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EDITORIAL

Scholarship as ministry

Scholarship is often thought of as a luxury in which a few people are privileged to indulge. It is often spoken of as an "ivory tower" disconnected from the hubbub of ordinary life. The term was first used derogatorily by the French literary critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve in 1837 to describe the dreamy poetical attitude of Alfred Vigny in contrast to the socially engaged writing Victor Hugo.[1] However, its original occurrence is in the Bible, in a context that has very little to do with scholarship but a lot to do with romance. "Your neck is like an ivory tower" croons the ardent lover in the Song of Solomon (7:4). The simile was later applied allegorically to Mary, the Mother of our Lord, in Medieval devotional literature.

Like Mary who cultivated the spiritual-intellectual gifts of memory ("preserving all these things") and contemplation ("pondering in her heart"), all the great Christian scholars who have made an enduring contributions to the church throughout the ages were in some way involved in pastoral leadership, and its attendant joys, sorrows and perplexities.

As Ajith Fernando writes,

> Those who had a marked impact upon the history of the church were leaders who wrote out of active involvement in grassroots ministry. Augustine went into the pastorate against his will because it shattered his dream of a tranquil life of study, prayer, teaching, and writing. Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and John Wesley were,

1. Steven Shapin, "The Ivory Tower: the history of a figure of speech and its cultural uses," *British Journal for the History of Science* 45, no. 1 (March 2012): 1-27. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/shapin/files/shapin_ivory_tower_bjhs.pdf

like Paul, active in grassroots ministry.[2]

The ultimate purpose of Christian scholarship, I believe, ought to be the same as Jesus' compassionate response to the great multitude who were helpless and harrassed (Mt 9:36; Mk 6:34). The question we need to constantly ask ourselves is, how does our ministry of scholarship address the plight of ordinary disciples who are like "sheep without a shepherd"?

People are most lost, easily deceived, and susceptible to abuse and exploitation when they do not know who they are (identity) and what they are there for (purpose). All of Jesus' teaching is focused on helping those who will listen to un-learn and re-learn who they are, whose they are, and for what purpose they have been called to live. He was the Good Shepherd who opened their eyes (made them truly 'woke'), healed their wounds, and led them to new life under God's transforming rule.

Christian scholars must follow Christ's example of practicing the vocation of teaching as ministry. Whatever discipline they may specialize in (be they the theological disciplines or the disciplines of the arts, sciences, and professions), they need to ask and teach their students to ask: How do we serve God's purposes for his creation (the common good in common grace)? And, how do we as Christians serve redemptively the world that is so broken and oppressive (the difference that Christ makes in the world as Redeemer and King)?

Ajith Fernando describes Christian ministry as "a call to joy and pain." I would like to make a list of some ways in which Christian scholarship is an experience of joy and pain.

First, in what ways are Christian scholars called to embrace the pain of their vocation?

1. If you are a thinker, a reader, a questioner, someone who wants to dig deeper, someone with an academic bent, indeed an 'intellectual',

2. *Call to Joy and Pain: Embracing Suffering in Your Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 131.

the chances are that you will be made to feel quite uncomfortable and out of place in the church. Frequent remarks from the pulpit mock "theologians" and "scholars", ridicule "science" and "human understanding" as if the disciplined effort to understand God's world must always be deprecated in order to exalt the revealed truths of God's Word. You must develop a certain immunity against these sanctimonious jibes and forgive your pastors and preachers for unthinkingly assuming that theologians, scientists, sociologists, and economists are their natural rivals. On the other hand, intellectual rigor (like our hunger for justice), which is excellent by itself, can become tainted by pride and turn into intellectual snobbery. Patience, therefore, is a grace by which our scholarship must be sanctified, so that we are patient with those who need time and help to process their thoughts.

2. The call to scholarship also requires interaction with your intellectual equals and, if you are fortunate, your intellectual betters. This means that you must share your findings and ideas and expect mixed reactions of agreement, doubt, and disagreement. Productive academic debate requires gracious listening and forbearance as much as the tenacity to 'go for the jugular'. It takes emotional maturity to respect persons while despising their ideas without descending to personal insults. The unkind words of one's peers hurt very much, especially if one is encumbered with a fragile ego.

3. Scholarship is about putting one's reputation at risk. A truly impressive piece of scholarship involves new ideas and new interpretations. There is always the possibility that you have overlooked something quite basic. It is prudent to be humble and tentative, allowing room for further discussion, even allowing others to modify your ideas and share the credit.

4. The pain of lengthy and meticulous research, followed by the grind of committing it all to writing is a peculiar form of suffering that only scholars take upon themselves. Research is a test of commitment. You must wait humbly for all sorts of self-important custodians to grant you access to sources. Then come the hours of seemingly endless sifting. Finally, you have to be satisfied with what the sources actually say rather than what you wished they would say.

5. Then there is the risk that your work will be utterly ignored. What you consider are your greatest ideas may lay buried for years until perhaps they are rediscovered by someone else and claimed as their own. Worse yet would be when your work is hijacked by people with a completely different agenda, who misuse your work for purposes you never intended.

6. Most grievous of all is the failure of a student. Not the failure of lacking success for efforts expended, but the shock of their success in striving for the very things you taught them to unlearn, avoid and reject. Sometimes, it seems as though they had learned nothing at all.

Then there are the joys:

1. The joy of discovery is priceless. Re-discovering something that had been forgotten for a long time, making a connection that nobody else had made before. These make all that effort worthwhile.

2. It is exquisitely rewarding to help people understand the biblical writings more vividly, to see the 'Big Story' of God's redemptive love at work in His creation, and see themselves as the Holy Spirit's works-in-progress within that story. To evoke from your students the expressions "Wow! I never knew that!" or "What a difference that makes!" or "You really made me think!" are the small but significant

signs that lives are being transformed.

3. To be a reliable guide to your students and a supportive colleague to your fellow scholars is a source of joy by itself. It is a blessing to share one's discoveries with those who appreciate their value. It is an honour to give and receive honest criticism. Scholarly reciprocity and inter-disciplinary collaboration are far more satisfying than solo acheivements based on jealously and rivalry.

4. Safeguarding young and old minds from futile beliefs and ideas is a responsibility to be gently and respectfully carried out. It demands the honing of an instinct called 'sanctified commonsense' (apparently a superpower in our time) to spot the weak argument, the dubious source, and sanely excavate for facts beneath layers of hype, esoterica, tropes, and wishful thinking. To seek to sharpen the iron of one's own intellect and that of one's interlocutor is a mark of friendship not one-upmanship.

5. There is the sweet satisfaction of seeing your labour bear fruit. Even Ecclesiastes will not deny it. "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labour is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God" (2:24).

6. Ultimately, if we are so blessed, the rewards of our scholarly ministry will be seen in the New Jerusalem, purified and perfected for eternity as offerings of worship to our heavenly King. It would be our joy to be shown how God used our work in ways we could never have foreseen to fulfil His purposes, and how our most unpromising students and most unlikely successors stood on our shoulders to rise to even greater heights of scholarly service to God and their generations.

To these hard burdens and gratifying rewards, we have been called. May we always be found faithful in serving those whom Christ has entrusted to our ministry of scholarship.

Prabodith Mihindukulasuriya
Editor

CAN THE SUFFERING GOD HELP? THE DOCTRINE OF IMPASSIBILITY IN THE SOUTH ASIAN CONTEXT

NATHANAEL SOMANATHAN

Abstract: *The patristic doctrine of divine apatheia (impassibility) has been questioned by modern theologians because it claims that God cannot suffer as his divine nature cannot be acted upon. The current discussion explores how Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words, "only the suffering God can help," prompts consideration of an important dimension in the impassibility discussion from the subjective experience of the sufferer. Namely, do Bonhoeffer's words hold true for the South Asian context and how does consolation relate to one's view of God in that socio-religious context? Due to the interchangeable roles of belief and experience in shaping, reexamining, or reinforcing one another, the implications for the recovery or rejection of the doctrine of divine impassibility must be explored along with proposals for further investigation into the differences between the western and eastern modes of understanding "help" in response to pain, grief, healing, and consolation. Finally, I will argue that a closer observation of the doctrine and its function in its original patristic context does speak into South Asian theistic VishishtaAdvaita conceptualizations of the nature of divinity in a multi-religious context.*

Keywords: *Divine impassibility, passibility, transcendence, apatheia, VishishtAdvaita.*

1. Introduction

With every large-scale calamity theologians often revisit the question of *theodicy*, which grapples with the question 'How can a loving and almighty God allow the innocent to suffer?' The Covid pandemic is no exception. While the events surrounding the pandemic are complex and unresolved, the scale of suffering and death it has

caused has reignited the age-old debate between the 'problem of evil' and the plausibility of a good and omnipotent God. However, this discussion is hardly an academic matter. While philosophers and apologists (for both theism and atheism) clammer to provide rational explanations or rebuttals, the overwhelming suffering and grief caused by the pandemic surpass academic debate to engulf and confound human emotions, a-priori beliefs, and lived experience.

Nevertheless, for Christian theists for whom the existence of God is non-negotiable, the question is: Which version of God can truly "help" victims of suffering in a world so frequently overtaken by evil and chaos? At stake is not merely a rational 'idea of God' (accounting for his existence) that can satisfy modern skeptics, but a whole 'theology of God' (accounting for his attributes witnessed by the narrative of Scripture) which is at once a consolation to believers in their subjective experience of suffering and congruent with their intuitions about a transcendent and yet immanent God. While many answers can and have been offered in response, the classical doctrine of divine *apatheia* (Gk. *a-* [without] + *pathos* [feeling or emotion]) or *impassibility* (Lat. im- [without] + *passio* [suffering]), that God cannot feel pain or experience suffering, is at the heart of this enquiry.

Nine months before his execution by the Nazi regime, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from his prison cell, "Human religiosity directs people in need to the power of God in the world,… The Bible directs people towards the powerlessness and the suffering of God; only the suffering God can help."[1] For Bonhoeffer, it is the meditation on the "suffering God" that addresses the apparent evil, brings consolation, and instills hope in the face of incredible pain and suffering, even death. However, Bonhoeffer's words, which reveal important aspects of post-holocaust theology in general, must be understood against the 20th century developments

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 8* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2010), 479.

within Christian thought. A "new orthodoxy" arose at that time that presented serious theological challenges to the patristic doctrine of *divine impassibility* and asserted that the triune God can experience suffering. The assertion that God, not merely in Christ's human nature but in Godself, is susceptible to different emotional states (*pathos*) and therefore, suffers in solidarity with his creatures, not only led to new theodicies but became the only conceivable mode of consolation. This discussion has since undergone several developments and remains a lively debate to this day.

However, the subjective experience of the persons undergoing suffering in relation to their view of God (the transcendent being) and their socio-religious context is an important dimension that is oft-overlooked in the impassibility discussion. The defense of the impassibility doctrine has been described primarily in terms of Western contextual interests (such as philosophical coherence) whereas Eastern theologies have fully embraced the passibilitist position in line with the modern reaction to classical theism. Therefore, any forward movement to the already profuse discussion would require attention to the implications of divine *apatheia* in the South Asian context in terms of the Eastern worldview and its particularities.

It is important to note that my focus here diverges in important ways from a defense or rejection of divine *apatheia* and its compatibility with Christian theology. The goal here is twofold:

1. To explore if Bonhoeffer's words hold true for the South Asian context saturated with competing religious views on transcendence and imminence of divine deities, and

2. what is at stake in the rejection of divine impassibility for the eastern context and its view of God as it relates to suffering, consolation, God's nature and God's relation to the world?

For this purpose, the history of engagement with the doctrine of impassibility and the context in which Christian theology adopted it into its theological discourse will be

initially discussed. This will provide the historical landscape for understanding the historical and cultural situatedness of the developments of this discussion. Furthermore, the Eastern concepts of God will be explored via the Hindu philosophy of VishishtAdvaita to identify the different aspects of transcendence and imminence within Eastern theism. Finally, the patristic concerns for the function of divine impassibility will be brought to bear on Eastern Christianity to explicate the similarity between the patristic and South Asian context and thereby establish for the ongoing relevance of the doctrine of divine impassibility for the South Asian context.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive account of the various trajectories the debate has taken or provide a prescriptive position on the matter. However, the overarching question is if the notion that a suffering God can "help" in the current context and to what extent must intuitions about the nature of God in South Asia be radically altered for such a view.

