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Abstract: This article looks at central issues in missiology and public theology in Asia. First, it addresses the question as to the extent to which the assumptions of missiology and public theology are actually largely the assumptions of post-Enlightenment western theology, and as such "Latin" assumptions. Second, the article addresses the issue of the implications of a thorough-going Christian theology in Asia. Third, the article deals with the issue of how a minority faith can be involved in public issues in Asia.

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For *The Australian Journal of Mission Studies (AJMS)*:

“Missiology outside the Latin Captivity of the Church: Discipleship and Citizenship in the Public Theology of Asian Christianity:”¹

James Haire²

Introduction

This article looks at discipleship and citizenship in Asian Christianity. In other words, it looks at one aspect of what has come to be known as “public theology”. Public theology has come to the forefront in the theological consciousness of churches and Christians in recent years. We now have a Global Network in Public Theology (GNPT), involving over twenty theological institutions in all continents around the world, including the Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre (PACT) of Charles Sturt University.

So, what is public theology? To this question there have been a variety of answers. The most prominent has been that of David Tracy. His answer has been that public theology is a theology which engages three

¹ This paper has been peer-reviewed and is deemed to meet the definition of original research required of scholars by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations of the Australian Commonwealth Government.

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audiences, that is, the academy, the church, and society. More recent critiques of this perception have stressed the emphasis needed on Christian conclusions rather than on consensus (Kathryn Tanner), or the emphasis needed on the “ἔσχατον (*eschaton*)” rather than the present (Richard Mouw).

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

This article, then, looks at the issues of discipleship and citizenship in the context of Asian Christianity. It looks at them in terms of “belonging”. The concept of discipleship refers to the concept of belonging within the church, while the concept of citizenship refers to belonging within the nation-state. Thus the issue of belonging within these two spheres is a sub-set of the questions relating to public theology within Asian Christianity. So this article looks initially at public Christian theology in the Asian context.

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

The *first* issue that is considered is the question as to what extent the assumptions of public Christian theology actually are the assumptions of post-Enlightenment western Christian theology alone, and therefore have only very indirect links with Asian Christianity. This is a pressing issue for the methodologies in public theology of Asian Christian theologians. Does the agenda of much public Christian theology, for example, actually address the situation of Christianity in the Asian region, or does it in fact only seek to address the internal *Angst* of Western Christianity? Is public theology thus an expression of a western need, or even a “Latin Captivity”, in the church, or not?

The *second* issue that is considered is the intercultural nature of Christian theology, and its implications for public theology, including discipleship and citizenship.

The *third* issue that is considered is the reality of Asian society and Asian Christian theology, particularly public theology. Where Christianity is a minority (albeit, large minority) faith, what is the contribution of a public Christian theology to the debates of civil society? Is the word “debate” indeed the correct word? This is especially pressing where the cultural aspects of a world religion other than Christianity (e.g., Islam in Indonesia, Buddhism in Thailand, and Hinduism in India) heavily influence the discourses of civil society. How do the concepts of discipleship and citizenship, and their interaction, fit into this situation? In this third section, I look at the concrete reality of violence in Asia, and seek to analyse how the dynamics of Pauline theology frequently used in Asia engage with the fact of violence.

Fourth, and finally, the article seeks to answer the question as to what we can learn from Asian Christian contexts on the interaction of faith and culture in relation to Christian discipleship and engaged citizenship.

First: public theology – A western need of the church?

