seek the meaning of the verses, my life is transformed. So, I beg God's forgiveness for any error, and I ask you to bear with me as, in spite of my lack of learning, I share some of the sources of my inspiration.

God's light—God as light

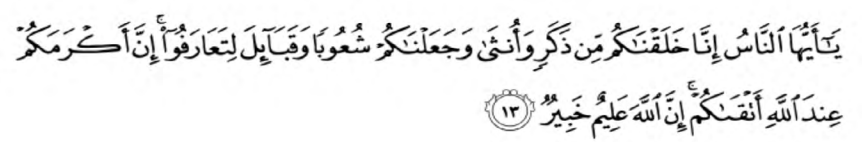
ٌحابَصْمِ اهَيفِ ةٍاكَشْمِكَ هِرِونُ لُثَمَ ضِرْأَلْاوَ تِاوَامَسَّلا رُونُ هُللَّا
ةٍرَجَشَ نمِ دُقَوَيُ يٌرِّدُ بٌكَوْكَ اهَنَّأَكَ ةُجَاجَزُلا ةٍجَاجَزُ يفِ حُابَصْمِلْا
ءُيضِيُ اهَتُيْزَ ذُالَكَيَ ةٍيَّبِرْغَ الَوَ ةٍيَّقِرْشَ الَّ ةٍنِوتُيْزَ ةٍكَرَابَمُ
ءُاشَيَ نمَ هِرِونُلِ هُللَّا يِدِهْيَ رِونُ ىلَعَ رٌونُ رٌانَ هُسْسَمْتَ هْلَ وْلَوَ
مٌيلِعَ ءٍيْشَ لٍّكُبِ هُللَّاوَ سِانَّلِلِ لَاثَمْأَلْا هُللَّا بُرِضْيَوَ

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.
The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp.
The lamp is within glass, the glass is as if it were a pearly [white] star,
Lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree,
Neither of the east nor of the west,
Whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire.
Light upon light, Allah guides to His light whom He wills.
And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is Knowing of all things (Quran 24:35 [emphasis added]).[2]

There are many debates about the meaning of this profound, elusive, and maze-like verse. It is as if the very description of God's light is labyrinthine, intricate, inescapable, and unfathomable. For how do you parse light when it is source and sourced, and is everywhere? Forget the bulb. Can you look into the sun and see from whence it begets its light? It *is* light. Thus, too the Divine. God *is* light. Why does this matter? Because in this verse, knowledge is God, and God is light, and light is at once a guide to His nature, as well as the emblem of his will. God is the light, the will, and the knowledge. If one is a seeker, how can one not but be wholeheartedly drawn like a moth to this literal lightness of being?

2. *The Quran* (Arabic Text With Corresponding English Meaning), by Saheeh International (Sahih International), January 1, 1997.

Diversity of creation



يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقۡنَٰكُم مِّن ذَكَرٖ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلۡنَٰكُمۡ شُعُوبٗا وَقَبَآئِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوٓاْۚ إِنَّ أَكۡرَمَكُمۡ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ أَتۡقَىٰكُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٞ ١٣

> O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted (Quran 49:13).

The above is my spirituality. It is an unequivocal and indisputably accurate statement from my Creator that we are created with diversities. In other words, our very existence is a feature of diversity. And our diversity *is* our existence. It is this diversity of the human condition that is the centerpiece of how I feel God, how I know God. Sameness—even the sameness of nature—feels like a form of alienation, a marginalization from the teeming diversity that is the heart of life. Sameness feels to me like the pulse of life is missing. And thus, homogeneity of species is akin to the absence of the Divine.

One of the many things that has struck me in the past about the above *aya*, and continues to fascinate me now, is that the reference is *not* to "man" and "woman," as it is elsewhere in the Quran. Rather, the reference here is to behavioral traits. The verse, in fact, refers to what, centuries later, we speak of as *gender*, assigned by society, "male" and "female."[3]. Given how we often dispute these identities, and how our existence oscillates between different eras and judgments, it is all the more striking to see these words, delivered by God through his Prophet Mohammed (*pbuh*), as Muslims believed, way back between 609 and 632 CE.

The *aya* also contains another reality check: God created us "peoples and tribes." Here we are, having lived through centuries of colonialism, industrialization, postcolonial nation-states, rampant technology, and now artificial intelligence. Throughout, reams of social, cultural anthropology, politics, international relations, and economics posit that modernization and tribes are anathema. At the same time, it is abundantly clear that tribes are not merely resilient, they are widespread and diverse in nature, structure, and affluence. Tribes exist as the axis of communal sentiment. Tribes are long-standing, durable, and adaptable.

3. Richard A. Lippa, *Gender, Nature, and Nurture* (Mahway, N. J.: Lawrence Ehrlbaum Associates Publishers, 2005).

As Sebastian Junger argued in the book *Tribe* (a *New York Times* bestseller), tribes are not only a feature of birth and social stratification, they represent a "strong instinct [including in the West] to belong to small groups defined by clear purpose and understanding."[4] Tribal society, he notes, has been exerting an almost gravitational pull on Westerners for hundreds of years; the reason for this is an "evolutionary past" as a communal species.[5] The most recent example of that attraction, he posits, is combat veterans who come home to find themselves missing the close bonds formed during platoon life. In fact, Junger suggests that the loss of the tribal closeness may even explain the high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder suffered post-deployment by military veterans today. It would seem, therefore, that "peoples and tribes" is not a feature of 7th-century Arabia, but another aspect of our enduring human condition.

But that which bespells me—as a woman, a North African, an Arab Muslim immigrant living in a Western world still to reconcile itself to multiple forms of sustained and systemic discrimination, and thus someone eternally fascinated by "the other" and by processes of "othering—is the inarguable command to know one another *lita'arafu*. There is a very deliberate consequence to the Creator's intent. The diversity is not a *caprice de Dieu*. It is intentional. In creating us diverse, God demands/orders/ commands that we be known to one another. This is a commandment to love. We are not commanded to know one another so we can be oppressors and subordinators. We are not created diverse to overpower and be cruel, as Pharaoh was (as countless *ayas* enlighten us). Rather, we are commanded to know one another as equals in God's creation.

On the Knowledge and Proximity of God

بُرَقْأَ نُحْنَوَ ۖ هُسُفْنَ ۦهِبِ سُوِسْوَتُ امَ مُلَعْنَوَ نَسَنْإِلْاَ انَقْلَخَ دْقَلَوَ
دِيرِوَلْاَ لِبْحَ نْمِ هِيْلَإِ

And We have already created man,
and know whatever thoughts his inner self develops,
and We are closer to him than (his) jugular vein (Quran 50:16).