2. Short History of Engagement with Divine Impassibility

In 1917, H. M. Relton predicted the rise of a "new orthodoxy," a term coined by Ronald Goetz about three decades ago, where the suffering of God will become a dominant theme in Christian theology.[2] The once widely accepted doctrine of divine impassibility by the church in antiquity became no longer tenable at the turn of the 20th century. Thomas Weinandy identifies three reasons for this shift: "the prevailing social and cultural milieu, modern interpretation of biblical revelation, and contemporary trends in philosophy."[3] As per the first reason, the post-World War era struggled to reconcile the impassibility and immutability of God, the tenets of "classical theism," with

2. H. Maurice Relton, *Studies in Christian Doctrine / by H. Maurice Relton.* (London: Macmillan, 1960), 79. R. Goetz, *'The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy.'*

3. Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 1–2.

the human experience of the horrific evils that swept the world. The new found consciousness in modernity could no longer subscribe to a God who was not profoundly moved by suffering or even somehow changed within himself towards love and compassion because of it.

In place of the old orthodoxy, Goetz claims that the once condemned ancient *theopaschite* heresy that affirmed that "God can suffer" took root in its various adaptations. Starting with a steady stream of English theologians, the new theological development of divine suffering made trails into other traditions like liberation theology, black theology, Asian theology, and American process theology.[4] Most notably, Jurgen Moltmann has had significant influence with his formulation of divine suffering in his two important works, *The Crucified God* and *Trinity and the Kingdom of God*.[5]

In the Sri Lankan context, Vinoth Ramachandra has challenged the classical doctrines of divine perfection and divine impassibility. In his recent work *Sarah's Laughter*, Ramachandra opines that "[the] 'false conception of God' embodied in classical Christian theism, from its early years, was influenced by Greek philosophical ideas of perfection."[6] He advocates for a qualified passibility wherein God experiences emotional change vis-à-vis his creation. This is because, in contrast to the strong passibilitist position, God in his freedom has chosen to be affected by his creation.

However, the doctrine of divine impassibility is not without its defenders. Contributions from diverse theological quarters like the Catholic dogmatician Matthew Levering, the Orthodox historical theologians

4. For descriptive survey of the doctrine of impassibility across Church thought, see J. K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 1-6.

5. According to Goetz, "A list of modern theopaschite thinkers would include Barth, Berdyaev, Bonhoeffer, Brunner, Cobb, Cone and liberation theologians generally, Küng, Moltmann, Reinhold Niebuhr, Pannenberg, Ruether and feminist theologians generally, Temple, Teilhard and Unamuno." "The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy – Religion Online," accessed October 16, 2021, https://www.religion-online.org/article/the-suffering-god-the-rise-of-a-new-orthodoxy/.

6. Vinoth Ramachandra, *Sarah's Laughter: Doubt, Tears and Christian Hope.* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2020), 44.

Paul Gavrilyuk and David Bentley Hart, and the Reformed theologian Kevin Vanhoozer have sharply opposed the new orthodoxy movement. Additionally, the seminal work of Roman Catholic priest and scholar, Thomas Weinandy in *Can God Suffer?* has presented a striking defense of the impassibilitist position in recent times.

Wesley Hill claims that "[the] tide is shifting again, and there is a new 'new orthodoxy' afoot."[7] Nevertheless, there has not been any significant engagement for the implications of the doctrine of impassibility particularly for the South Asian context in terms of its unique context and similarity to the Greco-Roman world except in terms of the doctrine's rejection in contextual theologies.

3. Belief and Experience

Before looking at the content and function of the doctrine of divine impassibility, it is necessary to assert the crucial role that doctrine and belief play in organizing and making sense of human emotions and responses to suffering. However, the complex interrelationship between belief, experience, and emotions, cannot be neatly transcribed. They are at best illustrated by a cobweb of fragile interconnections. Additionally, one's social imagination, way of seeing, feeling, and understanding the world, impacts one's response to it. Folded into this imagination is the view of the transcendent, God. Needless to say, the different views of God and God's place in the Christian's imagination, influence the different ways in which people make sense of life's tragedies and how they cope with it.

Ramachandra in his reflection on the creative tension between faith and experience observes that "the truth-claims of personal experience probe and sharpen our beliefs about God and the relationship we have with him; while our beliefs also shape our experiences, help interpret

7. "The New 'New Orthodoxy' | Wesley Hill," First Things, accessed October 15, 2021, https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/01/the-new-new-orthodoxy.

them and refuse to let them to dictate to us."[8] Alternatively, Ramachandra also claims that "new experiences… will always unsettle our beliefs. We normally attempt to interpret these new experiences by seeking to expand rather than radically dismantle our deeply held beliefs."[9] However, he warns that when our experiences are not given any epistemic status, erroneous beliefs remain insulated from any examination. This is why a particular tragedy can produce a variety of responses amongst family members and on a larger scale, even amongst communities. This was especially true of the pandemic when a range of responses and convictions from fatalistic despair to apocalyptic sadism appeared to fracture entire countries and revitalize dangerous ideologies. Nevertheless, there certainly were instances of positive growth and reform in smaller sectors.

In the post-World War era, the patristic view of God as unaffected in Godself by the suffering or fate of his created world came under fire because of the evil that was unleashed in the world. How can a righteous and good God not be moved by that level of suffering and pain? The extent of his concern, and the nature of his compassion and response became important questions for the theodicy issue. There is no doubt that the memory and lived experience of the gruesome atrocities of the world wars have shaped the identity and interpretive lens of whole communities for centuries. But, more importantly, it also awakened the modern sensitivities to the horrors of submitting to authoritarianism and brute power that is essentially apathetic. The sentiment was that if apathetic men aspired to an apathetic God of maximal power, then it is God that must be first dethroned or redefined.

Therefore, despite the philosophical and theological discrepancies a certain view of God may have, the concrete realities from which Christians address suffering and their geographical and cultural situatedness cannot be overlooked. For instance, how is the subjective experience of those suffering in the South Asian context related to their

8. Ramachandra, *Sarah's Laughter*, 24.
9. Ramachandra, *Sarah's Laughter*, 42.

doctrine, understanding, and perception of God as shaped by their socio-cultural and pluralistic settings. Conversely, how does the way Christians envisage God in the worst of situations affect the way they cope with and endure through suffering?

4. A Case Study on Eastern Theism

For an application of this discussion in the South Asian world, the impassibility discussion can be brought to bear on Eastern Theism through the Hindu-Vedanta philosophy as taught by the VishishtAdvaita school. To say that most Eastern religions subscribe to impassibility for their understanding of God as transcendent and wholly other is somewhat contentious. However, the example stated below are instructive for how there exists differing views of God's nature within Eastern religions like Hinduism that produce contrasting views on how God relates to the world even though they may be essentially similar in all other respects.

VishishtAdvaita maintains that the world is non illusory and the soul, or the Self, and the material world both exist only through Brahman. "Ramanuja and Madhva [founder of the Dvaita school of Vedanta] were both theists, both Vedantins, and both Vaishnavas (that is, both identified God with Vishnu), sharing a common allegiance to the same set of scriptures and engaging in similar religious practices" describe God's relationship to the world in different ways.[10] According to Ramanuja, the world is God's body which is to indicate that as body's are dependent on souls for everything, the world is dependent on God. However, the world-God relation is not completely symmetrical because God is not dependent on the world. Wainright explains how this metaphor functions in Ramunja's thought:

The world's dependence on God… is complete.

10. William Wainwright, "Concepts of God," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2017 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/concepts-god/.

The upshot is that the body-soul relation is only fully exemplified by the world-God relation. The world is absolutely dependent on God; God in no way depends upon it. (It is worth noting that classical western theism's principal objections to the claim that the world is God's body—that it makes God dependent on the world and subject to its imperfections—aren't relevant to Ramanuja's position. For, in the latter's view, not only does the dependence relation run only one way [from body to soul and not vice versa], but the body's defects do not affect the soul.)[11]

In contrast, Madhva rejects that the world is God's body because what is central in his thought is "God's infinite majesty, utter transcendence, and absolute sovereignty: 'What is incompatible with the divine sovereignty should be rejected. Inconsistency with the divine majesty is itself the criterion of what is unworthy of acceptance.'"[12] Furthermore, because God's body is the world for Ramunja, God is both the material and efficient cause for the world. This means God is part of the world and gives existence to the world but not bound to it. Madhva's point of departure however is that "it is inconsistent with God's transcendence and independence of the world. If God is truly perfect, then, he cannot be the cause of the world's existence, [that is the material cause]."[13] For Madhva, the impassibility of God is of utmost importance and therefore, there cannot be any form of relational contingency with the world that can affect God's divine perfection.

Wainright's conclusion is instructive for this exploration of Eastern theism in relation to passibility and God's relationship to the world from the VishishtAdvaita perspective in that it "illustrates how an emphasis on different aspects of God's perfection (the absolute dependence of everything other than God on God, on the one hand, and God's transcendence and independence,

11. Wainwright, "Concepts of God."
12. William Wainwright, "Concepts of God" and Madhva quoted in Eric J. Lott, *Vedantic Approaches to God*, Library of Philosophy and Religion. (London: Macmillan, 1980), 48.
13. Wainwright, "Concepts of God."

on the other) can cause theologians with otherwise quite similar views to draw very different conclusions about God." It also points to the diversity within the Eastern religious philosophies that favor both passibility and impassibility as viable visions for the nature of God. However, as will be seen below, they lack the clarity of the Christian passibilitist position as set by the Fathers (in line with the Biblical testimony) that holds both transcendence and imminence as mutually affirming and inextricably linked aspects of God's self-revelation.

5. Understanding Divine Impassibility

Firstly, it must be noted that with all major theological discussions, views and positions evolve and become increasingly nuanced. Similarly, the views on divine impassibility can be placed on a spectrum of varying positions, broadly categorized as strong impassibility, qualified impassibility, strong passibility and qualified passibility. A detailed description of each of the above views is beyond the narrow compass of this current discussion.[14]

Divine *apatheia* is described by passibilitists as a Greek concept that was adopted by the early Fathers as part of the broader tendency for Christian theology to syncretize with Greek philosophy.[15] The sharpest criticism from these quarters is that the impassibilist God is the Greek god of the philosophers. But proponents of the doctrine have argued that divine impassibility was not an uncritical import by the patristic theologians; rather, it was carefully reworked in their contexts for their own exegetical and theological purposes. Bauckham, however, maintains that "[if] the Fathers are to be criticized, it is not, of course, for

14. For a descriptive engagement of the different positions along with their respresentatives, see Robert J. Matz and A. Chadwick Thornhill, eds., Divine Impassibility: Four Views of God's Emotions and Suffering, with contributions by Daniel Castelo, James E. Dolezal, Thomas Jay Oord, and John C. Peckham (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019).

15. For one of the earliest accounts and scholarship that proposed the chronic Hellenization of Christian theology, see A. Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, 207, 211-12; History of Dogma, i. 227-8.

the necessary attempt to make some connexion between the biblical God and the God of Greek philosophy, but for the insufficiently critical nature of their reconciliation of the two."[16]

Bauckham clarifies that impassibility has often been mischaracterized to mean that God is incapable of suffering or that God is apathetic. Instead, he suggests, to grasp the full meaning of *apatheia* one must reflect on the connections between 'impassibility', 'passion', and 'passive' which may "bring us somewhere near the implications of *apatheia*, *pathos* and *pathein* (*paschein*)." This is important because for the Greeks, "God cannot be passive, he cannot be affected by something else, he cannot (in the broad sense) 'suffer' (*paschein*), because He is absolutely self-sufficient, self-determining and independent."[17]

Pathos, Bauckham explains, "means both 'suffering', in our sense of pain or calamity, and also 'passion', in the sense of emotion, whether pleasurable or painful."[18] The difficulty for the Greeks, who understood 'passion' as an overwhelming force that can sweep over persons overcoming their reason and will, was that God cannot be a "passive victim" of an outside force. Therefore, Bauckham writes,

> [to] be moved by desire or fear or anger is to be affected by something outside the self, instead of being self-determining. Again, this is weakness and so God must be devoid of emotion. To suffer or to feel is to be subject to pain or emotion and the things that cause them. God cannot be subject to anything.[19]

Related to this early Christian doctrine of impassibility is the notion that God is perfect, timeless, simple, and immutable which are also metaphysical features of the Greek understanding of God. At the root of these assertions

16. Richard Bauckham, "'Only the Suffering God Can Help'. Divine Passibility in Modern Theology," *Themelios* 9, no. 3 (1984): 8.
17. Bauckham, "Only the Suffering God Can Help," 7.
18. Bauckham, "Only the Suffering God Can Help."
19. Bauckham, "Only the Suffering God Can Help."

was the belief that since "suffering is connected with time, change, and matter, which are features of this material world of becoming," they cannot apply to the transcendent God who stands outside of these contingencies and is the perfect anthesis to human and material reality.[20] Any change within the atemporal and perfect nature of God was conceived "to only be a change for the worse."[21] Therefore, emotions and suffering which indicate a change of some kind within an otherwise static and self-sufficient being would be incompatible with the Greek conception of God.