I need to begin by looking at the question of public theology as a need of western Christianity. One might even go on to see it as a “Latin Captivity” of the church. This term, the “Latin Captivity” of the church, is parallel to Martin Luther’s famous phrase, the “Babylonish Captivity” of the church (in its sixteenth century English translation). Luther, of course, was referring to the captivity of the church within its late medieval structure and form within western Christianity. So I take this concept of Luther’s, and apply it, in general, to western Christianity. I am not thinking here of western Christianity as opposed to the eastern orthodox churches. Rather, I am thinking of western Christianity as it has developed from the eleventh century in its variety of forms, including catholic and protestant. These are the churches which factually have had the greatest impact on the growth of Christianity in Africa, the Americas and Asia, particularly from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century. Thus the question arises as to the extent to which the primary international agenda in theology has been, and continues to be, set by western Christianity. This, then, leads to the question as to the extent to which Christianity in Asia is dominated by this “Latin Captivity”. I use the word “Latin” not simply in the sense of language, although this may be involved too. Nor do I use it as applying only to the Roman Catholic Church, although that church is involved too. I use it in relation to the whole agenda of western Christianity, so heavily influenced as it is by

Latin thought-forms, philosophies and agendas. The literature on this in relation to Asia is significant.³

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

Within the traditions of western Christianity of course came the European Enlightenment. Here we see radical changes, but they developed within western Christianity. Human beings, on the one hand, become more important than God. On the other hand, however, they become fundamentally not different from animals and plants. Both capitalism and Marxism derive from this Enlightenment vision of human beings as autonomous individuals without any reference to the Divine. It is a radical anthropocentrism. What distinguishes the effects of the Enlightenment is that it is, in its public face or public philosophy, atheist. The Christian faith is questioned, repudiated, or studiously ignored. Revelation, especially communal revelation, now has to prove its claim. However, the European Enlightenment did not deny the Christian faith, or indeed any religion, its place. That place is fundamentally in the private sphere. The Enlightenment relativised the Christian faith's exclusive claims, and thus placed it firmly in the area of the individual's personal

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

rights. It taught that every individual was free to pursue his or her own happiness, irrespective of what others thought or said. This has continued in western cultures to our times. It means that in Western Christianity individual faith and ethics, and the communal faith and ethics of like-minded individuals, can be nurtured and developed. Individual discipleship, and small communal or monastic groups, can flourish. However, the public face of Christianity is denied or ignored.

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

Second: intercultural nature of theology and praxis, including public theology, discipleship and citizenship

A vast literature has been produced on the issue of intercultural theology since the first discussions of the so-called *theologiae in locō* took place in the late 1950s. I wish specifically to look at how the insights of the past half-century of theological debate in this area can inform the development of public theology. However, before that can be done, it is necessary to

draw out some of the insights of intercultural theology and see how they can be related to the development of public theologies, especially in societies as in Asia, where emerging indigenous theologies are conscious of their Latin captivity.

The authentic gospel or Christ-Event-for-us⁴ is not pre-packaged by cultural particularity but is living. The church remains in a constant struggle between the acceptance of the Christ Event within its particular culture in each place, and yet in the wrestling with that which stands against its own particular acceptance in each place. In this sense the church is always both indigenous and *reformata sed semper reformanda*. In recent times the term *glocal* has been used in this respect. It is perhaps because the Christ Event can never be exclusively identified with one culture or one type of culture that Paul employs the ambiguous term, “ἡ ἀκοή” (*hē akoē – the hearing*), to describe the action by which the Christ Event enters a person’s or a community’s life, that is, the crucial steps of grace and faith.⁵ Since Käsemann’s pioneering work, this, of course, has been seen in the varied theologies in the New Testament.⁶

If the Christ-Event-for-us in each place lives in widely diverse cultures, then for the whole people of God there can only be a true fullness of that event or gospel if there is true inter-confessional, inter-traditional,

⁴ I use the term “gospel” here in a sense not simply dependent on the Bultmannian use of the term.

⁵ See, for example, Romans 10: 16 – 17; Galatians 3: 2.

⁶ See KÄSEMANN, E. “Begründet det neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche?”, in *Evangelische Theologie*, München, Vol. XI, 1951/52, 13 – 21 (subsequently published in KÄSEMANN, E. *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, Erster Band, 2nd Edition. Göttingen: Vandenhoech und Ruprecht, 1960); KÄSEMANN, E. “Zum Thema der Nichtobjektivierbarkeit”, in *Evangelische Theologie*, München, Vol. XII, 1952/53, 455 – 366. (subsequently published in KÄSEMANN, E., 1960).

international, interracial and inter-cultural fellowship. The church of Jesus Christ is indeed a fellowship which transcends space and time.