4. Sebastian Junger, *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 49.
5. Junger, *Tribe*, 43.

As with all verses (and letters) of the Quran, there are multiple rich interpretations and analyses of the above verse. At first glance, it reads as God speaking to his creation, his omniscience concerning each human, and his proximity to all His creation—even closer than the jugular vein. Why the jugular vein? With multiple surgeons in the family, I asked the brain surgeon among them what was so special about the jugular vein. He responded that among the most critical of their functions is that jugular veins are key players in the circulation and drainage systems to the brain, face, and neck. If the jugular veins are blocked for any reason, he explained, the pressure on the brains builds up. Unless treated, this can cause serious damage to the entire body.

I find it deeply and endlessly interesting that as our Creator God seeks to alert us to His full knowledge of us, the link is made to the part of the body so intimately connected with the cerebral control of the whole of our body. As Creator, God is closer to our self, than the instrument which controls the pressure inside our bodies.

On a more personal note, as someone who since childhood has been warned (albeit lovingly) about being "too cerebral," who to this day is advised to "try to stop thinking so much," and who suffers from severe migraines, the idea of a Creator who is closer to knowing me than my jugular vein—which so intricately impacts my brain and the pressure valve thereof—this leaves me in utter awe. My Creator knows me all too well. In spite of all the flaws this Creator knows about, He remains closer to me than my jugular vein. How can I not but love this Creator who loves me so fully? Therein lies my spirituality.

Let me conclude by sharing words that I consider to mirror the Quran's 'light congealed in tangible form': the poetry of Hafiz of Shiraz (ca. 1315–1390):

> Go ahead and be who you are.
> The world we live in is a farm and each of us reaps our own wheat.
> Whether we are drunk or sober, each of us is heading for the street
> of a friend.
> The Temple, the Synagogue, the Church and the Mosque
> Are all houses of love.[6]

6. Michael Green and Sally Green, *The Illuminated* Hafiz*: Love Poems for the Journey to Light,* trans. Coleman Barks, Robert Bly, Meher Baba, and Peter Booth; ed. Nancy Owens Barton (Boulder, Colo.: Sounds True, 2019), 42.

23

Divine Inclusivity and Transformative Spirituality in Hinduism

Anantanand Rambachan

It is important to begin this discussion of transformative spirituality in Hinduism by acknowledging the diversity of this tradition. *Hindu* is the Iranian name of a river that the Indo-Europeans referred to as the *Sindhu*, Greeks as the *Indos*, and the British as the *Indus*. Those who inhabited the regions drained by the Indus River system were derivatively called Hindus. There is no reason to believe that they shared a homogenous religious culture. The reality is that the religious life of India has always been richly diverse, reflecting the variety in its geography, cultures, and languages.

It is helpful to think of Hinduism as a family name, recognizable through shared features. Though generalizations are hazardous, various scholars have identified some common features and themes.[1] These include:

- Recognition of the significance of the four Vedas as sources of authoritative teaching. The four Vedas (*Rg, Sama, Yajur*, and *Atharva*), are widely acknowledged by Hindus to contain revealed teachings. Acceptance of the authority of the Vedas is commonly regarded as necessary for Hindu orthodoxy, even though such acceptance may be merely formal and nominal.
- The belief in a moral order and rebirth (*karma* and *samsara*), emphasizing human responsibility and the short- and long-term consequences of actions. This include affirmation of an ultimate reality, spoken of as *brahman*, that is regarded as both transcendent and immanent.
- The view that ignorance (*avidya*) of the nature of this reality is the fundamental human problem and the primary cause of suffering.
- An optimistic outlook flowing from the belief in the possibility of knowing *brahman* and liberation (*moksha*).

1. R. Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 25–26; Troy Wilson Organ, *Hinduism: Its Historical Development* (Woodbury: Barron's Educational Series Inc., 1974), 28–34.

These common orientations provide the fabric, as it were, out of which a rich theological diversity is woven.

The boundaries between the various Hindu traditions are permeable and membership in a sub-tradition is not formal. On the whole, Hindu traditions are decentralized and without governing institutions prescribing right belief and practice, as may be present in other religions. The traditions comprising this ancient extended family continue to intermingle, influencing and being influenced by each other. If we keep this fact of diversity in mind, our generalizations will not mislead.

My discussion in this essay draws from a variety of Hindu traditions, but most specifically from the tradition of *Advaita*. *Advaita* is one of several Hindu theological traditions that look to the Vedas as sources of authoritative teachings. More specifically, these traditions look to the dialogues in the last sections of the Vedas, the Upanishads, also called the Vedanta, as the repository of the highest teachings in the scripture. This tradition also draws significantly from the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. *Advaita* looks to a line of distinguished teachers for the interpretation of its authoritative texts and for the transmission of its teachings. The most distinguished among these is Shankara (ca. 8th century CE), who wrote extensive commentaries on the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, and who is credited with the legacy of the finest systematic exposition of *Advaita*.[2]

A Good Human Life

Hindu spirituality, in its most fundamental purpose, aims at human transformation. Transformation suggests a change from one condition into another: from one way of being to another. In the Hindu tradition, such transformation is the consequence of a new way of understanding oneself in relation to the divine, the world, and other living beings. This process of transformation, however, begins when we deeply experience the limits of finite gains and yearn for a deeper meaning and purpose in life. The fulfillment that all human beings seek through multifarious finite pursuits is to be found only in the divine. The Svetasvatara Upanishad 6:20 could not be clearer on this point: "Only when people will be able to roll up the sky like a piece of leather will suffering come to an end without first knowing God."[3]

2. See Anantanand Rambachan, *The Advaita Worldview: God, World, and Humanity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

3. *Upanishads,* trans. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

> The Hindu tradition identifies four goals for a good human life. These are virtue (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*), pleasure (*kama*), and liberation (*moksha*). Contrary to popular impression, the Hindu tradition is neither life-denying nor narrowly otherworldly. Hinduism has never given its blessings to involuntary poverty. It recognizes poverty to be a great cause of suffering. By including *artha* as one of life's four goals—along with pleasure, virtue, and liberation—Hinduism recognizes the need of every human being for material necessities, such as food, healthcare, shelter, and clothing, that make life possible and that enable human beings to live with dignity. *Kama* addresses the human need for pleasure. Hindus are not so spiritually minded that they despise the gain and enjoyment of material things. *Kama* includes sensual as well as aesthetic enjoyment. Sculpture, music, and dance have flourished with the blessings of the Hindu tradition and Hindus love to celebrate life through these forms. The good life is more than just having the ascetic minimum for survival.