Furthermore, as Warren McWilliams points out, "One reason for the frequent debate over the impassibility of God is the kind of language used in the Bible to describe God."[22] Scripture has passages that describe the real distinctions between the divine and human natures, but at the same also consists of other "passages freely [using] anthropomorphic language to describe God, i.e., human form is attributed to God. God walks, talks, smells, hears, writes, and has a back side that Moses can see."[23] Of particular importance to the impassibility discussion "are the passages that use anthropopathic language for God, i.e., they attribute human moods, feelings, or emotions to God. For example, God loves, hates, is jealous, and is patient."[24] Some of the passages that point to the paradoxical nature of scriptural language are those that refer to the repentance of God, implying a change within God's intention or attitude (Genesis 6:6-7; Exodus 32:11-14; Judges 2:18; 1 Samuel 15:11, 23; 2 Samuel 24:16; 1 Chronicles 21:15; Psalm 106:45; Jeremiah 18:8, 10; 26:3, 13, 19; 42:10; Amos 7:3, 6; Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:10; 4:2).

20. Bauckham, "Only the Suffering God Can Help."

21. Bauckham, "Only the Suffering God Can Help."

22. Warren McWilliams, "Divine Suffering in Contemporary Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 33, no. 1 (1980): 35, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600047116.

23. Warren McWilliams, "Divine Suffering in Contemporary Theology."

24. Warren McWilliams, "Divine Suffering in Contemporary Theology."

Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel in his 1936 dissertation and later in his major work *The Prophets*, constructed a theology of the divine *pathos* from the Old Testament prophets.[25] This has also become an important hermeneutical lens for the passibilist readings of scripture. Baukham observes that "[from] his own background in kabbalistic and Hasidic Judaism, Heschel was able to recognize in the prophets a quite different understanding of God from that of the Greeks, and in deliberate opposition to the doctrine of divine *apatheia* he used the word *pathos* to describe God's concern for and involvement in the world."[26] Furthermore, Heschel finds the "divine pathos reflected in the pathos of the prophets themselves. The prophets, by sympathy with the divine pathos, are themselves intimately involved in God's concern for his people. Thus, just as divine *apatheia* had its anthropological corollary, so does divine pathos: 'The ideal state of the Stoic sage is apathy, the ideal state of the prophets is sympathy.'"[27]

However, there are of course other passages that indicate that God is unwavering and does not change his mind unlike human beings (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Psalm 110:4; Jeremiah 4:28; Zechariah 8:14-15; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). Therefore, the exegetical nature of this debate continues to be an important part of the discussion of divine im/passibility and is inadvertently connected to adjacent discussions on the interpretation of Scripture in Biblical theology.

6. Impassibility in its context

A close observation of the context in which the *doctrine of apatheia* was originally deployed shows that for the patristic Fathers, "salvation," the pastoral concern at the heart of the matter, can be achieved only by keeping the Creator-creature distinction intact. For the Divine cannot

25. Bauckham, "Only the Suffering God Can Help," 9.
26. Bauckham, "Only the Suffering God Can Help."
27. Bauckham, "Only the Suffering God Can Help," 9–10; A. J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York/Evanston: Harper and Row, 1962): 258.

heal the corrupted created order if the ontic separation has been compromised.

Nevertheless, as can be observed in the Christological debates of the church in antiquity, the incarnation presented severe challenges to this notion. Theologians like Cyril of Alexandria developed the traditional answer to the above paradox that Christ suffered in his human nature while his divine nature remains untouched. The popular phrase "God suffered impassibly," attributed to Cyril captures this well.

Also, it was common place in the early Greco-Roman pagan context suffused with competing visions of the transcendent and deities for early Christian apologists and theologians to use existing religious and philosophical language to subvert narratives that stood in contradiction to the revelation of God in Christ. From Gavrilyuk's work, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, two major points can be derived for the function of the doctrine of impassibility in patristic sources without special reference to Christological debates on the incarnation:

1. "By calling the Christian God impassible the Fathers sought to distance God the creator from the gods of mythology. In this debate the major goal was to rule out popular pagan modes of imaging the divine realm as unworthy of the Christian God."[28] In fact, "the Fathers viewed impassibility as compatible with select emotionally coloured characteristics, e.g., love, mercy, and compassion."[29]

2. Second, it can be shown that "in apophatic theology impassibility was first of all an ontological term, expressing God's unlikeness to everything created, his transcendence and supremacy over all things, rather than a psychological term implying the absence of emotions. In this conceptual framework

28. Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God the Dialectics of Patristic Thought*, The Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: University Press, 2004), 48.

29. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God.*

> divine impassibility safeguarded God's un-diminished divinity and transcendence."[30]

6.1. God apart from other gods

In Isiah 46:9, God distinguishes himself from the Babylonian idols: "Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me." Unlike the pagan Gods who attributed human vices onto God, the Bible consistently portrays God as perfectly good, all-loving and all-holy. These positive characteristics are not predicated on anything but the very nature of God that is the ultimate and perfect manifestation of the above attributes. For the Greek philosophers, however, releasing God from the negative attributes espoused to him by pagan religion meant that God must be unrelated to the material world whatsoever. But as Baukham observes,

> [although] the general tendency of the Greek view of God was to remove him from any contact with the world, as adopted into Christian theology it did not mean that God was *'apathetic'* in the modern sense. The Fathers have no doubt of God's love for the world, but his love is his benevolent attitude and activity, not a feeling, and not a relationship in which he can be affected by what he loves.[31]

Whereas in the case of the Greek pagan deities, their 'passions' often manifested in flashes of violence and the evils associated with human weakness. In contrast, as Gavrilyuk points out, early theologians like the apologist Justin Martyr were

> eager to demarcate the character of the Christian God from that of the passionate Homeric deities. The God of Christians is impassible, free from passions, in the sense that, unlike Dionysius, he is not prone to debauchery;

30. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God.*

31. Bauckham, "'Only the Suffering God Can Help'. Divine Passibility in Modern Theology," 8.

unlike Apollo, he is not a woman-hunter; unlike Persephone and Aphrodite, he is not engaged in rivalry over the handsome Adonis; unlike Zeus, he neither corrupts young boys (Ganymede), nor shows partiality towards his illegitimate sons (Achilles). In this context divine impassibility means that God is above the passions of envy, lust, and all selfish desires. To ascribe these passions to God the creator was to obliterate important distinctions between him and his fallen creatures.[32]

Moreover, in using terms like 'impassible' the patristic theologians were seeking to remove popular characteristics attributed to God to make room for the "coloured characteristics such as mercy, love, and compassion."[33] God's impassibility in this sense communicated not a static, emotionless, apathetic state within God but that unlike his contenders, he was consistently God and immutable in his goodness, justice, and love, not prone to undesirable change.

6.2. Creator-creature distinction and relationship

One of the driving questions of early theological discourse is how do we speak of God who is ultimately incomprehensible and incomparable in his essence to anything of the limited and finite universe. Ramachandra concedes this point himself; he states, "God is Mystery, and his relationship to us and to his world is ultimately beyond our conceptual grasp. We can speak truthfully about him, in so far as he has revealed himself, but even in his self-revelation God remains hidden, beyond our comprehension."[34] It was precisely for the same reason that apophatic theology and apophatic qualifiers were developed by the early Fathers. Therefore, words like impassibility cannot be analyzed merely on an etymological basis. They must be understood in the context in which they were formulated as appropriate theological grammar for speaking about God's transcendence and as a polemic against false gods.

32. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 49–50.
33. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 51.
34. Ramachandra, *Sarah's Laughter*, 24.

As seen in the above the section, the impassibly doctrine reveals that the Fathers were highly concerned with preserving the ethical and moral otherness of Yahweh in line with the Biblical testimony and in contradistinction to the pagan gods. A second concern was God's ontological otherness to the created order. Weinandy observes that the Church Fathers,

> accentuated and clarified, against Platonism and Aristotelianism, that God did not merely order or set in motion preexistent matter but that, by His almighty power, He created all out of nothing—*creatio ex nihilo*. God was then no longer merely at the pinnacle of a hierarchy of being, but His transcendence, as Creator, radically placed Him within a distinct ontological order of His own. As such He was the perfectly good and loving personal God who eternally existed in and of Himself.[35]

However, one of the charges against apophatic theology which upholds a strong Creator-creature distinction, is that it is not sufficiently clear about the relationship between the transcendent and the immanent, or God and the world, if any, which is of special concern to the passibilitists.

Weinandy's defense is particularly helpful here. Even though God is of his own ontological order, he argues that for God, "to be transcendent does not mean that there are certain aspects of His being that are distinct from those aspects of His being that allow Him to be immanent."[36] As can be seen in the Old Testament, it is precisely God's revelation and actions in history, his imminence that speak to his transcendence and otherness as the only One God, Savior God, mighty God, and Holy God.[37]

From the above sections, there is at least four

35. Thomas Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap., and O.F.M. Cap. Articles Thomas Weinandy. 2021. "Does God Suffer? | Thomas Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap.". *First Things*. https://www.firstthings.com/article/2001/11/does-god-suffer; See also Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 108–9.

36. Weinandy, "Does God Suffer?" *First Things*. https://www.firstthings.com/article/2001/11/does-god-suffer.

37. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 41–57.

immediate implications for the South Asian context in regard to impassibility as it was deployed in its original context and its similarity to the socio-cultural components of the pluralistic South Asian "social imaginary:"

a. The separation between radical transcendence and creatureliness as a tenet of classical theism also shares philosophical inroads with other religions, including Hinduism, for talking about God and his relationship to his creation. What does this mean for interfaith dialogue when impassibility is rejected wholesale?

b. The sheer plurality within the Eastern context of the different options and ideologies about God has often been challenged by apophatic theological language especially when it relates to secular doctrines like pantheism. How does Christianity then talk about God in such a context to present Yahweh as distinct and unique if terms like impassibility and immutability are no longer used?

c. Related to the previous question, how can Christian theology challenge attributes that are either cultural or contextual that are mapped onto God that can produce dangerous anthropological corollaries? That is if the doctrine of divine impassibility is eliminated, what are the parameters for what characteristics are attributed to God in a relativist society?

d. Finally, for impassibilitists, how can Eastern theism provide language, metaphors, and concepts to challenge or strengthen the discussion on the viability of divine impassibility for Christianity?

7. Socio-cultural and Socio-religious Factors in Consolation

C. S. Lewis in his reflection of his wife's death in *A Grief Observed*, remarks: "Talk to me about the truth of religion and I'll listen gladly. Talk to me about the duty of religion and I'll listen submissively. But don't come talking to me about the consolations of religion or I shall suspect that you don't understand."[38] While it is true that religion in its rigid and institutional form cannot offer much to the bereaved, it is certainly also true that deeply held religious beliefs are reinforced and/or re-examined during times of grief. For some, it is their religious belief in God and his relationship to the world that sustains their journey in a world filled with death and despair.

Furthermore, it is observed in psychological literature that "[although] death, and subsequently, grief and loss is an experience that everyone in the world shares, it is 'culturally embedded' and understood according to that culture's norms, beliefs and traditions."[39] Additionally, Dennis Klass observes that just as grief occurs in an intersubjective space, "as an interaction between interior, interpersonal, communal, and cultural narratives that are charged with establishing the meaning of the deceased's life and death," consolation also "happens in the same inter-subjective space as grief."[40] This means that both grief and consolation cannot be understood apart from the cultural and religion context they are experienced in.

Therefore, a question that cannot be ignored in the impassibility vs. passibility discussion is what consolation means for different cultural contexts, both theologically and psychologically. For some, to say "God suffers alongside us"

38. C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 23.

39. Philip. Kuehn, "Cultural Coping Strategies and Their Connection to Grief Therapy Modalities for Children: An Investigation into Current Knowledge and Practice," *Master of Social Work Clinical Research Papers*, May 1, 2013, 12, https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/215.