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

Third: public theology in the praxis of the church in Asia

Asian Christian theologies, in the main, make little or no distinction between the public and the private. Thus, they are in a situation entirely different, on the whole, from that of post-European Enlightenment western Christianity. So the relationship between the concept of discipleship and that of citizenship is quite different from that in majority contemporary western Christianity. For this article, the main difference is in the conception of the public sphere within which these Asian theologies are articulated.

In much of Asia public discussion of religion forms the normal pattern of life, quite unlike the marginalised and privatised place of religion in the post-European Enlightenment western world. Equally, being a Christian, whether a church leader or church member, frequently necessarily

involves the person in communal, public and sometimes political ⁷ activity. This involvement has to do with Christian presence, self-propagation and survival in a multi-religious context.

Indigenous Asian Christian theology has, of course, a very long history, as outlined so clearly by Samuel Moffett ⁸, and later developed by Gillman and Klimkeit. ⁹ However, if we look specifically at the development of self-conscious *theologiae in loco* or contextual theologies in Asia in recent times, that is, since the late 1960s, a number of significant factors occur. These factors overwhelmingly influence contextual Asian concepts of discipleship and citizenship, and the relationship between them.

So, in looking at the issues of discipleship and citizenship within public theology, let us look at one of the major realities of the Asian context, that is, the reality of *violence*. Let us look at how public theology, in terms of discipleship and citizenship, is carried out in the praxis of the church in Asia, against a specific, and at times overwhelming, background. This is because the issue of the prevalence of violence in Asia is dominant, and because there is a relationship between violence and theological debate.

The contemporary reality of Asia ¹⁰ is one of deep violence. The irony of the ending of the Cold War is that it has coincided with the unleashing

⁷ Such political activity may be formal or informal, local or wider.

⁸ MOFFETT, S. H. *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Vol 1. San Francisco: Harper, 1992.

⁹ GILLMAN, I. and KLIMKEIT, H. J. *Christians in Asia before 1500*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002.

¹⁰ The author has lectured in Asia now for over thirty-five years, including thirteen years when he was resident in Indonesia.

of uncontrollable violence, especially in Asia. The combination of high technology and seemingly medieval tribal conflict has become the pattern of our times, and this, at times stimulated from the West, “legitimizes a culture of violence by invoking God arbitrarily to suit a particular agenda for aggression. As a result, insecurity, fear and anxiety characterize the lives of many people”.¹¹

This culture of violence manifests itself in many different ways.

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

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

¹¹ KOBIA, S, quoted in World Council of Churches News Release, entitled “Restating the Ecumenical Vision demands Conversion, says Kobia”, Geneva, 15/02/2005. Cf. BURTON, J. *Conflict: Resolution and Provention*. London: Macmillan Press, 1990, 1 – 2; 13 – 24.

there is evidence of a vast amount of resilience among populations who have been deeply wounded.

Between 2001 and 2005 I took part in the reconciliation process for the Molucca Islands. In 2001 and 2002, I visited Halmahera in the North Moluccas, where I had served for thirteen years in the 1970s and 1980s, and saw the results of the Christian – Muslim violence, which had been stimulated by the political situation in Indonesia at that time, and aggravated at times by elements within the Indonesian military. Events too terrible for words had occurred. Both Muslims and Christians were involved in violence. Let me just give one example. Six of my former students in the Molucca Islands, all ordained ministers, were killed. One of them was the Rev Albert Lahi. He was in the vestry of his parish church when elements of the *Jihad*, aided and abetted by elements of the military, arrived. He knew that his case was hopeless. He asked to be allowed to pray. His wish was granted. He put on his preaching gown and knelt by the communion table. He prayed for his church, for his nation, for his congregation and for those about to kill him. The Sunday school children who observed the whole incident told me what happened. Then he stretched his head forward and was beheaded. His head was carried on a pole around the village. His body was dragged by the feet for all to see. Yet in this same village, and in this whole area, reconciliation has come about. Christians too, were heavily engaged in violence. However, since 2002 both the Muslim and the Christian populations have been slowly but surely working their futures out together, in a quite remarkable display of overcoming violence and creating communities of peace. At the end of the peace process in the Moluccas a remarkable communal act of reconciliation occurred. A rebuilt central mosque and a rebuilt Christian church were both dedicated.