The goal of *dharma* is based in the social and relational context in which we live our lives. It emphasizes the need to regulate our pursuit of wealth and pleasure in the interests of the well-being of others. The attainment of wealth and pleasure by inflicting pain and suffering on others or by denying them the freedom to pursue these ends is in opposition to *dharma.* The pursuit of wealth and pleasure must be consistent with the requirements of the common good. There is no good reason why the demands of *dharma* should be limited to individuals. Today, we must extend the ethics of *dharma* to corporations and nations because of their power to affect the common good. There is broad consensus among Hindu traditions that the cardinal ethic of *dharma* is non-injury (*ahimsa*).

Though approving the pursuit of wealth and pleasure within the ethical framework of a regard for the common good, Hindu traditions call attention to the limits of these ends. A life defined by these ends is ultimately unsatisfactory and inadequate. It leaves us wanting and restless. The reasons are many. The gains of wealth and pleasure are transient, leaving us hopelessly addicted to momentary gratification and always wanting more. Since gains such as wealth, power, and fame are never evenly distributed, their value is derived from the fact that some possess more. When we link our own self-worth to such gains, we condemn ourselves to a competitive anxiety that demands that we always have more than others. There is never contentment.

The Knots of the Heart

In addition to lost contentment through a focus on wealth and pleasure, we condemn ourselves by what the Hindu sacred texts speak of as the knots of the heart. These knots are ignorance-greed-greedy actions (*avidya-kama-karma*). Ignorance causes greed because it perpetuates the belief that human beings can find lasting fulfillment in the finite. The fulfillment of such desires, however, results only in momentary experiences of satisfaction, while new desires are generated leading to the condition of greed. Greedy desires generate actions that are destructive of self and others. Greed expresses itself in greedy actions that champion one's own interests above all others. Nachiketas' declaration in the Katha Upanishad 1:27, "With wealth you cannot make man content," is at the heart of the Hindu indictment of greed and materialism. Beyond the destructive social consequences of greed, materialism lures us with a false promise of delivering contentment. It is an illusory path to human flourishing.

Spirituality as transformation truly begins when we understand the limits of finite gains. Without this awareness, religion is reduced to a system of magical techniques for gaining finite objects of human desire. Our relationship with God becomes transactional in nature. Religions cannot be indifferent to human suffering caused by the lack of human necessities or by structures of injustice and oppression—whether economic, political, or socio-cultural. At the same time, Hindu traditions teach that the highest purpose of religion is to remove ignorance about God and to live one's life in harmony with the truth of divine nature.

Knowing the Infinite

For a person who experiences existential anxiety in the face of meaninglessness, the Hindu tradition advises approaching a teacher (*guru*) who is centered in God and knowledgeable about the sacred texts. The Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.13 also reminds the teacher of her obligations to the student: "To that student who approaches in the proper manner, whose mind is calm and who is endowed with self-control, the wise teacher should fully impart the knowledge of *brahman* through which one knows the true and imperishable person."

The knowledge of *brahman*, the infinite, that is described here is at the heart of Hinduism's transformative spirituality. Knowledge, however, is not just mental or verbal. The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad 2.4.5 speaks of spiritual

knowledge as a threefold process of hearing (*sravava*), reasoning and reflecting (*manana*), and assimilation and transformation (*nididhyasana*). Knowledge is a discipline, a path to transformation and it is best received from a teacher who embodies it and exemplifies what it means in her relationships with others. The Bhagavad Gita 4:34 advises that spiritual knowledge is best sought by becoming a disciple and by dialogue with and service of the teacher.[4]

What is the content of this transformative teaching? Hindu traditions describe the universal human problem of ignorance (*avidya*) in various ways. At heart, however, ignorance is a false understanding of self and its relatedness. The Bhagavad Gita 18:20–22 discusses three ways of seeing the world. Two are false and one is true. In 18:22, we learn that the most problematic way of seeing the world is the exclusive and stubborn focus on a single object, entity, or being, irrationally regarding it as the whole. Today that single entity could be one's nation, ethnic, or religious community, or oneself. For one who sees the world in this way, the well-being of that entity is so all-consuming that one sees nothing else. It is as though nothing else exists or matters. Such knowledge leads to fanaticism, obsession, and self-righteousness.

Better than such an exclusive way of seeing the world, centered on a single entity, is the seeing of the many, the diversity. Here the horizon of seeing is enlarged. But, in 18:21, the Bhagavad Gita problematizes this way of seeing: if one sees the many as existing separately and independently, without connectedness to each other. In this view, the many are not perceived as having anything in common. Difference is all important. One sees different races, ethnic groups, nationalities, and even species, but no common identity. One sees "many-ness," but not unity or interrelatedness.

In 18:20, we find that the highest way of seeing in the text is not the obliteration of difference, but the awareness of unity and connectedness in the midst of difference. It is "that knowledge by which one sees one indivisible and imperishable Being in all diverse beings." It is the seeing of the One, uniting all that is divided and separate.

The Bhagavad Gita 9:17–18 describes the indivisible and imperishable Being as father and mother of the universe, and as friend, sustainer, lord, refuge, and goal of all human beings. The Upanishads speak of this one God as "that from which all beings originate, by which they are sustained and

4. In this chapter, scripture quotations from the Bhagavad Gita are from *Shri Bhagavad Gita,* trans. Winthrop Sargeant (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

to which they return."[5] Other Upanishads, such as Chandogya Upanishad 6.2.1–2, speak of God as the indivisible and uncreated One from which the many are created. The Upanishads contest the existence of anything but the One God before creation, and the emergence of the world from anything other than God. The universe, Chandogya Upanishad emphatically states, does not spontaneously appear from non-existence. The world is willed into being by an intentional creative act of God. The Hindu tradition understands God to be source of everyone and everything. In the Bhagavad Gita 16:8, ignorance also includes the idea that the universe is without divine origin (*anishvaram*) and exists independently of God.