40. Dennis Klass, "Grief, Consolation, and Religions: A Conceptual Framework," *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* 69, no. 1 (2014): 15, https://doi.org/10.2190/OM.69.1.a.

or to say that "there is consolation in knowing God suffers like us," only heightens their suffering and succumbs God to the pathetic state of mortality and creatureliness. For others, divine impassibility is untenable on philosophical, exegetical, and broadly religious grounds and therefore, is not a view of God that helps the sufferer. In fact, it perpetrates more evil as God cannot be truly love and compassionate if he cannot be vulnerable and moved by human suffering.

Intuitively, it would seem that in the West, the therapeutic presence of the other, listening, and suffering alongside the sufferer as consoling. The imminence of God and the suffering God helps. Whereas, in the Eastern and the South Asian context it would seem that the presence of a strong-man, someone who can fix the problem, and bring deliverance, is consolation. It is important to note that "[after] all, the patristic doctrine of divine impassibility flourished in the great era of Christian martyrdom."[41] That is to say, "that there have been a whole variety of ways of relating God to human suffering. A doctrine of divine impassibility can encourage men and women to rise above suffering in the hope of attaining the unshakable blessedness of God, and in fact the martyrs were often seen as realizing the ideal of *apatheia* in triumphing over pain."[42]

8. Conclusion

In Mozley's excellent treatment of the history of impassibility in the first quarter of the 20th century, he suggests six questions that must be addressed in any serious discussion of the subject. Of the six, two are important questions to be pursued further to adequately uphold Bonhoeffer's words for the current context. Firstly, what is God's relationship to the world? The topics such as transcendence/immanence, creation, and providence have

41. Bauckham, "'Only the Suffering God Can Help'. Divine Passibility in Modern Theology," 9.

42. Bauckham, "'Only the Suffering God Can Help'. Divine Passibility in Modern Theology," 9.

received fuller treatment since his publication however, both passibilitists and impassibilitists have not taken Eastern theism and its pluriform worldviews into serious consideration in their undertakings. Mozley's second question concerns the religious value of divine passibility. So what if God suffers? What effect does divine suffering have on human suffering? This question must be explored through comparative studies between theology and psychological studies that focus in on uniquely non-western modes of understanding pain, grief, healing, and consolation.

As observed in this paper, for an effective analysis if Bonhoeffer's statement, "only the suffering God can help," holds true for the South Asian context, the discussion on the doctrine of im/passibility is indispensable. Moreover, the latter has its own history both in the formulation and deployment of the doctrine of impassibility and in its rejection in modern times. This provides key insight into the factors and conditions that required the language of divine *apatheia* and can be mapped onto the South Asian context. As a result, it can be observed that the "suffering God," theology creates a void in the South Asian context in addressing its most predominant feature of religious plurality. Secondly, the subjective experience of consolation cannot be understood univocally across different cultures and socio-religious settings. The intersubjective nature and cultural embeddedness of grief and consolation invites a deeper study of the different modes of consolation in different contexts and how it relates one's theology of God's transcendence and imminence.

Finally, it must be undoubtedly stated that God is not indifferent to human suffering. Christian theology offers both the consolation of the trinitarian God in the form of his presence and deliverance from suffering and pain—in some measure in the immediate sense and in its entirety in the eschatological message of the cross and resurrection. However, the nature of God's transcendence and imminence, the problem of evil, and the theological, socio-cultural, psychological, and religious dimensions depict the enduring complexities of the im/passibility discussion.

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF RACE AND ETHNICITY[1]

PRABODITH MIHINDUKULASURIYA

Abstract: *Contemporary confrontations on ethnic identity, racial justice, and the challenges of life in multicultural societies make it imperative that Christians refresh their understandings of what the Scriptures teach about our communally-embodied selves. This article seeks to draw out the fundamental theological orientations that can guide us to live faithfully as disciples of Christ in societies polarized and befuddled by such agendas as ethno-religious nationalism, systemic racism, and hyper-sensitive political correctness.*

Key words: *race, ethnicity, community, nations, culture.*

1. Introduction

Here we are, in the third decade of the 21st century, utterly perplexed by the polarization of public opinion across the world between multiculturalism and xenophobia, political correctness and racism, globalization and a clash of civilizations. Does ethnicity mean anything beyond a cultural construction? Does it contribute something essential to our personal and collective identities? What is its place in human rights and civic duties? What role should it play in a nation's politics and distribution of public goods? These are just some of the issues that are being debated, sometimes flaring into violent conflict, in every part of the world. Therefore, it compels Christian communities everywhere to refresh our theological understandings of this complex and emotive issue.

1. This paper was originally written as part of a consultancy for Tearfund (UK) in March 2020. New material has been added in response to the momentous events that followed soon after.

1.1. A paradox of our time: ethnicity between political correctness and racism

On one hand, the 20th century witnessed unprecedented improvements in interracial relations in many societies. The horrors of the Holocaust forced the postwar world to reckon not only with the consequences of antisemitism but of racism as a whole. Decolonization forced the postcolonial world to face up to the oppressive ideological power of race theories, orientalism, and paternalism. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) recognized that "the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." Its Second Article specifically affirmed that "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." The Civil Rights movement in the US (1954-68) compelled the dismantling of racial segregation and enactment of laws against racial discrimination. Decades of internal resistance and international sanctions against the white-minority government of South Africa eventually abolished the system of apartheid in 1991. A few countries such as India, Singapore, Brazil, Canada and New Zealand adopted some form of bi- or multi-culturalism/lingualism as their national policy for social integration. In more recent years, some countries have experimented with programmes for 'affirmative action', 'scheduled castes' and the codification of 'political correctness' to remedy historical imbalances and discrimination against specific ethnic groups, among other categories of discriminated persons. In many western liberal democratic societies, there is a *perception* that belonging to a visible ethnic minority (among other historically victimized groups) now elevates them to an especially entitled class of persons with privileges and protections (eg. laws against racial slurs and stereotyping) nor available to persons of the majority race community.

Yet, on the other hand, towards the end of the 20th century, we also witnessed shocking race-related atrocities or refusals to acknowledge them. As already mentioned, during the Holocaust era (1933-1945) the German Nazi regime persecuted and systematically murdered over 6 million Jews, almost 2 million ethnic Poles, and 220,000 Roma, among others. Neo-Nazi ideologues deny such atrocities ever occurred and label these claims as Jewish propaganda. So too the Turkish government which barely admits the earlier Armenian Genocide (1914-1923) which took between 600,000 – 1.5 million lives. In the 1970s and 80s ethnic riots were perpetrated by indirect state support or inaction against Tamils in Sri Lanka and Sikhs in India. After eradicating the Tamil Tiger rebels in its civil war (1983-2009), Sinhala ethno-nationalism has become more belligerent in Sri Lanka, not lessened. 'Ethnic cleansing' was practiced during the Bosnia War (1992-1995) between Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims. Between 500,000 to one million ethnic Tutsi, Twa and moderate Hutus were killed in the Rwandan genocide (1994). In the 21st century, we saw how easily ethnic hatred could be ignited even in such liberal and cosmopolitan cities such as New York following 9/11. We have already seen pogroms against Rohingya immigrants in Myanmar (2016-present) and the forced 're-education' camps for Uyghurs in Xinjiang, China (2017-present). The swing to economic nationalism in the US and UK are not always overtly motivated by racism, but they do make new immigrants and refugees feel unwelcome and insecure. More overtly, the upsurge of white supremacist and fascist movements in the US and Europe which openly propagate antisemitism and xenophobia is alarming. In a heartbreaking irony (let alone the treatment of Palestinians), Ethiopian Jews are crying out against discriminatory treatment at the hands of European Jews in Israel about allocations of employment and housing. Decades of complaints by the African-American community in the US against discriminatory treatment by the police flared up in weeks of rioting across the US and similar statue-toppling

demonstrations in other countries after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 in Minneapolis was captured on video and seen around the world.

The Covid-19 pandemic has predictably exposed many local and global disparities, including racial prejudices. Congested living conditions, subsistence daily-wage employment and lack of internet access suddenly forced migrant workers (from different regions in the same country, or from different countries) to struggle for survival while dealing with aggravated xenophobic mistreatment as whole cities became hostile to groups rumour to be 'super-spreaders' of the virus.[2]

In this paradoxical and perplexing global situation, the missional church needs to refresh its worldview perspective on ethnicity. This paper endeavours to offer a framework of theological affirmations about ethnicity which emerge from a biblical worldview of humankind as part of God's creation and mission.

1.2. Definitions

To reflect theologically on the issues of 'race' and 'ethnicity' we may begin by paying attention to how sociologists have tried to understand these complex terms.

1.2.1. What is 'race'?

Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartman define a race as "a human group defined by itself or others as distinct by virtue of perceived common physical characteristics that are held to be inherent."[3] They point out that "systematic physiological differences among many human groups are obvious" with "skin colour [being] only one example."[4]

2. "List of incidents of xenophobia and racism related to the 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_incidents_of_xenophobia_and_racism_related_to_the_2019–20_coronavirus_pandemic.

3. Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartman, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*, 25.

4. Cornell and Hartman, *Ethnicity and Race*, 23.

However, "deciding which of these physiological differences should serve as racial markers is a complicated process." For example, "blood types, hair textures, skin colors, and body forms vary, sometimes dramatically, not only between populations we often think of as racially distinct, but within as well. In fact, the extent of genetic variations among individuals within supposed racial groups typically exceeds the variation between the groups."

"Despite the lack of a biological basis for the conception of distinct human races," Cornell and Hartman state that "race still wields monumental power as a social category. In many societies, the odea of biologically distinct races remains a fixture in the popular mind, a basis of social action, a foundation of government policy, and often a justification for distinctive treatment of one group by another."[5]

1.2.2. What is 'ethnicity'?

German sociologist Max Weber defined ethnic groups as "those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration…It does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists."[6] In similar terms, Richard A. Schermerhorn described an ethnic group as "a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood."[7] He identified the following among such 'symbolic elements': kinship patterns, geographical concentration, religious affiliation, language, and physical differences.

To be clear, the reference to race and ethnicity as

5. Cornell and Hartman, *Ethnicity and Race*, 24.

6. Max Weber, *Economy and Society, Vol. 1* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 389.

7. Richard A. Schermerhorn, *Comparative Ethnic Relations: A Framework for Theory and Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 12.

"social constructs" does not mean that they are arbitrary sociological false or contrived categories with no basis in genetic lived experience, which therefore can be dismissed as unworthy of theological reflection. In fact, it is precisely because these are socially invested and relationally experienced human realities that they invite close attention from a scriptural point of view.

2. Theological affirmations

2.1. Creation perspective

Every ethnic community has an 'origin story' about who their ancestors were and where they came from, how they overcame adversities and adversaries, how they created a distinct way of life and what they achieved, and why it is important to safeguard those memories (including grievances against other ethnic groups), kinship bonds and heritages, and pass them on to the next generation. Some elements of these collective 'memories' (transmitted by oral, written, and artifactual traditions) can be historically verified to some extent, but others cannot. They are simply believed, often selectively and coloured by ideology.

The proto-historical and archetypal 'origin story' of Gen 1-11 acts as a metanarrative in which all other local narratives (including ethnic ones) are nested. It sets important worldview parameters which control, challenge or elevate the claims of local narratives.[8]

2.1.1 Our common God-related humanity precedes our ethnicity.

The Genesis creation narrative makes two foundational affirmations about our humanity. Firstly, that all human beings are created in God's image and likeness, and therefore

8. John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009); *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate* (2015); *The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate* (2018).

have the capacity to relate to Him and represent His rule on earth (Gen 1:26-27). Secondly, that all human beings, in their successive generations, are to increase in population and spread across the continents to exercise their equally God-mandated responsibility to govern the earth (Gen 1:28). These two theological truths precede, and are reaffirmed in, the diversification of humankind into ethno-national groups in the flood narrative.

It was the biblical conviction that all human beings were equally endowed with 'rational souls' and were equally entitled and demonstrably able to possess and rule their lands that led Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566) to defend the rights of Amerindians against arguments justifying their conquest and enslavement based on the Aristotelian idea that some races were 'natural slaves' who were inherently incapable of using their lands productively and governing their communities justly and peacefully, and therefore necessitated more superior nations to subdue and govern them, for their own good, as a moral imperative.[9] Unfortunately, it even took de las Casas some time to comprehended the full implications of the Bible's teaching that all human beings bore the 'image of God'. He, among others, proposed the importation of African slaves into the Caribbean as an alternative to the enslavement of native Amerindians, which led to the growth of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Later in his life, Las Casas bitterly regretted his part in promoting this crime against humanity.[10]

2.1.2 Our ethnicity and ethnic diversity are part of God's original purpose for humankind, not a result of the 'the curse of Babel'.