Both had been destroyed in the violence. At the beginning of the dedication of the mosque, Christians brought the *tifa* (the equipment used to call Muslims to worship), which they had had made at their own expense, to the Muslim community, as their gift for the new mosque. At the beginning of the dedication of the church, Muslims brought a large bell, which they had had made at their own expense in the Netherlands, as their gift for the new church. Both promised never to engage in violence again with their neighbours.

As we see here, there are two emphases. First, there is the emphasis on the *communal*. Second, there is the emphasis on relating *personal faith to public responsibility, including political responsibility*. This can be seen in the dynamics of Pauline ethics, so often used throughout Asia. Let us look at one example, in relation to violence.

A microcosm of the New Testament understanding of overcoming violence and building peace for all can be seen in the ethical sections of Paul's writings, especially in the ethical sections in *Romans*, frequently used in Asian contexts.

In order to understand this ideal of overcoming violence and building peaceful communities, that is, living out its discipleship in public, we need to understand that early Christianity reacted against, and transformed, Greco-Roman cultures of the first century C E.

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

subordinate to social consciousness.¹² *Second*, religion, like other social factors, was enmeshed in kinship and politics. In the first century C E Christianity, which was a religion of voluntary members, resulted in a newly-created kinship group.¹³ Although it appeared to be similar to, or to look like, any other kinship group, it was in fact a created or fictive kinship grouping. In early Christianity, language of the natural kinship group, for example “household (of faith)”, was used for a created kinship group. It was a created, or fictive, kinship group, but it struggled to have the closeness of a natural kinship group. For God had created the church. *Third*, there is considerable evidence in the First Century C E within Greco-Roman culture of intense expressions of emotion, through outbursts of anger, aggression, pugnacity, and indeed violence. Moreover, these appear to have been socially acceptable.¹⁴ *Fourth*, in such an atmosphere, concern for honour and shame was significant. A person’s sense of self-worth was established by public reputation related to that person’s associations rather than by a judgment of conscience.¹⁵

Over against these four factors, Paul summons Christians to new social roles. They are based on mercy, peaceable conduct and reconciliation in a culture where expressions of violence seem to have been normative.

¹² MALINA, B J. *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981, 55-66, 60-64; MEEKS, W A. *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, 90-91. Cf. THEISSEN, G. *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics and the World of the New Testament*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1992, 272 – 278.

¹³ THEISSEN, G. *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (edited and translated by John H Schutz). Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982, 27-40. Cf. ESLER, P. F. *The First Christians in their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific approaches to New Testament interpretation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994, 6 – 12.

¹⁴ PEARSON, L. *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece*. Stanford: University Press, 1973, 193; WEDDERBURN, A J M. *The Reason for Romans (Studies of the New Testament and its World)*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988, 81-83. Cf. LOADER, W. R. G. *Jesus’ Attitude towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels*. Grand Rapids (Michigan) and Cambridge (UK): Eerdmans, 2002, 177.

¹⁵ MALINA, 27-48.