Equality and Inclusivity

The understanding of the one God is fundamental to our tradition. We also understand the universe to be the overflow of God's fullness (*ananda*). Taittiriya Upanishad 3.6 speaks of all beings as originating from, sustained by, and returning to divine fullness (*ananda*). Our affirmation of the truth of a universal God who is the source of all existence is not a theological footnote. It is transformative and fundamental for our relationships. For Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), the implication is unity and identity with others. Gandhi wrote, "I believe in the absolute oneness of God and, therefore, of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source. I cannot, therefore, detach myself from the wickedest soul nor may I be denied identity with the most virtuous."[6]

All living beings have a common origin and constitute a single community. According to the Maha Upanishad 6: 71–72, only those with small minds distinguish between the relative and the stranger. For those who live generously, the entire world constitutes a single family (*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*).

The transformative significance of the Hindu understanding of God for our relationships is not to be found only in our understanding of God's oneness and in God's significance as the source of all life. As we see in the Bhagavad Gita 18:20, Hindu traditions affirm the existence of the One being in the many. Isha Upanishad begins with the famous call to see everything in the world of movement as pervaded by Isha (God). There is no life outside of God and there is nothing that exists which is not sustained by God. The Bhagavad

5. Taittiriya Upanishad 3.1.1.

6. Mahatma Gandhi, *All Men Are Brothers: Autobiographical Reflections* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1980), 75.

Gita 13: 27–28 articulates beautifully this truth and its implications: "One who sees the Supreme God existing equally in all beings, the imperishable in the perishable, truly sees. Seeing indeed the same God existing everywhere, one does not hurt the self by the self. Therefore, one attains the highest end."

Both verses affirm the presence of God in the world but characterize this presence in two very important ways. The first way is indicated by the word "equally" (samam). It is the first word in each of the two verses. The second is apparent in the phrase "in all beings" (sarveshu bhuteshu). The word "everywhere" (sarvatra) is also used. These words admit of no exclusions nor distinctions. Put simply, God exists equally in all beings. The divine presence is not limited by anything—neither nation, gender, ethnicity, nor age. This is not unusual for the Bhagavad Gita and other Hindu texts that always speak of the divine presence in terms of equality and inclusivity. Seeing the imperishable and indivisible in the perishable and divided is consequential. It is commended as true seeing and as the highest way of seeing because it is the seeing of that which is ultimate, and which, therefore, has ultimate value. The imperishable evokes reverence and that reverence extends to all in which It exists.

Nothing exists outside of God, and nothing exists but for the fact that it receives the gift of moment-to-moment sustenance from God. In the words of the Bhagavad Gita 7:7, everything rests in the divine like radiant jewels strung on a single thread. This truth of divinity abiding in all hearts is the most fundamental source and ground of the intrinsic dignity and equal worth of every human being. It is our theological antibody to the instrumentalization of human beings and the denial of their personhood. We cannot claim, as so many across traditions and institutions do today, to acknowledge and honor the divine while dishonoring and demeaning human beings. We cannot honor and value God and devalue human beings. We cannot give our assent or support to any social or cultural system that is founded on human inequality and indignity. Our understanding of God requires diligence and discernment in identifying such systems and in articulating critiques from our theological centers. To see women as inferior to men, to prefer the boy-child, to mistreat the elderly, to ascribe unequal worth and demean persons on the basis of birth, and to discriminate and practice violence against gay people are all in fundamental contradiction to our deepest theological convictions.

The Sacred in the Other

Divine inclusivity is indeed the source of human dignity, but this truth invites us to an even deeper way of seeing human beings. It summons us to encounter each other with reverence and an awareness of the sacred. The logic of teaching that the divine is intimately present in us all leads to the awe-filled recognition that every human encounter is, in fact, an encounter with the divine. Every human relationship is a relationship with God. In the face of every being, we behold the divine.

For good historical reasons, our contemporary discourse about the significance of human beings is dominated by the language of rights. The contribution of this language, especially in pioneering United Nations conventions, must never be underestimated. Such language, however, has its limits. It legally binds us to tolerance and to specified freedoms. It does not arouse delight or inspire relationships that flow from an awakening to the sacred in the other. It does not remove the veils from our eyes necessary for sacred seeing.

The positive transformative implications of divine immanence are as important as the rejection of inequality, and injustice in casteism, racism and sexism. The single value that best expresses this transformation is compassion (*daya* or *karuna*). The Bhagavad Gita 12:13 describes the person dear to God as one who is free from hate and who is friendly, compassionate, and forgiving. The text describes the best yogi as the human being who identifies with others in suffering and in joy (6:32). Oneness with others in pain and sorrow is at the heart of Hindu spirituality and understanding of God.

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and distinguished teacher of Hinduism, found inspiration for his life of service to the poor in the course of a conversation with his teacher. In an inspired reflection on compassion, Sri Ramakrishna uttered the now famous words: "Talk of compassion for beings! Insignificant creature that you are, how can you show compassion for all beings? Who are you to show compassion? You wretch, who are you to bestow it. No, no; it is not compassion to *jivas* (living beings) but service to them as Shiva."[7]

Swami Vivekananda saw the profound possibilities in this thought for an interpretation of *Advaita* that justified service and a concern with overcoming suffering. In powerful words at the Rameswaram Temple in southern India,

7. Gwilym Beckerlegge, *Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Service: A Study of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 94.

Vivekananda called for spirituality in the service of others: "He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak and in the diseased, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary."[8] Vivekananda extended the meaning of liberation to include service to others in the world. This is generally associated in Hinduism with freedom from the cycles of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsara*). In a letter to his disciple, Mary Hale, Swami Vivekananda expressed a desire for rebirth and the opportunity it affords for the service of God in all: "May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship."[9]

In a similar way, Mahatma Gandhi, drawing deeply from the Hindu teaching about God's presence in every being, believed that God would be found only in unity and identity with others. The highest expression of identity, according to Gandhi, is a life of service: "Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavor simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and to be one with it. This can only be done by the service of all."[10]

Suffering and Liberation

We cannot discuss transformative Hindu spirituality without acknowledging that there are interpretations of the Hindu tradition and practices that do not reflect this vision of human sacredness, unity, and dignity. Many Hindus continue to define Hindu identity in the context of a hierarchical caste order that labels some as impure and denies them dignity and worth. The doctrine of *karma* is interpreted in ways that justify caste inequalities by contending that birth in a lower caste is the consequence of evil actions and that there is no freedom from its indignities without rebirth into a higher caste. Such views justify violence against persons seen as belonging to lower castes. The Hindu tradition developed in a patriarchal culture, with assumptions about male supremacy, in which women derived value only through relationships

8. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,* vol. 3 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama 1964–1971), 140.