Although the proto-historical flood narrative (Gen 6-9) comes after the fall (Gen 3-4), God's original intentions are reaffirmed in his commands to Noah and his

9. Bartolomé de las Casas, *Apologetic History of the Indies*. http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/lascasas.htm.

10. Lawrence Clayton, "Bartolomé de las Casas and the African Slave Trade," *History Compass* 7 (2009): 1526-1541.

descendants. All human beings bear God's image and are descended from one family, Noah's sons Shem, Ham and Japheth (9:6; 18); and they are to migrate across the earth and populate it (v.7). The genealogy of Noah's descendants in the 'Table of Nations' (Gen 10) introduces the major OT theme of "the nations" or "the peoples" (Heb. *ha-ggōwyim*, which occurs 561 times in the OT).[11] The narrator's refrain highlights the ethno-linguistic diversity and geographic diffusion of the nations.

From these [the sons of Japheth] the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into their nations. (Gen. 10:5)

> These are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations. (v. 20)
>
> These are the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, according to their nations. (v. 31)
>
> These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood. (v. 32)

Therefore, the entire human family, in all its ethnic diversity, are placed under the covenant and blessings of preservation and providence God declared to Noah (Gen 8:21-9:17).

That God intended ethno-linguistic diversity within the human family as part of His created order, is also confirmed by the biblical narrator's choice of placing the 'Table of Nations' (Gen 10) before the Babel Tower

11. Richard Bauckham proposes that the seventy nations named in the 'Table of Nations' constitute a "representative geography" symbolic of all nations on earth, where the farthest regions known to the pre-exilic Israelites (such as Sheba and Cush) represent nations which lived beyond the horizon of their limited geographic knowledge. *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 63-65.

narrative (Gen 11), which is when the dispersion of nations actually takes place. It is precisely because a rebellious humanity conspired to amass around one civilizational center and refused to spread across the earth as God had originally commanded that He "confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth" (v. 9).

As Vinoth Ramachandra explains,

> So, while human beings share a common species nature as homo sapiens, common conditions of existence, shared life experiences, needs, wants and so on, they also conceptualize and respond to these in quite different ways. Their identity is a product of a dialectical interplay between the universal and the particular, between what they all share and what is culturally specific. Even the universally shared features do not impinge on human consciousness "raw"; they are mediated through linguistic cultural symbols and acquire different meanings in different cultures.[12]

Apart from linguistic and cultural differences, the Bible matter-of-factly refers to physical characteristics such as skin colour as a distinguishing racial marker without attaching the slightest notion of superiority or inferiority. As in Isaiah's description of Black African Cushites as "a people tall and smooth" (18:2), Jeremiah's rhetorical question, "Can the Ethiopian [Heb. *Kūšī*, Cushite] change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" (13:23) attributes no value judgement on the skin colour of members of this Black African empire who came into contact with Israelite society under different historical circumstances.[13] Although ostensibly noted as being 'other' (or, more neutrally,

12. Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 134-135.

13. Rodney Steven Sadler Jr, *Can a Cushite Change His Skin? An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering in the Hebrew Bible* (London/NY: T & T Clark, 2005).

'another'), 'blackness' as a racial phenotype is nowhere associated in the Bible with sin and moral inferiority. In fact, when God punishes Miriam for her jealous resentment against Moses for marrying a Cushite wife (Num 12:1), He makes her (with apparently intentional irony) "leprous…(as) snow" (v. cf. Ex 4:6 and 2 Kgs 5:27) a simile for whiteness (eg. Isa 1:18; Ps 51:9; Dan 7:9)![14]

On the related issue of 'shadism' (the unfair preference for fairer skin over darker skin complexion) widely prevalent in traditional African and Asian cultures, it must be noted that although biblical writers refer to the 'blackening' or darkening of one's skin as an undesirable outcome of overexposure to the sun (e.g. Job 30:30; Jer 8:21; Lam 5:10), the point that 'black is beautiful' is powerfully made by the Beloved in the Song of Solomon who protests,

> I am black but lovely,
> O daughters of Jerusalem,
> Like the tents of Kedar,
> Like the curtains of Solomon.
> Do not stare at me because I am swarthy, for the sun has burned me.
> My mother's sons were angry with me;
> They made me caretaker of the vineyards, …" (Song 1:5-6).

2.1.3. God has worked in the ethnic histories of all nations, not just of Israel's, so that all may seek Him.

The uniqueness of God's relationship with Israel is that He chose to work in its history *for the sake of* the other nations. God's sovereign intervention in the histories of all nations is explicitly stated, in fact, as a warning against Israel's tendency to pridefully remember its 'exceptionalism' while forgetting the purpose for which they had been chosen: "'Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?' declares the LORD. 'Have I not brought up Israel

14. For a discussion on this episode, see Sadler Jr, *Can a Cushite Change His Skin?*, 32-40.

from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?'" (Amos 9:7).

In Lystra, Paul argued that although the Creator had "permitted all the nations to go their own ways; yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14: 16-17). God's common grace to all nations has remained a constant indicator to their sense of the numinous, even though they have failed to recognize Him. In Athens, Paul made a similar appeal to the city's famed forum of philosophers. He asserted the creational truth of humankind's common origins: "He made also *of one blood* every nation of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth." The Aborigines Protection Society founded by Christian humanitarians in 1837 took their Latin motto "*Ab Uno Sanguine*" from this text. They opposed the theory of polygenesis (that different races evolved separately) which made even Charles Darwin dread that "the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace the savage races throughout the world."[15] The Athenians were well-known for their belief that they were superior to other city-states because their ancestors had literally sprung up from the very soil of their native Attica. Paul was probably aware of this notion and was challenging it.[16] He added furthermore that God had since then sovereignly superintended over the histories of every nation: "having ordained times before appointed, and the bounds of their dwellings" (Acts 17:26 YLT). Paul then made the startling theological connection that God involved Himself in this way so "that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us," as in fact, some of their own philosopher-poets had falteringly done (v. 27).

15. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, part 1, in *The Works of Charles Darwin*, edited by Paul H. Barrett and R. B. Freeman, vol. 21 (London: Routledge, 2016), 162.

16. Josine H. Blok, "Gentrifying Genealogy: On the Genesis of the Athenian Autochthony Myth," in *Antike Mythen: Medien, Transformationen und Konstruktionen,* edited by Ueli Dill and Christine Walde Page (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 251–74.

Theologically, therefore, God entrusts us with our ethno-cultural 'groundedness' or particularity to enable us to create ideational 'resources' to seek for Him, until He reveals Himself to every culture, incarnated as He chose to be in one of them.

2.2. Fall perspective

The narrative of the fall (Gen 3-4) teaches us that the whole human family and all its ethnic branches have been affected by sin. As Andrew Walls put it, "Humanity was vile everywhere, not only in Ceylon."[17] As with every other aspect of our humanness, sin distorts the way we think and behave in relation to our own ethnicity and those of others.

Theologically, our 'fallenness' is a consequence of our human desire to create a moral order ("the knowledge of good and evil" Gen 3:16-17) apart from God's order. Ethno-centrism, the attempt to view the world from the vantage-point of one's own ethnic group, and to impose that worldview on everyone else is certainly part that overreaching 'will to power'.

At the most basic level, (as with the difference of male and female in Gen 3:16b) the 'diversity' or 'difference' which God desired for good has now become a cause for division, fear, and struggle for dominance. In the sphere of ethnic relations, sinfulness is commonly manifested by feelings of superiority or inferiority in relation to the 'other', which results in various forms of essentializing or stereotyping (that every person from one ethnic community necessarily shares one or more common traits), followed by shaming, discrimination and various degrees of exclusion.

17. Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 66. Walls was alluding, of course, to Rev. Reginold Heber's missionary hymn "From Greenland's icy mountains" (1892) with the stanza "What though the spicy breezes/ Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle; Though every prospect pleases,/ And only man is vile: In vain with lavish kindness/ The gifts of God are strown;/ The heathen in his blindness/ Bows down to wood and stone."

2.2.1. The sin of ethnic competitiveness and strife is, sadly, real.

The Bible gives us a realistic view of human sinfulness. We do not do anyone any favours by pretending that competitiveness does not exist in multiethnic societies, where such benefits such as state or NGO funding for education, housing or livelihood development, or opportunities for wealth creation such as government contracts and access to markets are allocated on the basis of ethnicity.

God wanted the Israelites to be economically self-sufficient and be respected among their neighbouring nations. He promised that, conditional upon there covenant-faithfulness, "you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. The Lord will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above, and you will not be underneath" (Deut 28:12-13). But he warned that if they disobeyed Him, "The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but you will go down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you will not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you will be the tail" (v. 43-44). The spectre of ethnic minorities finding insidious ways to dominate the majority community in different ways is a perennial theme of ethnonationalist alarmism. The reason why God warns the Israelites of the real possibility of this undesirable scenario is not to rouse the Israelites to xenophobia, but to alert them to the commonsensical truth that covenant-faithfulness (which included fair treatment of the alien) is the only safeguard against interethnic competitiveness and strife.

As Ramachandra observes, "When a majority community defines itself as a nation and claims the culture of ownership of the state, it promotes it's minority defined themselves to as nations. Minority ethnic nationalism is often a defensive reaction against majority nationalism."[18] Missionaries have sometimes exploited these rivalries and further embittered existing jealousies. The discriminatory

18. Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths*, 142.

educational and ordination policies of the White Fathers in Rwanda and Burundi in favor of the Tutsi minority, whom they identified as "natural leaders" whose facial and physical features were supposed to resemble Europeans more closely, gradually led to majority Hutu resentment culminating in a bloodbath.[19] Today's Christian NGOs must be careful not to follow the disastrous policies of their missionary forebears by favouring one ethnic community over others. Except in situations where particular ethnic communities have been targeted for economic deprivation, it is advisable to assist disadvantaged communities based on common economic needs that cut across ethnic lines.

2.2.2. We are all susceptible to racial biases, prejudices, insensitivities, and resentments.

Most people would probably not think of themselves as being ethno-centric and racist in their perception of themselves and attitude towards others. However, the effect of our fallenness is so insidious that even though we reject these wrong attitudes on a cognitive level, we may yet have deep-seated biases and blind spots on an affective level that, when they surface, may even shock us. What Paul confessed about our innate sinfulness in general terms applies to our ethnic consciousness too: "For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate" (Rom 7:15).

Much of the White Evangelical push-back, not just against 'Critical Race Theory', 'Wokeness', and 'Cancel Culture', but also against embracing social justice as an integral part of Christian mission is based on the unwillingness of a significant proportion of North American Evangelicals to recognize that sin can be systemic and structural as much as it is personal. They also manifest a blindness to the realities that individualism and capitalism are ideologies as tainted by human fallenness as

19. Timothy Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58-81.

communalism and socialism are.[20] Furthermore, like many secular philosophical constructs, Marxian theories of power and conflict can be useful analytical tools for Christians to uncover hidden evils in society although the solutions which they offer may fall far short of the transformation that can only come from Christ.[21]

One could find numerous instances of casual prejudice in the biblical narratives. Naomi presumed that, like Orpah, Ruth would return to her Moabite kinfolk and their beliefs. She says, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law" (Ruth 1:15). But Ruth's decision showed that she was not simply hardwired by ethnic loyalties: "Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (v. 16c). Similarly, David presupposed that Ittai the Gittite (i.e. from Gath, the same Philistine hometown as Goliath), being a recent immigrant would choose safety over supporting David: "…[Y]ou are a foreigner and also an exile; return to your own place. You came only yesterday…" (2 Sam 15:19-20). But Ittai's response was unexpected. "As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be" (v. 21).

Jesus reverses this process by eliciting counterintuitive responses from his Gentile interlocuters to demonstrate to his Jewish audience that the former are exemplarily qualified for inclusion in God's kingdom because of their faith in Him, whereas the latter lag behind. On the

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20. For examples of the push-back see, Own Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel—and the Way to Stop It* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021); Jon Harris, *Christianity and Social Justice: Religions in Conflict* (Ann Arbor, MI: Reformation Zion Publishing, 2021); Scott David Allen, *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice: An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Credo House Publishers, 2020).