The call for transformation now means new expressions of group identity. No longer based on kinship or ethnicity, group identity nevertheless seeks to retain the intense cohesion of former groups. Paul's community members bind themselves together as one body in Christ. This metaphor is poignantly suitable in a society where self-awareness arises from group association rather than from individual worth. The ideals of honourable and shameless conduct are altered in that they are now for Christians not any more primarily derived from society outside. Rather, enhanced honour for the community derives from its incorporation into its risen Lord. Patterns of social co-operation are modified as a result. A new communal identity as one body in Christ is thus reinforced.

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

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

in the same way. This perception is totally new in much of Greco-Roman society.

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

Let us then now see how these dynamics are played out within the concepts of discipleship and citizenship within Asian public theologies.

First, there is the *communal* nature of these theologies. These theologies are not conceived for private purposes, but have the whole community as their audience.¹⁶ This is seen in a number of significant indigenous Asian theologies. Let us look, for example, at the Korean concept of *han* as used in *Minjung* theology¹⁷, at the writings of Kosuke Koyama¹⁸ and at the work of Choan-Seng (C S) Song.¹⁹ This communality relates both to the Christian community and to the interaction between the

¹⁶ See WICKERI, P. L., ed. *The People of God Among All God's Peoples: Frontiers in Christian Mission*. Hong Kong/London, Christian Conference of Asia and the Council for World Mission, 2000; WIDYATMADJA, J. P. *Kebangsaan dan Globalisasi dalam Diplomasi*. Yogyakarta (Indonesia): Yayasan Bimbingan Kesejahteraan Sosial/Kanisius, 2005. See, too, A. A. YEWANGOE, *Theologia Crucis in Asia: Asian Christian Views on Suffering in the Face of Overwhelming Poverty and Multifaceted Religiosity in Asia*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987, *passim*, especially 289 – 323.

¹⁷ See BEVANS, S.B. *Models of Contextual Theology (Faith and Cultures Series)* (revised and expanded edition). Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004, 77 – 78.

¹⁸ BEVANS, 95 – 99.

¹⁹ See, for example, SONG, CHOAN-SENG (C S), *Christian Mission in Reconstruction*. Madras: CLS, 1975; SONG, C S. *Third Eye Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979. See, too, KOSHY, N. *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia*, Volume 1. Hong Kong: World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region, Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs, and Christian Conference of Asia, 2004, 219.

Christian, minority, community and the wider community in each Asian society.

For the *Minjung* theologians this relationship is with the wider Buddhist and Shamanist communities of Korea. The Korean concept of the *minjung* is that of the people who have been put aside and robbed of their subjectivity in history, either by outsiders or by internal oppressors. The word is created from two Chinese characters, “*min*” and “*jung*”, which can together be translated as “the mass of the people”.²⁰ Its emphasis is on the people’s loss of subjectivity. It thus has some similarity to the New Testament concept of “ὄχλος” (*ochlos*). The Korean concept of *han*, so close to the heart of *Minjung* theology, refers to the sense of unresolved resentment against injustice and suffering, a sense of helplessness in the face of overwhelming odds, especially overwhelming violence, and a feeling of being totally abandoned. Again, we think of our Lord’s cry, “Why have you forsaken me?”²¹ *Han* also points to a feeling of acute bodily pain, a feeling of helpless suffering, and an urge to right a wrong.²² An example is given is the account of Miss Kim Kyong-sook. Miss Kim was an executive committee member of a Korean trade union. On 11 August 1979 she was shot dead during a demonstration organised by two hundred women workers demanding that the Government party (the New Democratic Party) work out a fair solution to their labour dispute. According to the letter which she left for her mother and younger brother (in case she should die during this labour

²⁰ MOON, C. H. “*Minjung* Theology”, in *Ching Feng* 26 (1983), 48

²¹ Mark 15: 34 (NRSV).