9. Vivekananda, letter to Mary Hale, 9 July 1897, in *The Complete Works,* vol. 5, 137.

10. Gandhi, *The Voice of Truth,* vol. 5 of *The Selected Works of Mahatma Ghandi*, ed. Shriman Narayan (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1969), 1.

with men. Patriarchal values are reflected in the fact that a disproportionate percentage of the illiterate in India are women, in demands for dowries from the families of brides, and in the abortion of female fetuses. The oppression and injustice of caste and patriarchy cannot be justified by core Hindu teachings about human unity and dignity value.

Our identification with others in suffering—the outcome of seeing the divine in everyone—requires that we properly inquire into the causes of their suffering with the aim of overcoming these causes. The traditional emphasis has been on suffering as an inward condition associated with ignorance, but there is no reason to limit the meaning of suffering in this way. Hindu texts commending the identification with others in suffering do not suggest any such limitation. What we need then is an expansive understanding of suffering and liberation. We cannot ignore the suffering of human beings when they lack opportunities to attain the necessities for dignified and decent living, or when suffering is inflicted through systemic oppression and injustice based on gender, birth, or race. It is not acceptable to affirm teachings about life's unity while being indifferent to inequality and oppression at the social level. Working to overcome suffering means identifying the political, social, and economic structures that cause and perpetuate suffering. The unmistakable call to be one with the suffering other requires nothing less.

Hindu-Christian Learning

Let me conclude my essay with a word of gratitude. Since 1981, my engagement in interreligious dialogue has focused in a special way on Hindu-Christian dialogue. I have had the privilege of a continuing relationship with the World Council of Churches (WCC), the world's largest Christian ecumenical body and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican. Most recently, I have had the privilege of participating in the WCC-sponsored Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. I encounter the Christian tradition in a very special way through its embodiment in friends who express their faith in their way of life. My learning from and friendship with them span many decades.

> My favorite Christian text is the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. In this parable, Jesus commends virtuous human beings as those who engage in acts of care and service towards the suffering. These are the ones who will be richly rewarded. His words, however, intrigue his hearers, since he uses the personal pronoun: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,

> I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (verses 35–36 [NIV]).

Puzzled, they ask, in verses 37–39: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

The heart of the parable is in the response of Jesus to their perplexity: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (25:40).

This is a text from which I learn deeply. I understand this parable to affirm the divine presence in every human being. This is a Hindu teaching that I lift up throughout this essay. What Jesus makes powerfully clear to me are the implications of this truth for human relationships. The truth of divine immanence is meant to promote certain kinds of actions—feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, offering hospitality to the stranger, visiting the lonely. The love of God, present equally in all, is not meaningful unless it moves us to care for those who suffer. The extraordinary and explicit way in which Jesus spells out this connection inspires me to ponder deeply the connection between the Hindu emphasis on divine immanence and social justice. For this, I am grateful.

24

The Many Faces of Compassion: A (Western) Buddhist View

André van der Braak

In the past few decades, Buddhism has entered the West from many countries around the world—ironically, not so much from its cradle, India, but from various other cultures in Asia, like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Vietnam, Tibet, Japan, Korea, and now, last but not least, China. For the interested Westerner who wants to study Buddhism, a wide variety of religious traditions is available for consideration: Theravada, Zen, Chan, Vajrayana, Pure Land, Shingon, and new religious movements, such as the Sanbo Kyodan, Soka Gakkai, and Fo Guang Shan.

One of the advantages of bringing this multitude of Buddhist traditions and movements into fruitful contact with cultural and religious diversity in the West is to increase and renew the understanding of our own religious traditions. Eberhard Scheiffele once described intercultural dialogue as "questioning one's own from the perspective of the foreign."[1] The dialogue with Buddhist traditions is, therefore, not only aimed at getting to know Buddhists better, but also, and above all, at making one´s own familiar faith tradition "foreign" again. Through such a constructive form of alienation, the texts and core concepts of one´s own tradition may come back to life.

What does Buddhism have to offer in such a dialogue? Our present time is characterized by what the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has described as the *nova effect*, which has spawned "an ever-expanding variety of moral/spiritual choices" leading to "a generalized culture of 'authenticity' or expressive individualism, in which people are encouraged to find their own

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1. Eberhard Scheiffele, "Questioning One's 'Own' from the Perspective of the Foreign," in *Nietzsche and Asian Thought,* ed. Graham Parkes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 31–47.

way, discover their own fulfilment, 'do their own thing.'"[2] Within such an individualistic culture, according to some sceptics, a market of well-being and happiness emerges, a religious furniture boulevard, in which each tradition can open its own shop.

In such a market, the most important Buddhist "product" would be enlightenment (*nirvana* or *bodhi*): the liberation from suffering, the awakening from the illusion of ignorance. And indeed, since the 1960s, many in the West have devoted themselves to the practice of Buddhist meditation, subjecting themselves to *senseis*, *roshi*, *gurus*, *rinpoches*, and *acharyas*, in the hope of realizing spiritual liberation. Many of these devotees were Christians who had disappointedly turned away from the faith of their childhood. I myself was among them at the beginning of the 1980s. Raised as a Roman Catholic, I followed Nietzsche in his proclamation of the death of God and turned my gaze to the East in search of enlightenment. I practiced *vipassana* meditation (nowadays better known as *mindfulness* meditation) and was taught by various teachers and gurus.

However, in the end, my perspective on enlightenment changed. From a Buddhist point of view, I realized, enlightenment as a consumer article is deeply contrary to the notion of *anātman,* non-self. There is no true self, no true essence to which we must try to gain access. My religious quest took a new and unexpected turn. Through the Chinese Buddhist *bodhisattva* of compassion, *Guanyin*, I rediscovered the Christian Virgin Mary. Through the bodhisattva protectors in front of the entrance of countless Chinese Buddhist temples I rediscovered Saint Michael, the leader of the army of angels. I realized that Buddhism does not compete with Christianity, that enlightenment is not a substitute for a God who has supposedly died, and that religious diversity and dialogue are inseparable from Western modernity.[3]

Perhaps the most important contribution of Buddhism to our hyper-individualistic Western culture is not to offer an even better product on the market of well-being and happiness, but to challenge our culture of authenticity itself, to put expressive individualism into perspective by reconsidering social values such as solidarity, mercy, caring, and service. Today, an investigation into such values may be even more needed than an investigation into enlightenment. I will, therefore, examine various Buddhist perspectives on compassion.

2. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2007), 299.

3. See André van der Braak, *Enlightenment Blues: My Years with an American Guru* (Rhinebeck, N.Y.: Monkfish Publishing, 2003).

Compassion and Wisdom

Compassion (*karunā*) is a basic value within Buddhism. Even in early Buddhist traditions, compassion is mentioned as one of the four *Brahmaviharā* (abodes of Brahma; elevated states of mind). Cultivating these states of mind is an important part of Buddhist practice.

In later Mahayana Buddhism, the practice of compassion is inseparable from the notion of the bodhisattva: a being (*sattva*) aimed at awakening (*bodhi*). In the Buddhist Pali Cānon, this term is used to refer to Prince Siddhārtha Gautama in his previous incarnations, when he aimed to attain Buddhahood. In the *jātaka* stories (talking about the previous lives of the Buddha), his bodhisattva path is illustrated by many examples demonstrating his selflessness. Mahayana Buddhism knows the bodhisattva ideal: as a Buddhist practitioner, one should focus not on attaining enlightenment for oneself, but on becoming a buddha who can also show others the way to liberation. To this end, one takes four bodhisattva vows, which amount to devoting oneself to the liberation of all sentient beings. To walk such a bodhisattva path, ten important virtues must be developed. The most important of these are the first six: *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (moral behaviour), *ksānti* (patience or humility), *vīriya* (energy), *dhyāna* (meditation), and *prajñā* (wisdom). A bodhisattva who has realized these six *pāramitās* is, similar to the *arhat* of early Buddhism, liberated from all ties with *samsara* (the cycle of death and rebirth), and could choose to enter *nirvana*.

However, out of compassion for all sentient beings, bodhisattvas choose to remain within *samsara* and to continue their bodhisattva path. They also perfect the remaining four *pāramitās*: *upāya* (the ability to instruct others skillfully), *pranidhāna* (steadfastness in making vows), *bala* (special spiritual abilities), and *jñāna* (liberating knowledge or gnosis). Such bodhisattvas can now decide for themselves when and in what form they reincarnate. They can manifest themselves in all kinds of forms. They can assist living beings in the most miserable circumstances, and even descend to the deepest slopes to assist the damned. From the Mahayana Buddhist perspective, the whole world is filled with such bodhisattvas, invisible to us.

The various Mahayana sutras contain examples of bodhisattvas who are prominent in Buddhist traditions, widely revered and even worshipped. Maitreya (the loving one) is venerated as the bodhisattva who resides in Tusita Heaven and who prepares to incarnate as the next Buddha, many years from now. Manjushri (the noble one) is the bodhisattva associated with

discriminatory understanding. Samantabhadra (universal virtue) is known for his practical application of wisdom in the world, often in a hidden way. Ksitigarbha (Earth womb) assists the deceased, especially deceased children.[4]

Compassion is embodied in India by the male bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (The Lord Who Looks Down from Above). When Buddhism travelled to China, Avalokitesvara morphed into the female bodhisattva Guanyin (She Who Listens to the Cries of Distress of the People). Guanyin is often depicted with a thousand arms; she literally lacks hands to assist all living beings. She is also often portrayed with a tear because she realizes that her efforts will always fall short. Chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra emphasizes that Guanyin can take any form necessary to save someone. In the contemporary translation by Dutch Chan teacher Ton Lathouwers, this form can include a buddha, a bodhisattva, a Buddhist saint, a monk or nun, a layperson, a child, a very elderly person, the Christian Redeemer, the Mother of God, angels or saints, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, the Shechinah from Jewish mysticism, prophets or *tzaddiks*, a sage in Islam or Sufi, a god or goddess from Hinduism, a convinced atheist, one who has failed completely, one who is the lost, and even a monster or demon.[5] So, in the various shapes of Guanyin, compassion literally takes on many faces.

The many faces of compassion figure prominently in the Vimalakīrti Sutra. This sutra recounts the story of a wealthy businessman Vimalakīrti, who does not live in a monastery like the monks but works amid the chaos of the world as a bodhisattva. He uses his immeasurable wealth to help the poor. He is married with children, yet he is chaste. In a busy household with family and servants, he still goes into silence. He wears jewellery and beautiful robes but is poor inside. He visits gambling houses and wine shops to do his bodhisattva work, like a lotus that grows in the mud. Vimalakīrti's understanding and practice of compassion is far superior to that of more conventional disciples of the Buddha, because he is not hindered by dualistic Buddhist concepts.

One of Vimalakīrti's discussions in this sutra deals with the compassion that should be developed by a bodhisattva. The text makes a distinction between "sentimental compassion," which is said to exhaust the bodhisattva, and should therefore be transcended, and "great compassion" (*maha karunā*), which does not lead to exhaustion, and which "does not use the concept of

4. Taigen Dan Leighton, *Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003).

5. Maha Karuna Ch'an, accessed 12 January 2021, https://mahakarunachan.nl/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/06-Kuan-Yin-Lotus.pdf.

living beings."

> He arouses the great compassion toward all living beings, without falling into any sentimental compassion. The great compassion that strives to eliminate the accidental passions does not conceive of any life in living beings. Why? Because great compassion that falls into sentimentally purposive views only exhausts the bodhisattva in his reincarnations. But the great compassion which is free of involvement with sentimentally purposive views, does not exhaust the bodhisattva. . . . Hence, . . . he has the power and ability to teach the Dharma which liberates living beings from their bondage.[6]

Therapists, doctors, social workers, and other healthcare providers often suffer from "compassion fatigue" that can lead to burn out. After years of trying to be empathetic to the suffering of those they are trying to help, they may become cynical and emotionally empty. A bodhisattva, on the other hand, is expected to work tirelessly for the well-being of others, twenty-four hours a day, not only in this life but also in future lives. When we reflect on this, it becomes clear that the qualities required for this will have to go beyond the feeling usually described by the word *compassion*.

Those who work to end the enormous and overwhelming suffering in the world without realizing wisdom run a high risk of compassion fatigue and burnout. But, as the Vimalakīrti Sutra tells us, practicing the great compassion that is nourished by great wisdom does not exhaust the bodhisattva. Therefore, those who have great compassion can perform unlimited and varied bodhisattva acts for the good of all living beings.