21. See, for example, David T. Koyzis, *Political Visions & Illusions: A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (Second Edition, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019); Vinoth Ramachandra, *Gods that Fail: Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission* (Revised Edition, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018) Tony Campolo, *Partly Right: Learning from the Critics of Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008).

often-misunderstood dialogue of Jesus with the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30), Dick France observed how

> The whole encounter builds up to the totally positive conclusion of verses 29 to 30, while the preceding dialogue serves to underline the radical nature of this new stage in Jesus's ministry into which he has allowed himself to be 'persuaded' by the woman's realism and wit. He appears like a wise teacher who allows, and indeed incites, his pupil to mount a victorious argument against the foil of his own reluctance. He functions as what in a different context might be called a 'devil's advocate', and is not 'disappointed' to be defeated in argument. As a result the reader is left more vividly aware of the reality of the problem of Jew-gentile relations, and of the importance of the step Jesus here takes to overcome it.[22]

It is sometimes possible that we could have prejudices against *our own* ethnocultural group. Jesus was painfully aware that he was not accorded the honour he was due by some of his fellow Galileans because "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household" (Mark 6:4). When invited to follow "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph," Nathanael retorted, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:45-46). This unfiltered skepticism revealed Nathanael's own low esteem of a fellow-Galilean since Nathanael himself is later identified as "Nathanael of Cana in Galilee" (21:2). We could unconsciously internalize culturally imposed social stratifications which make us accept the 'inferiority' of our ethnocultural group, even to the extent of then resorting to 'ennoble' our culturally imposed ranking by creating speculative genealogies and alternative historiographies that claim a 'superior' origin. Although we are not sure precisely what he meant, we could still take a general warning from

22. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark (New International Greek Testament Commentary)*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 296.

Paul about "myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation" (1 Tim 3-4), and to "avoid foolish controversies and genealogies…for they are unprofitable and worthless" (Titus 3:9).

2.2.3. There could be particular habits of thought and behaviour shared across an ethnic group, and some of these may be sinful.

There are instances in the Bible where particular moral characteristics are attributed to a group of people. Paul quotes the Cretan poet Epimenides (c. 6th cent BC) to chastise his Cretan readers: "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" (Tit 1:12). Paul did not hesitate to add, "This testimony is true. For this reason, reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth" (v. 13). He also vented his frustration against the Galatians, with the collective rebuke "You foolish Galatians!" (Gal 3:1). Luke even contrasted the collective disposition of one Jewish community against another when he commented about the Jews in Berea, "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica…" (Acts 17:11).

Is it theologically acceptable to speak about characteristic virtues and vices that are specific to ethnic groups, without stereotyping and essentializing them?

Firstly, as in the case with the Cretans, every ethnic community will arguably acknowledge that there are indeed moral weaknesses to which they are particularly prone. This emic self-awareness is commonly reflected in their folk wisdom and humour.[23]

Secondly, as Paul reflexively does, the writers of Scripture (virtually all Israelite/Jewish) were profoundly self-critical about the 'national sins' of their own ethnic

23. E.g. Leon Rappoport, "Prejudice, Pride, and Play in Ethnic Comedy," in *Punchlines: the Case for Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Humor* (Westport, CT/ London: Praeger, 2005), 31-44.

community (eg. Romans 2:17-25).

Thirdly, although groups of people are described stereotypically, there is never an instance when an individual is singled out as having a certain characteristic *because* he/she belonged to a particular ethno-cultural group. These are important guidelines which help us to speak sensitively yet honestly about sins which may have become embedded in the attitudes, ideologies, and practices which we have inherited through our ethnicity.

2.2.4. Historical sins of exploitation and oppression have complicated 'our' memories and how we perceive 'others'.

The so-called 'Curse of Ham' (Gen 9:25) was the most commonly cited biblical prooftext to justify the enslavement and exploitation of black Africans in Christian societies in Europe and America. However, as David Goldenberg's painstaking research has shown, this text was never applied to black Africans in early Jewish or Christian interpretation, most probably because Noah's curse was directed at Ham's son Canaan, and not even his descendants. The application of the 'curse' to black Africans originated with Qur'anic interpreters in 7th century AD Arabia "when the Black became strongly identified with the slave class in the Near East, after the Islamic conquest of Africa."[24] The misuse of this text in Christian societies first appears in the 15th century when Portugal muscled its way into the African slave trade. Thereafter, "as the Black slave trade moved to England and then America, the Curse of Ham moved with it."[25] We need to be critically self-aware of the ambient historical conditions and ideological climate we live in, which often affects our ability to relate justly to the ethnic 'other'.

The attitudes of the ancient Israelites towards their neighbouring nations were shaped by their historical

24. David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 170.

25. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham*, 175.

experiences of hostility or kindness, which made indelible impressions on their ethnic memory for generations. For example, the Israelites were to treat Edomites and Egyptians with kindness, and gradual inclusion. "You shall not detest an Edomite, for he is your brother; you shall not detest an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. The sons of the third generation who are born to them may enter the assembly of the Lord" (Deut 23:6-7; cf. 1 Sam 15:6). In contrast, Moabites and Ammonites were to be treated with hostility and perpetual exclusion. "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord, because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam… to curse you" (vv. 3-6). These variations demonstrate that God wanted the Israelites to take their historical experiences seriously, and formulate realistic policies based on them. The purpose was not to protect their nation's ethnic homogeneity, but to remain faithful to the LORD's covenant calling to holiness, justice and righteousness in the midst of the other nations.

On occasion, it was also necessary to contest the historical factuality of some ethnic 'memories'. When the king of Ammon stated his claim to the territory between the Arnon and Jabbok rivers, demanding that Israel return it to his people, Jephthah accurately recounted the history of how Israel had come to possess it, including the fact that Israel had won it in a battle against Sihon king of the Amorites who had already captured it from the Ammonites, and that Israel had since occupied that land for three hundred years during which period the Ammonites had never attempted to reclaim it (Judg 11:12-28). Where reliable sources are available for credible examination of historical claims it is important to do so even though the results may not produce amicable resolution or satisfactory redress in every instance. At best, finite human justice can only anticipate the perfect justice of God.

2.3. Redemption perspective

God announced his redemptive intervention in human history with explicit reference to "all the families of the earth" in His call to Abram and Sarai to be the progenitors of that unique nation through whom He would bless all other nations (Gen 12:1-3). As Waldemar Janzen and Chris Wright have helpfully shown, God's distinct covenant instructions for Israel's communal life (including those pertaining to ethnic relations) act paradigmatically to inform us of our contemporary theological-ethical perspectives and responsibilities.[26] What God teaches Israel about its own 'ethnic identity' and its 'ethnic relations' is therefore paradigmatically applicable to Christian practice.

As the climax and fulfilment of Israel's mission, the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus inaugurated God's transforming rule on earth. He creates a new global community obedient to God's kingship in every area of life, including our ethnic identities and practices. We learn to understand our ethnicity in under the lordship of Christ and to submit all its resources to His service and glory.

2.3.1. Human community (including nationhood) is made possible by love of God and neighbour, not merely ethnic kinship.

Even in God's election of Israel as the nation uniquely chosen to move his 'salvation history' forward, God showed that redemption was based on covenant purity, not ethnic purity. The mass of ex-slaves whom Moses led out of Egypt were constituted "among all the peoples" as God's unique "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5-6) by entering into covenant with God. Their covenant nationhood was not based on common ethnicity

26. Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994); Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2004), 62-74; 183-186; 197-198; 320-321.

and endogamous kinship alone. God wanted them to include not only the descendants of Jacob but also "the alien who is within your camps" when He "establish[ed them]…as His people" (Deut 29:10-13). One of Simeon's sons was from a Canaanite wife (Gen 46:10) as were three of Judah's (38:2-5). The half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were descended from Joseph and his Egyptian wife (Gen 41:45, 50; 46:20). There were Israelites who were half-Egyptian (cf. Lev 24:10). A sizeable number are also described as a "mixed multitude" (Ex 12:38; Num 11:4), presumably made up of former slaves of other ethnicities. Moses himself married a black African "Cushite woman" (Num 12:11).[27] In the genealogies and censuses of the Pentateuch, the descendants of these non-Israelite peoples are never identified as 'outsiders'. In Israel's subsequent history too, covenant faithfulness to the LORD mattered more for inclusion within Israelite society than ethnic origin. Rahab and her Canaanite family (Jos 6:25) and Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 4:10) are classic examples. The Kennites who were the descendants of Jethro (Judg 1:16; 1 Chron 2:54) were gradually absorbed into the tribe of Judah.[28] Endogamous ethnic purity was required of Israel for the purpose of preserving covenant faithfulness (Exod 34:16; Deut 7:3-4). If that qualification was met, as we shall see, there were provision was made to absorb foreigners into the Israelite covenant community.

After the initial campaigns under Joshua when the Israelites established firm footholds throughout Canaan, most of the Canaanite nations were not dispossessed or annihilated. They were allowed to coexist in the land, albeit as a lesser-than-ideal 'ground reality' fraught

27. J. Daniel Hays writes that Cush "is used regularly to refer to the area south of Egypt, and above the cataracts on the Nile, where a Black African civilization flourished for over two thousand years. Thus it is quite clear that Moses marries a Black African woman." *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 71.

28. James T. Sparks, *The Chronicler's Genealogies: Towards an Understanding of 1 Chronicles 1-9* (Leiden: Brill, Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 224-227.

with complications. God judged the Israelites for their syncretistic worship of Canaanite deities alongside Him (Judg 2:11-20), but determined that He "will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not. So the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua" (vv.21-23). Unfortunately, the Israelites did not respond to this demographic challenge by reforming themselves as God desired. Instead, they resorted to periodically enslaving those non-Israelite populations among them (Judg 1:21, 27-36).

This too was regulated within covenant law. As instructed in Lev 25:44-46, the Israelites were repeatedly commanded to bestow equal treatment to non-Israelites pressed into forced labour in matters of justice and participation in worship (e.g. Lev 16:29; 17:8-15; 22:18-19; 25:6; Num 9:14; 15:14-16; 15:29-30, etc.).

Anticipating the reality that immigrants from other nations would seek refuge in Israel due to various reasons, Moses gave them the command to welcome them, and the historical rationale for it.

> When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. (Lev 19:33-34)

In Israel's covenant law, resident aliens were singled out only for the bestowal extra rights, not lesser. Their sustenance (along with that of widows and orphans) was prioritized as a matter of special attention for Israelite social righteousness (e.g. Deut 24: 17-21; 26:13). Moreover, when the Lord put people 'in their place' it was the native-born Israelites who were reminded that *they*, in fact, were the immigrants and refugees in on His land. "The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is

Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me" (Lev 25:23).

After the exile, returning Israelites were commanded not to drive out foreigners who had settled in the land as before. "You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel" (Ezek 47:21-23). If God commanded His chosen people to be inclusive in this way, breaking with former categories of belonging and introducing new understandings of nationhood, how much more than the other nations? This shows that ethnic communities need not be locked into the patterns of the past, and that we can transcend 'primordial' ethnic histories with new paradigms of relationships.

2.3.2. By His incarnation, Jesus affirms the particularity of human racial and ethnic identity.

The incarnation of the Son, the second Person of the eternal Trinity, as a first-century Galilean Jew is the greatest affirmation of God's good gift of our race-d and encultured human-ness. Jesus was able to authentically represent all of humankind before the Father because he became a member of one of its ethnic families. Jesus was conscious of his Israelite-Judahite identity and its significance for his messianic mission (e.g. Matt 10:5-6; 15:24; John 4:22). His Jewishness was also an integral part of the apostolic proclamation about his messiahship (e.g. John 1:11; Acts 2:22; Rom 1:3; 15:8; Gal 4:4-5).

There are many instances when Jesus can be seen behaving 'appropriately' within His 'Middle Eastern' ethnocultural milieu, even after the resurrection! One outstanding example is when, having arrived at Emmaus with his travelling companions, "He acted as though He were going farther" (Luke 24:28). To a westerner, this would appear somewhat dishonest behaviour. But as Kenneth Bailey explains,

> In the Middle East the unexpected invitation must be refused. The refusal is all the more

> required if the guest is of lower social rank than the host…In Luke 24:28-29 we have, culturally speaking, the same scene. This time Jesus receives the unexpected invitation. As a courteous Oriental he "made as though he would go further." The two men, again in true Middle Eastern fashion, "compel him" to stay. He is not forced against his will. Rather, they know he *must* refuse for the first fifteen minutes of discussion as a matter of honour. In order to convince him that they really *do* want him to stay … they gently drag him into the house.[29]

Such examples, and the many wisdom sayings of Jesus (e.g. Matt 13:57; Lk 14:8-11; 28-29; etc.) also validates our cultural-intelligence in becoming mindful about relating healthily with people from 'high context' and 'low context' cultures. While the anthropological avoidance-pursuit pairs of 'honour-shame', 'guilt-innocence', 'fear-power' provide a useful general matrix for understanding why people from a particular culture tend to give more weightage to some moral values while overriding others, it is important to remember that individuals from all cultures constantly operate within a matrix of all three axes.[30]

And yet, as deeply as Jesus identified with his Jewishness, he was, for that very reason, prophetically self-critical of the ethno-centric complacencies and hypocrisies of his compatriots (eg. Matt 5: 43-6:6; 23:1-39; John 8:37-59). As a consequence, he was himself excluded and victimized by the mainstream ethno-religious 'guardians' of his own people (eg. John 9:22; 16:2).