²² SUH, David Kwang-sun. “*Minjung* and Theology in Korea”, in Kim Yong Bok, ed., *Minjung Theology: People as Subjects of History*. Singapore, Christian Conference of Asia, 1981, 27; MOL, D. “*Minjung* Theologie, Zuid Koreaanse Bevrijdingstheologie in een geïndustrialiseerde Samenleving”, in *Wending* (1985), 20 – 21.

dispute), she recounted that sometimes she was not paid for her work in the factory over the previous eight-year period. She had no opportunity to attend church because of her work on Sunday. Her testament was for a deepening of personal and community piety (church attendance and Bible study) and stronger support for the trade union movement.²³ Piety and public political theology are here seen in communal ways. For the *Minjung* theologian David Kwang-sun Suh²⁴ this concern is always to relate Christian faith with the wider Shamanist, Buddhist, Confucian and Neo-Religionist communities of Korea, who respectively represent approximately 25%, 15%, 13% and 14% of the South Korean population, with Christians representing over 30%.

Equally for Koyama faith and theological expression are always related to the wider Japanese community, and to the wider Buddhist community of Thailand²⁵.

For Choan-Seng Song the interrelated factors of Christian faith and engagement relate to the wider Daoist and Confucian society of both Taiwan and China.²⁶ Song uses the concept of the Mask Dance as a means of expressing communal theology in the public space. The dance helps the community, including both Christian and non-Christian, to overcome the toil of the day, including the effects of structural violence. However, for Song, its importance is much greater. Song sees the dance

²³ SUH, Nam Dong. "Towards a Theology of *Han*", in Kim Yong Bok, ed., *Minjung Theology*, 54.

²⁴ See KOSHY, 306.

²⁵ See BEVANS, 96 – 99, 169 – 170.

²⁶ See, especially, SONG, C S. *Third Eye Theology*. See too PO Ho Huang, *From Galilee to Tainan: Towards a Theology of Chhut-thau-thi'* (ATESEA Occasional Paper, No. 15). Manila: Association for Theological Education in South East Asia, 2005.

in its social, political and theological contexts.²⁷ Through the dance, the plight of the poor and the achieving of justice without violence are portrayed. It inspires human resourcefulness in a merciless society. It exhibits the nearness of God to humanity, in God's favour as well as God's disfavour. So the communal mask dance, in the public space, is a political manifesto as well as a prayer for a community in trouble. According to Song, the dance comes from what is called the "experience of critical transcendence".²⁸ It expresses devout discipleship and responsible citizenship.

Second, there is the close inter-relationship of the personal, the political and the public. This is seen clearly, for example, in the work of Johannes Leimena²⁹ and of T. B. Simatupang³⁰ in Indonesia, particularly in relation to the debates of the late 1940s as to whether or not Indonesia should become an Islamic State. Leimena, a Presbyterian from the Moluccas, served as Prime Minister of Indonesia in the 1950s. In the period after the so-called attempted Communist Coup in 1965, Leimena was questioned under duress by officials of the *New Order (Orde Baru)* Government of President Suharto concerning the activities of former President Soekarno. He refused to implicate Soekarno as a Communist, insisting that Soekarno had primarily been a nationalist. What is more significant for this paper is that Leimena insisted that his co-operation

²⁷ SONG, Choan Seng. *Theology from the Womb of Asia*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986, 218 – 219.

²⁸ SONG, Choan Seng. *Theology from the Womb of Asia*, 219.

²⁹ LEIMENA, J. "De Ontmoeting der Rassen in de Kerk", in *De Opwekker*, 1941, 626 – 642; LEIMENA, J., "The Task of Restoring Fellowship Within the Church and the Indonesian Nation", *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 9: 3 (1968), 57 – 64. See too VAN KLINKEN, G. *Minorities, Modernity and the Emerging Nation: Christians in Indonesia, a biographical approach (Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Volume 199)*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003, 122, 137, 189 – 190, 218 – 220.