Mahayana Buddhism thus emphasizes that the development of compassion must always go hand in hand with the realization of *prajñā*, wisdom. And not just *prajñā,* but *prajñāpāramitā*, the perfection of wisdom, the transcendental wisdom, or the wisdom beyond all wisdom. In Mahayana Buddhism, compassion and wisdom are seen as two connected qualities needed to walk the Buddha-way, just as a bird needs two wings to fly. When wisdom is lacking, compassion degenerates into "sentimental compassion," and burnout and compassion fatigue arise. When we realize wisdom, compassion grows into great compassion. Ultimately, learning to embody such great compassion is the purpose of Buddhist transformative spiritualities.

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6. Robert A. F. Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture* (Delhi: Motilal, 1991), 46.

The wisdom beyond all wisdom is that everything—humankind, the whole reality, and therefore compassion— is fundamentally characterized by *sūnyatā,* emptiness or openness.[7] Without a profound understanding of *sūnyatā,* the Buddhist practitioner risks interfering with fellow human beings like an ennobled scout, constantly striving to do good deeds. That is the danger of sentimental compassion. That is why, for example, the Diamond Sutra proclaims that a bodhisattva can only liberate all sentient beings by realizing that no other sentient beings exist at all! Any conventional view of compassion actually stands in the way of the embodiment of great compassion.

Charles Goodman recounts a story of a lunch conversation between Buddhist scholar Edward Conze and a Buddhist lama from Mongolia. Conze had done his best to provide a vegetarian lunch. However, it turned out that the lama ate meat. When he questioned the lama about this (after all, eating meat goes against the *vinaya* vows that the lama had subscribed to as a monk), the lama remarked that in the nomadic area of Mongolia, meat is often the only food available. But these conditions do not diminish the negative karmic effects of eating meat. The lama told Conze that he was seriously considering the possibility that he would be reborn in hell because of his choice to eat meat. But given the importance of his mission to bring Buddhism to the people of Mongolia, he was prepared to accept this risk of negative consequences.[8]

This example shows that the desire to stay karmically clean can be diametrically opposed to great compassion. Where these two impulses clash, Mahayana Buddhism gives priority to acting according to compassion. Furthermore, the example shows that, when it comes to great compassion, we are abandoning our conventional view of ethics, the ethical rules, and "doing the right thing." Above all, great compassion is, as Nietzsche put it, "beyond good and evil." But because it is still a form of compassion, the bodhisattva does not turn into an amoral, selfish, uninhibited exploiter of others. On the contrary, the bodhisattva grows into a much more flexible, creative, and effective source of positivity for others.

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7. The misleading translation of *sūnyatā* as emptiness led to the deplorable characterization of Buddhism as a life-denying nihilism, promulgated in the nineteenth century by Arthur Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and adopted in the twentieth century by many philosophers and theologians.

8. Charles Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion: An Interpretation and Defense of Buddhist Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 20–21.

Three Images of Compassion

The quality of compassion has been imagined differently in various Buddhist traditions. In what follows, I will describe three images of compassion—personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal—that play a role in Buddhist transformative spiritualities of compassion.

Personal transformative spirituality of compassion

In early Buddhism, compassion is mainly imagined in individual terms, as a personal kind of compassion. This type of compassion toward living beings is conceived as an emotion that creates a motivation to promote the well-being of others. This motivation, however, is linked to the concept of *person*. One example of this is the Buddhist meditation practice of loving kindness (*metta*). In this practice, meditators first send loving kindness and compassion to themselves, then to their family and best friends, then to their colleagues at work, then to all their fellow country people, and finally to all sentient beings. In this way, the circle of compassion continues to expand, until the meditator gets to the point where they repeat: "may all beings be healthy and happy."

From an Indian Buddhist perspective, such a personal compassion is a beneficial mental state, one of the four *brahmaviharā* that can be strengthened by mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). In the Indian Buddhist doctrine of salvation, the notions of karma and rebirth play a crucial role. The moral law of karma (intentional action) is a matter of cause and effect. All our actions, even our thoughts and intentions, have a causal influence on future living conditions. Good deeds bring wholesome results for those who perform them; bad deeds bring unwholesome results. This mechanism can be explained by an agricultural analogy. A seed is planted, and a complex process of growth creates a plant that can be harvested. In the same way, an intentional act leads to its results. However, the time between an action and its result is unpredictable.[9] Cultivating compassion is a beneficial path to liberation because it counteracts the negative karmic effects of the past.

Interpersonal transformative spirituality of compassion

As Buddhism spread from India to China, the personal notion of compassion gradually evolved into a more interpersonal approach to compassion. This was

9. According to Richard Gombrich, the first step of the eightfold path, correct conception *(sammā ditthi)*, refers to accepting the concept of karma. The Buddha called himself a *kammavādin*, someone who deals with karma and its transformation through speeches and dialogues (*What the Buddha Thought* [London: Equinox Publishing, 2009], 27).

based on the fundamental understanding that the conceptual boundaries and demarcations we make in relation to living beings are conventional, and that the uniqueness of an individual life, of a separate individual, is an illusion.

Indian Buddhist notions of compassion and karma have been mixed with Chinese cosmological views, and with Chinese visions of self-cultivation. Robert Sharf has attempted to chart this process.[10] The Chinese cosmos is seen as an ordered, organic process of change and plurality. The universe is in a state of continuous movement and flow, according to the cyclic interaction of the five phases (*wuxing*) and the vital forces (*qi*) of *yin* and *yang*. Humans are not separate from this natural order but are an inseparable part of it. This organic unity is held together not by unchanging natural laws, but by sympathetic resonance, or stimulus-response (*ganying*).[11] Just as a tuning fork brings the strings of a guitar into sympathetic movement, so all things in the world constantly respond to each other, even when there is no external contact. Local phenomena influence the state of the whole, and the state of the whole is reflected in local phenomena. They share a space of sympathetic resonance in which all things are intimately intertwined.[12] Moral self-cultivation means becoming more and more attuned to the ever-changing cosmos of which one is a part. Virtue literally consists of being attuned to the universe, of achieving a perfect resonance between oneself and others, oneself and nature, and oneself and the cosmos.

This influence of early Chinese cosmology on later Chinese representations of Buddhism, particularly the doctrine of sympathetic resonance (*ganying*), affected the view of compassion. From the perspective of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, compassion refers not so much to an individual quality to be developed, but rather to a resonance with the ten thousand things in the universe, a resonance that is always ongoing.

10. Robert Sharf opposes the standard narrative of a Buddhism that is being gradually assimilated into Chinese culture, because it implies an essentialist view of Buddhism ("Chinese Buddhism and the Cosmology of Sympathetic Resonance," in *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* [Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002], 77–133).