Jesus therefore teaches and models for his disciples in every generation and culture how we ought to think about our own ethnic identity and how we ought to

29. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes* (Combined ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 108.

30. For a discussion, see Darrell Whiteman, "Shame/Hnor, Guilt/ Innocence, Fear/Power: A Missiological Response to Simon Cozens and Geoff Beech," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 42, no. 4: 348-356.

relate to our own ethnic community, as well as people of other ethnic communities. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) epitomises this teaching. Jesus implicitly changes his interlocutor's question "Who is my neighbour?" to "How can I be a neighbour?" with the counter-intuitive twist of making a Samaritan the hero of the story. In other words, Jesus demonstrates that once we are in right relationship with God, his disciples will learn to critically affirm their own ethnicity and act with counter-cultural love for the 'other' as one's own ethnic kin, doing both out of radical loyalty to God's just and merciful kingship. These ideal was well understood in the Early Church. It is poignantly expressed in the 2nd century *Letter to Diognetus*:

> For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on

> earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. [… T]hey are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.[31]

2.3.3. Christ's redemptive work covers all of human activity and necessitates integral mission in the sphere of fallen human ethnicity.

As Richard Mouw points out,

> The "world," the cosmos, which Jesus came to save was bigger than the world he originally created. Not only did this world contain many more people than had populated the original Garden, but it was filled with the languages, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organizations, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values…. And these items were and are touched by human rebellion. They comprise sinful culture. But they do belong to the fullness of the cosmos for which Christ died; "for God sent the Son into the cosmos, not to condemn the cosmos, but that the cosmos might be saved through him" (John 3:17).
>
> Already in his earthly ministry Jesus showed something of his power as the Lord over all nature and culture… He most certainly challenged existing habits, ideas, customs, and values. And in both subtle and obvious ways he confronted the existing patterns of commerce, politics, and ethnicity.[32]

31. *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, 5. http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-roberts.html.

32. Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In* (rev. ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 112-113.

Just as the gift of the Son in the particularity of a first-century Jewish male in the Incarnation was the greatest affirmation of God's good creation of our gendered and encultured human-ness, by the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, God affirmed the value of all vernacular languages as adequate mediums of communicating His revealed and saving truths to all cultures. Healing the 'curse' of Babel when people were confused and divided because they could not understand each other, Pentecost brought comprehension and unity precisely because now "devout men from [the Jewish diaspora scattered among] every nation under heaven…came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing [the Spirit-baptized disciples] speak in his own language" (Acts 2:5-6).[33]

Paul clearly instructed his converts about the value of vernacular languages in the witness of the local church even above the (ab)use of unintelligible tongues-speaking. "So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me" (1 Cor 14:9-11). Unlike all other ancient 'world religions' Christianity alone enables its local faith communities of every language and ethnicity to conduct its rites entirely in the vernacular of that community without, including the reading/recitation of the sacred scriptures, the celebration of the eucharist, preaching, and the offering of worship and prayers.

Andrew Walls has convincingly demonstrated how the "translation principle" learned from the Incarnation and Pentecost makes Christianity not only a truly global movement, but a movement of "polycentric globalization" from its very origin.[34] Therefore, as Lamin Sanneh has

33. This insight was recognized by many early Christian exegetes such as Cyril of Jerusalem (*Lecture* 17.17), Gregory of Nazianzus (*Oration* 41), and Augustine of Hippo (*Commentary on the Psalms,* LV.10*)*.

34. Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*

argued, contrary to the postcolonial myth of Christianity as a 'destroyer of indigenous cultures', the cross-cultural transmission of Christianity especially in its Protestant tradition, has often resulted in the preservation and flourishing of local vernacular languages, leading to wider revivals of indigenous cultures.[35] These in turn have resulted in directly or indirectly stimulating movements for literacy and education, publishing of newspapers and literature, social reform and political emancipation.

2.3.3. Jesus' sufferings included antisemitism, and by extension, all forms of racism and ethnic violence.

The atrocious history of Jewish sufferings at the hands of Christians (and worse, that Christians were motivated in that hatred because of the crucifixion of Jesus) demonstrates that the perils of "zeal without knowledge" (Rom 10:3) have more heinous repercussions when Christians violate their own admonitions. Christian antisemitism is all the more Christ-denying because, ironically, antisemitism was a factor in His crucifixion.

When Pilate had Jesus flogged and "handed Him over" to his soldiers for crucifixion, they "took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around Him" for a mock coronation (Matt 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-20; Luke 22:63-65; John 19:1-15). Since no Roman legions were stationed in Judea at the time, these soldiers were almost certainly the Samaritan and Syrian auxiliaries referred to by the historian Josephus.36 Before the Roman occupation, the Samaritan and Syrian populations in surrounding areas had suffered losses and humiliations at the hands of Jewish rulers of the Hasmonean dynasty.[37] After the Roman

(Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 26-42.

35. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message* (2nd ed., Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 122-228.

36. For references and discussion see Christopher B. Zeichmann, "Military Forces in Judaea 6–130 CE: The Status Quaestionis and Relevance for New Testament Studies," *Currents in Biblical Research* 17, no. 1 (2018): 86–120.

37. See, for example, Gary N. Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans: The*

takeover, they bitterly resented being placed under the rule of even the half-Jewish Herodian kings who tried to conciliate them. Their choice of stripping Jesus naked and humiliating him with a mock coronation, taunting him with the chant "Hail, King of the Jews!" has obvious anti-Jewish overtones. The soldiers used Jesus as a scapegoat to vent their hatred of the Jews for the past humiliations their ancestors had suffered under Jewish kings.

Jesus not only spoke to Samaritans, he even stayed with them in their village when invited (Jn 4:3-30; 39-42). When another Samaritan village refused him hospitality because he was Jewish, he rebuked his disciples for even suggesting they call on God to punish them (Lk 9:54-56). The fact that Jesus was a very different kind of Jew and a very different kind of king was entirely lost on the Samaritan and Syrian soldiers. Jesus silently bore their ethnic hatred, breaking the cycle of violence reaching back centuries into the past and centuries into the future, until He judges the nations and brings them peace.

2.3.4. Authentic Christian discipleship must include obedience to Christ in the area of our ethnic perceptions and relationships.

Our restored relationship with God and growing discipleship in Christ transforms our ethnicity in two ways.

Firstly, we receive a new identity in Christ that becomes more central to who we are than any other source of identity, including our ethnic identities. Before, our ethnicity (and other such identity-markers) gave us our primary sense of identity (who we are), belonging (whose we are) and purpose in life (why we are). Now, we receive our primary sense of identity, belonging and destiny in our relationship with the triune God. Paul explains this new reality in three of his letters.

Origins and History of Their Early Relations (oxford: OUP, 2013), 172-173; John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan* (323 BCE 117 CE) (Berkley/LA/London: University of California Press, 1996), 244-258.

> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given one Spirit to drink. (1 Cor 12:13)
>
> There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)
>
> Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free, but Christ is all and is in all. (Col 3:11)

Some early Church Fathers defined this new sense of belonging by calling Christians a "Third Race".[38] This certainly underlined the organic unity of the church as a human community that consciously seeks to relate as a spiritual family of brothers and sisters, the children of one Father, which transcends the differences between the ethno-racial grouping we come from. Peter reminded both Jewish and Gentile Christians that in Jesus, God had again reconstituted for Himself "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" just as He had at Sinai (1 Pet 2:9). In fact, Peter goes on, "for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (v. 10, alluding to Hos. 2:23).

However, this does not mean that Christian initiation obliterates the ethnicity that a disciple has been born with, in the same way that it does not obliterate his or her continuing to be a male or female, or (in NT times) a slave or free-born citizen. Rather, ethnicity simply ceases to matter as a factor that determines a person's value in the kingdom of God, because in it each person's value has been equally bestowed by grace 'in Christ' and 'in the Spirit'. In the 2nd century, Justin Martyr testified how "we who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live [lit. would not use the same hearth or fire] with men of a different tribe, now, since

38. For references and a helpful discussion see, D. K. Buell, "Rethinking the Relevance of Race for Early Christian Self-Definition," *Harvard Theological Review* 94, no. 4 (2001): 449–52.

the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies."[39]

Secondly, while Christian discipleship does not obliterate one's ethnic identity, it also does not require the substitution of one ethnicity for another. This was Paul's major argument with the Judaisers. He consistently argued that in Christ, Gentiles could enter into full membership of God's kingdom *as Gentiles* without renouncing their previous ethnicity and formally proselytizing into the Jewish community, which essentially meant adopting Jewish ethnicity (belonging by observing Jewish laws and customs). Paul insisted that a disciple should remain in the ethnicity they were "as the Lord has assigned (Gk. *merizō*, bestowed in the process of dividing up) to each one, as God has called (Gk. *kaleō*) each" (1 Cor 7:17). "Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God" (v. 18-19). Instead, "Each man must remain in that condition (Gk. *klēsis*, called status) in which he was called (Gk. *kaleō*)" (1 Cor 7:17-20). Therefore, Paul chastised as "so foolish" the misguided Gentile Galatians (who were ethnic Celts) who were adopting Jewish circumcision, dietary norms and calendrical celebrations in a misguided attempt to further secure their inclusion into the people of God (Gal. 3:1; 4:10). He condemned the same tendency among Gentile Christians in Colossae (who were ethnic Phrygians) (Col 2:16).

However, what Paul did insist upon was that an 'intra-identity' conversion ought to take place. That is, Gentile Christians could not simply continue living according to their accustomed worldview and lifestyle inherited by their ethnicity (among other factors) where these contravened the new worldview and lifestyle now radically re-ordered around Christ. Jesus challenged his

39. Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.14.

disciples to rethink their old group loyalties and kinship ties. "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" (Matt 5:46-47; see also 20:23-26). Christian discipleship introduces a tension that compels the believer to ask, "What does it mean for me to think, speak and act *as a member of my ethnic group* who is accountable to Christ above all other legacies, authorities and interests?"

Conversion to Christ requires a fresh redefinition of the self, including one's ethnic self, in relation to the person and teaching of Christ. Therefore, many exhortations in the epistles contrasted 'former' patterns of thought and behaviour with 'new' Christ-centred norms (eg. 1 Cor 12:2; Eph 4:17-24 ff; 1 Pet 4:3, etc.). It took great courage and humility for the apostles themselves to be transformed into this new counter-cultural mode of socializing across ethnic boundaries. Paul found it necessary to confront Peter's inconsistent behaviour in this regard "for prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision" (Gal 2:12). Paul saw this as "hypocrisy" (v. 13) and as fundamentally "not straightforward about the truth of the gospel" (v. 14). Jesus had made it impossible for his disciples to claim, "I am a Jew first and a Christian second" (and, indeed, "I am a [any other identity marker] first and a Christian second") without betraying Him.

2.3.5. While it is to be expected that ethnic tensions will arise within heterogenous Christian communities, the 'redemptive difference' is in the way such tensions are resolved.

After the initial phase of spontaneous economic sharing in the Jerusalem church which was seen as a sign of their unity, the daily distribution of food for dependent widows became an administrative task that opened up some tensions. "A complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic

Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food" (Acts 6:1). The apostles acted decisively and fairly by asking the congregation to "select from among you" a team of administrators for the task (v. 3). By their Hellenised names, it could be assumed that they were all chosen from the Greek-speaking community, including a Syrian proselyte (v. 5).

As Darrell Bock comments, "The disciples do not fragment along ethnic lines or suggest that separate communities be formed along ethnic lines. Rather they are committed to working together… a powerful testimony is created when different groups can be seen as working together in a world often divided along ethnic lines."[40] Also, "since the problem involves Hellenists, Hellenists are given responsibility to solve it." This could only happen because there was trust between the two groups. The majority Aramaic-speaking apostles trusted the minority Greek-speaking administrators to manage the allocated resources faithfully. The minority Greek-speaking community also trusted the majority community that this was not some tactic to exclude them from the wider community or abdicate responsibility for them.