³⁰ See VAN KLINKEN, 97, 123, 147, 169 – 170.

with all the independence revolutionaries of whatever background, as a Protestant Christian, had been part of his Christian calling. For Leimena, Soekarno, a nationalist of joint Muslim and Hindu background, had been one of his colleagues, and he refused to join in activity to betray or discredit him. Again, Simatupang, a Lutheran from North Sumatra, served as a General and Chief of Staff in the Indonesian Army during that decade too. In his writings he insists on the living relationship between the faith of Christians, on the one hand, and their thinking and activities in relation to the ongoing revolution in a nation like Indonesia in its striving to bring about a more just society without violence, on the other.³¹

Again, this close inter-relationship of the personal, the political and the public is seen in the work of Mamen Madathilparampil Thomas, or M M Thomas, in India³², against the background of debates on the state as secular or as influenced by Hinduism. Thomas, a member of the Mar Syrian Church of Malabar, spent much of his career involved in the issues of Christianity and society, both in India and through the World Council of Churches³³, and completed his career as Governor of the Indian State of Mizoram. Unlike the early indigenous Indian theologian Vengal Chakkarai, who was interested in the *bakti-marga*, “the way of devotion”, Thomas was interested in the *karma-marga*, “the way of action”. One of his aims was to contribute to a humanized world community, along with

³¹ SIMATUPANG, T. B. *Tugas Kristen dalam Revolusi*. Jakarta: Badan Penerbit Kristen, 1967; SIMATUPANG, T. B. *Keselamatan Masa Kini*. Jakarta: Badan Penerbit Kristen, 1973.

³² THOMAS, M. M. *The Christian Response in the Asian Revolution*. London: SCM, 1966; THOMAS, M. M. *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*. London: SCM, 1969. See, too, KOSHY, 32 – 33, 111 – 112, 179 – 180.

³³ See, for example, THOMAS, M. M. and ABRECHT, P., eds., *World Conference on Church and Society: Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of our Time*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967, *passim*.

other religious traditions. Especially in his work, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, Thomas demonstrates how Christianity has constantly had responsibility for introducing new elements into Indian society, particularly in facing the three challenging issues of Indian society, that is, of group over individual, of certain individuals over others, and of male over female. The introducing of these new elements have brought about many changes to the core of Indian society, both politically and otherwise, and also to Hinduism itself.³⁴

Fourth: discipleship, citizenship and Asian faith

In western society individualism and the privatisation of faith at times make it difficult for us to see the significance of the dynamism of Paul's transformation of a received aggressive culture. Moreover, throughout world history Christianity in its western form has had both success and failure in being able to present and live out this newly transformed identity in Christ. This stands in stark contrast to the ideals of the teachings in Paul, as we have seen, where Paul's ethics for *internal* Christian life are exactly the same as his ethics for those *outside*.

In his Cyril Foster Lecture in the University of Oxford, Jack Straw argued that the Cold War had eroded traditional political identities, and that its end had encouraged people to retreat back to identities defined in terms of cultural, ethnic, national, gender or religious affiliations. So, he argued, the challenge is to recapture civic political culture by finding ways of allowing space for these affiliations within a broader framework of shared values.³⁵ The Pauline ideal, of an equal ethical outlook for those *inside*

³⁴ BOYD, R. H. S. *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*. Madras: CLS, 1975, 312.

³⁵ *Oxford Today* 19: 3 (2007), 4.

a community as those it, epitomises a Christian viewpoint on this. In Paul's way, Christians *outside* seek to overcome violence and create communities of peace by showing the same attitudes to all, whether in the community or outside it. In much Asian Christian theology Paul's intent is clearly appreciated and understood.