11. "*Gan* has as its semantic field the notion of affect, feeling, stimulus and may syntactically function as a verb (to be affected, to us), and adverb (affectively, feelingly), or an adjective (affective, stimulating). . . . The meaning of *ying* focuses upon the idea of response, reaction, reflex, effect" (Charles Le Blanc, "From Cosmology to Ontology through Resonance: A Chinese Interpretation of Reality," in *Beyond Textuality: Asceticism and Violence in Anthropological Interpretation,* eds. Gilles Bibeau and Ellen E. Corin (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004), 60.

12. Sharf, "Chinese Buddhism," 82–84.

The American Buddhist philosopher Peter Hershock argues that, as Chinese Buddhism increasingly distanced itself from Indian Buddhism's formulations of compassion as a transformative inner experience (the realization of an inner essence), compassion was reformulated in terms of optimal external functioning (social virtuosity).[13] Hershock points out that the main currents within Chinese Buddhism did not focus as much on the psychologically highly-refined commentary tradition of Indian Buddhism (such as the Abhidharma scriptures, which catalogue levels and ranks of contemplative experience). Instead, they focused on texts such as the Lotus Sutra and the Vimalakirti Sutra which, rather than attempting to describe subjective experiences, provide exhaustive examples of successful compassionate behaviour.[14]

Such an interpersonal compassion is about demonstrating from moment to moment the willingness to carry out everyday activities with an improvised virtuosity, which Hershock calls "liberating intimacy": a personal embodiment of the mutual connectedness of all things. According to him, Indian Buddhist salvation, with its emphasis on inner spiritual purification, turned into Chinese Buddhist salvation. The latter focused on compassionate functioning, achieving situational virtuosity by embodying a sympathetic resonance with all things. Salvation does not lie in attaining a psychological state of enlightenment, but in compassionately embodying the mutual connectedness of all things.

Transpersonal transformative spirituality of compassion

There is a third, transpersonal approach to compassion, based on a full and complete realization of *sūnyatā.* Those who have realized this no longer have any conscious intention to act compassionately. They act spontaneously out of compassion, or rather, compassionate action acts through them because they themselves are no longer in the way. The transpersonal compassion that lies behind the bodhisattva vows is not a quality that needs to be developed, but a reality that is already embedded in one's deepest nature (one's buddha nature). By reciting the bodhisattva vows, bodhisattvas are not trying to cultivate an emotional quality. They are, rather, testifying to an inescapable compassion that is already embedded within their deepest nature. This mysterious reality of compassion can never be adequately put into words. It is precisely because of this that compassion has so many faces in Buddhism.

13. Peter D. Hershock, *Liberating Intimacy: Enlightenment and Social Virtuosity in Ch'an Buddhism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996).

14. Hershock, *Chan Buddhism: Dimensions of Asian Spirituality* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 143.

Transpersonal compassion is an expression of a fundamental Buddhist insight: my life is not my own. In early Buddhism, this insight is expressed through the idea of not-self: there is no self. We do not want; we are wanted. We do not think; we are moved by thoughts. We do not feel; we are moved by feelings. While we think, "I want," "I think," "I feel," early Buddhism says that there is nothing in us that moves us independently. We are amidst an interplay of forces in which we are constantly being moved.

In Mahayana Buddhism, new ways are being found to express this fundamental insight of non-self. What we call "I" is actually an interconnectedness with everything and everyone: a great web of interconnectedness. This interconnectedness is metaphorically expressed as the *web of Indra*. We are constantly being moved within that web; we cannot shut ourselves off from it. But within this interpersonal vision there is a consequence. Within the stream of interconnectedness, we ourselves are not at the helm of our lives. We are not the lord and master of our existence. True compassion, from this perspective, is to allow ourselves to be moved towards people and situations that are harmed and that call upon us for help. This requires developing an attitude of receptivity. It is about getting in touch again and again with a larger field that transcends our personal self.

Initially, we experience a certain cooperation between what is asked of us and our free will. There is the free will to say yes or no to what we are asked to do. Saying yes is the way of a bodhisattva. But once we have given that yes (or renewed and confirmed it again and again) there is a certain choicelessness. We then follow the stream without continually having to formulate a conscious intention for it.

That is when interpersonal compassion becomes transpersonal compassion. There is no sense of compassion or conscious intention to act compassionately, but great compassion uses us to act through us. Buddhist texts claim that this third form of compassion is embodied by enlightened beings: buddhas, tantric siddhas, and advanced bodhisattvas. In the Zen tradition this is expressed in the tenth image of the ox. The old man comes to the market empty-handed. No trace of holiness. But around him everything spontaneously blossoms.

Conclusion

Just as Buddhism established itself in China through intensive dialogue with Daoism and Confucianism, so it will establish itself in the West through intensive dialogue with Christianity and other Western traditions. Through that dialogue, both Buddhism and Christianity will change in nature. In this essay we have met several Indian and Chinese Buddhist visions of compassion. One is familiar to our Western background; the others are more strange and intriguing. Of course, the three visions in this case mark a whole range of views and visions of compassion. According to the Buddhist perspective, *sūnyatā* is not about determining which of these visions is "true." They are all time-bound attempts to articulate the unspeakable doctrine in the different philosophical and religious languages through which Buddhist traditions have expressed themselves throughout the ages.

By becoming acquainted with different visions of compassion, we become aware of the Western assumptions that determine our thinking about it: the distinction between inside and outside; myself and others; my liberation and that of others.

In this article we have journeyed from personal compassion—based on a human image of autonomy in which each human sets a law for one's own individual interactions, to interpersonal compassion—based on a human image of heteronomy, in which the law is established only in conjunction with others, to transpersonal compassion—based on what the sociologist Peter Berger described as *anomie*, the absence of any law. This article is a first step towards a layered "practical theology" of compassion.

While in many discussions about care, the promotion of autonomy is central (for example, in discussions around the end of life and euthanasia), learning to function in interdependence should also have a place in Buddhist interpersonal compassion. Compassion seems to be more and more appropriated by therapists and social workers as something that can be managed. However, those in the field of religion should maintain a place at the table, in order to keep the transpersonal dimension of compassion alive. After all, this transpersonal dimension takes shape not only in Buddhism, when it resonates with the ego-transcending field of buddhas and bodhisattvas, but also in Christianity, as God-given grace. I would like to argue that such a compassionate care from a transpersonal perspective is of utmost importance.

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