Thus, in relation to the interaction of discipleship and citizenship in Asian Christian theology, a number of factors are of significance. *First*, we need to be aware of the Asian Christian interaction of personal piety and public engagement, particularly towards those outside the Christian faith-community.³⁶ *Second*, Asian public theology, including the interrelated concepts of Christian discipleship and responsible citizenship, are not simply matters of engaging in semantic exercises (in, for example, doctrine, ethics and polity). They are as much expressions of faith through public liturgy, drama, dance, music and communal living. *Third*, this way of communal harmony is necessary in the ways in which the churches in the Asian region live their lives. Consensus decision-making, mutual celebration, and interest in others' rituals and festivities are important in the Asian way of being Christian. This is lived, un-self-conscious, Asian discipleship and citizenship. Moreover, the ecumenical movement in Asia, in and of itself, as it brings the churches together, is central to the expression of an Asian discipleship and citizenship. *Fourth*, an important *theologia in locō* which we all need is to express the style of our theological existence through Asian forms of peace. Our western inheritances have not always helped us in this. Public

³⁶ See, for example, from a Muslim perspective, H. TARMJI TAHER. *Aspiring for the Middle Path: Religious Harmony in Indonesia*. Jakarta: Center for the Study of Islam and Society (CENSIS), 1997; MUHAMAD ALI. *Teologi Pluralis-Multikultural: Menghargai Kemajemukan Menjalin Kebersamaan*. Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2003; H. M. OASIM MATHAR, ed. *Sejarah, Teologi dan Etika Agama*. Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Interfidei/Dian, 2003.

theological language in western Christianity has at times been violent. Is this violent language more acceptable where faith is a private matter, and therefore the form of the language of theology has less relevance to civil society? Does the tendency to marginalisation and privatisation mean that the style of the language of public theology does not matter?

However, in cultures where violence is close to the surface, then the style of language and the methodologies of public theology are important.

The ways in which we express public theology, the ways in which we preach, the ways in which we engage in discipleship, the ways in which we engage in communal life, the ways in which we live are the ways we express this שלום (*shālôm*).

A significant example of this comes from eastern Indonesia. This was in the issue of ecology and the integrity of creation. In the 1980s, during the logging boom in the eastern Indonesian islands, a licence was granted to an overseas company to log in an area of high density timber of the highest international value and uniqueness. The concession set out terms for the logging; only one tree in ten was to be felled, and that tree was to be replaced through planting. The villagers, mainly Christian, saw that the terms of the licence were not being carried out. Moreover, they saw great danger in any logging of this proposed scale taking place in any case. In fact, their overwhelming outlook was controlled by their concept of salvation, both present-orientated and eschatologically-orientated. They regarded the overseas logging company as merely irresponsible children, as endangering the integrity of creation and especially as being unfaithful to their concept of salvation. The villagers were humanly powerless, but divinely empowered, in their eyes. Thus, in darkness, day-by-day, and week-by-week, they removed small parts of the logging machinery and hid them in the forest. The logging company

brought in more and more equipment, with great trouble and at great expense. The villagers continued to remove and hide the small parts. The logging company was greatly frustrated, but could not work out how the parts of their equipment were disappearing. Finally, the logging company gave up, returned the licence to the government, and left the area. No more logging took place. After this, the deeply pious villagers gave thanks to God for God's guidance and empowerment. They had absolutely no concept of carrying out sabotage, or of acting illegally. For them, it was clear simply that irresponsible outsiders, like irresponsible children, were engaging in activity that was, and would be, detrimental to both present-orientated salvation and eschatologically-orientated salvation. They carried out, in their perspective, a theological *praxis* of salvation.

The gospel is not pre-packaged by cultural particularity. Thus the styles of Christian public theology, both in word and praxis, not just in its agendas, must vary from culture to culture, if they are to reflect the same gospel. This, therefore, applies to Christian discipleship and public citizenship. In this the experience of the church in Asia is an important contribution. If public theology in each place lives in widely diverse cultures, then for the whole people of God there can only be a true fullness of the understanding of discipleship and citizenship within public theology if there is true inter-cultural theological fellowship. The gospel, especially today, can only be lived in its fullness through sustained and widespread inter-cultural theological reflection and action. For the Christ Event, to which these factors point, as in Grünewald's painting³⁷

³⁷ "The Crucifixion of Christ", a panel of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1512 – 1515), by Matthias Grünewald.

constantly before Karl Barth, is only truly the same if differently expressed in different cultures.