While language differences make it practically necessary to organize separate church services, events and activities within the larger multi-ethnic church community, the practice of organizing distinct congregations as homogenous ethnic enclaves is counter-productive to Christian witness. Such 'ethnic churches' give higher priority to cultural identity (usually clustered around a few dominant families belonging to a particular caste, clan or region in their country of cultural origin) than to learning a difficult but vital aspect of Christian discipleship, which is to love and serve those who are different to ourselves but are inextricably bound to us by our adoption by the same Father, redemption by the same Son, and our sanctification by the same Holy Spirit.

40. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 261.

Recent research shows that the reason why 'Black Churches' have continued to exist long after segregation laws were abolished is because Black Christians have not felt the freedom to "be Black" as members of traditional White Christian congregations.[41] The ecclesial and liturgical structures of local churches are culturally shaped in ways that are 'normal' to one dominant race or class of believers who may not even realize how others may find these to be exclusionary. So-called 'colour-blindness' is a well-intentioned but misguided notion as it turns a blind eye to historic wrongs which have continuing consequences. It also ignores the 'good' differences that make ethnic communities diverse and which they cherish for their distinctiveness. Raising racial awareness and awakening consciousness of systemic biases (commonly called 'wokeness') are not another form of racism against the perceived dominant cultural group, as some White Evangelical critics allege. Labelling such conscientizing efforts as "liberal", "Marxist", and "anti-Christian" misses the point entirely. As Jemar Tisby explains,

> What is missing from these criticisms is the Christian concept of love. Love for neighbor requires critiquing and dismantling unjust systems of racial oppression. It is one matter to acknowledge that all people are made equal and have inherent dignity in their very being. It is another matter to identify the ways the image of God is defaced in groups of people through systems and policies and to work against those injustices. The emphasis here is on life together in a nation under laws and policies. If Christians claim to be concerned for their neighbors, then they must also be concerned about the structures and systems that enable or

41. Besheer Mohamed, "Most Black Protestants say denominational affiliation is less important than inspiring sermons," *Pew Research Center*, April 29, 2021. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/most-black-protestants-say-denominational-affiliation-is-less-important-than-inspiring-sermons/.

inhibit their neighbors' flourishing.[42]

It takes love to discern the difference between 'moral relativism' and 'cultural relativity'. So much of our racial prejudices are moral judgements that fail to distinguish between the two. When there is a general unwillingness to accept that gender, social class, race, ethnicity, and other embodied experiences significantly shape our perspectives, or that such dissimilarities in perception merit serious consideration and changes in prevailing conditions, then any discussion on 'difference' is misconstrued as an assault on 'truth' and resisted.

2.4. Consummation perspective

The eschatological vision of God bringing all of human history to a conclusion and his 'salvation history' to completion has significant implications for our theology of ethnicity. This consummation of the biblical metanarrative is described in Revelation as the angelic announcement, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever" (Rev 11:15). The eternal reign of Christ over the nations will include judgement, reward and a new beginning. These eschatological themes not only embrace humanity as a whole, they make particular reference to humanity as we stand as nations with our political, socio-economic, and ethno-cultural histories laid bare before God's perfect scrutiny and justice.

2.4.1. In Christ, God will fulfill His purpose for redeemed humanity in all its ethnic diversity.

The results of the fullness and diversity that God originally intended for humanity is displayed in the ultimate in-gathering of the saints in all their fullness and diversity. Already in the OT, the prophets had long anticipated the

42. Jemar Tisby, *How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey Toward Racial Justice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 197.

homecoming of the nations into God's presence together with Israel's remnant (e.g. Zech 8: 20-23; Isa 56:1-8). Isaiah envisioned the day when God would bring the Israelites' old and powerful adversaries Egypt and Assyria into a covenant relationship with Him, declaring, "In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance" (Isa 19:24-25). In the apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7, the sovereign Lord of history bestows upon the ascended Messiah (who represents "the people, the saints of the Most High") the "dominion, glory, and kingship, so that every people, nation, and language should serve Him" (Dan 7:14, 27).

Throughout the Book of Revelation, John uses the phrase "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" to express how the experiences of suffering and hope are comprehensively experienced by the whole of humanity on earth.[43] Surprisingly, John describes the triumphant saints in heaven in this same way.

> After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (7:9-10)

Although one would otherwise have assumed that distinguishable ethno-cultural features would not be evident among the saints in their glorified resurrection bodies, John is careful to describe the saints in heaven as they were on earth. The ethno-cultural diversity of

43. This is how they are described when referred to as the ones purchased by the blood of the Lamb (5:9); as the subjects of John's prophecy (10:11); as witnesses to the martyrdom and desecration of the faithful (11:9); as targets of the persecution by the beast (13:7); as those who must hear the gospel proclamation (14:6), and those under subjection to Babylon's exploitation (17:15).

the heavenly multitude "from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues" evidently redounds as much to God's glory as the unity of their praise. The glimpse of the heavenly court as a congregation of multi-ethnic worshipers encourages us to explore and cultivate ethnodoxology (the liturgical equivalent of ethnomusicology) in anticipation of our worship in heaven.

2.4.2. God will judge the nations, including for their ethno-political sins.

In the apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7, God permits but does not endorse human empires because they all fall short of His righteousness and justice, descending instead to oppression and arrogance, and incurring God's judgement (vv. 7,19, 23, 25). Divine judgement of the nations is a frequent theme in the prophetic oracles, often including references to arrogance and oppression arising from confidence in their own military might, economic resources, and cultural attainments. For example, Isaiah 2 looks forward to the day when God will arbitrate fairly and finally in seemingly interminable disputes between nations (often linked to ethnic animosities), bringing an end to cycles of violence and wasteful military expenditure.

> And He will judge between the nations,
> And will render decisions for many peoples;
> And they will hammer their swords into plowshares
> and their spears into pruning hooks.
> Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
> And never again will they learn war. (vv.4)

This oracle also refers to examples of nations becoming prideful of their economic resources which, now as then, become bound up with ethno-nationalist ideology. The "cedars of Lebanon," "oaks of Bashan" (v. 13) and "ships of Tarshish" (v. 16) were mainstays of those nations' economies, but these had evidently become idolized in their cultures to

the extent that, in the reckoning of Israelite prophets, they prevented these nations from gratefully acknowledging God as the true source of their resources and skills.

In the NT the apostles encountered similar cultural arrogance in cities that prided themselves on their ethno-cultural heritage. In Philippi (a city founded by Roman army veterans), a group of citizens were angered by their economic loss when Paul delivered the slave girl they were exploiting (Acts 16:19), but they attributed their resistance to the apostles' preaching to ethno-religious differences, accusing, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans" (Acts 16:20-21). Similarly, the Ephesian silversmiths were incensed by the threat of losing their profitable trade in making idols (Acts 19:23-27), but instead framed their accusation against the apostles as a matter of defending their civic pride, expressed in the chant "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (vv. 28, 34). Paul warned the Athenians against their ethno-centric idolatries because God "has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:29-31).

2.4.3. God sanctifies and receives the best achievements of human culture into His New Jerusalem, for eternity.

John skilfully weaves together earlier strands of OT apocalypses (e.g. Isa 2, 60, 65:17-25; 66:15-24; Eze 40-48; Zech 2:1-13) to present a vision of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21-22), as the holy city of the New Creation, which comes "down out of heaven from God" (21:1, 10). It is arguably the Bible's most extensive description of the eternal dwelling place of God and His redeemed humanity.

As in Isa 60, John observes that not only do "the nations will walk by its light" but that "the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it" (Rev 22:24) and "and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it" (v. 26). This is in apparent contrast to the previous status quo when 'Babylon the Great' dominated the nations with her

commercial and cultural power as much as her military might.[44] In the old fallen order, "all the nations [had] drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality" (18:3; also v.9), and "all the nations were deceived by [her] sorcery" (v. 23). Formerly all the finest products mined, cultivated, bred and crafted by distant ethno-cultural groups from as far away as Britain, East Africa, Sri Lanka, China and Central Asia had flowed into 'Babylon' along the overland and maritime trade routes. These included,

> Cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. (vv. 12-13)

Apart from the trade in "slaves and human lives" (lit. bodies and souls of humans, v. 13) which is condemned (1 Tim 1:10), the other merchandise consists of legitimate articles of trade. To these must be added the human artistic skills and creativity, as well as useful technology that John finds are no longer enjoyed in Babylon:

> And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer. (v. 22)

In Isa 60, God had transformed those resources which the nations had previously used to harm the Israelites and to

44. A cryptonym for Imperial Rome as a typological symbol for all corrupted centres of human civilization. See David A. deSilva, *Unholy Alliances: Heeding Revelation's Warning* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 21-34.

disregard God into objects of worship and instruments of service to Him and His people. As Mouw summarises,

> Isaiah is very explicit about this new purpose, noting what function each creature and item now perform. Ephah's camels now "proclaim the praise of the Lord" (v. 6). Nebaioth's rams "shall minister to you" as acceptable sacrifices on the Lord's altars (v. 7). The ships of Tarshish bring precious metals "for the name of the Lord your God" (v.9). And the costly lumber from Lebanon will "beautify the place of my sanctuary" (v. 13). Each of the items mentioned is now to be put to the service of God and his people.[45]

John obviously had the same idea about the purpose for which God was now receiving the "the glory and the honour of the nations" into His New Jerusalem. The best cultural creations of the nations produced in the long course of civilizational history would not be obliterated, consigning the magnificent creativity and artistry of thousands of talented ethnocultural artisans and craftspeople to oblivion. God would sanctify them for noble use and give them an eternal home in the New Jerusalem.

Therefore, however tainted they were in their (ab)use in the fallen order of the old cosmos, as Mouw legitimately speculates, God will transform the best of human ingenuity, including its ethnocultural heritages, for His glory. "The earth – including the American military and French art and Chinese medicine and Nigerian agriculture – belongs to the Lord. And he will reclaim all of these things, harnessing them for service in the City."[46]

3. Conclusion: Some personal reflections

To conclude, I offer three practical principles arising from reflecting on my own experiences as a Christian South

45. Mouw, *When the Kings*, 23.
46. Mouw, *When the Kings*, 39.

Asian living and working in different cultural contexts.

3.1. Being 'ethnic' and 'cosmopolitan' at the same time

Growing up in Colombo, Sri Lanka, I had become increasingly conscious of my privileged English-speaking middle-class background. I often felt I could barely identify with the vast majority of Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking Sri Lankans because I was so 'westernized'. When I left to study for a master's degree in Canada, at the age of twenty-four, I was very confident that my fluency in English and exposure to North American pop culture (through books, magazines, music, movies and TV shows) had prepared me sufficiently to transition seamlessly into my new cosmopolitan social world. No doubt, I was able to adapt quite easily to the relationships and routines circumscribed by my circumstances. But very quickly I realized how Sri Lankan I was. My fellow students and teachers saw me as the young Sri Lankan man who had come into their midst who "spoke English really well." But within a few weeks, I was seeking out Sri Lankan and other South Asian students in the university campus on which my seminary was located. I craved my spicy 'soul food', missed the clichéd humour based on social stereotypes and elite school rivalries, and the more serious arguments about the ongoing-civil war, politics, sports, and religion.

This is apparently a very common experience. As globalized and cosmopolitan as we may be, our ethnocultural formations do matter. As Vinoth Ramachandra writes, our ethnocultural communities are important because they give us "a sense of rootedness, existential stability, the feeling of belonging to an enduring community of ancient origins and ease of interpersonal communication."[47] But we need to be cosmopolitan also, as he goes on to state,

The lack of crosscultural interaction means that such homogenous societies are not places where we can expect the flourishing of such intellectual and moral virtues

47. Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths*, 132.

as tolerance, intellectual curiosity, self-criticism, moral imagination or empathy with those who are different from us. "It is the creator's will," writes Oliver O'Donovan, "not only that human beings should live in communities and cultural homes, but that from their homes they should be able to engage peaceably with those of other communities."[48]

Any multicultural collective (be it a church community, seminary, organization, neighbourhood or nation) that provides the space and climate for its members to be both 'ethnic' and 'cosmopolitan' would likely create a community of secure individuals who flourish in their interactions with one another.

3.2. Postcolonial resentment

Postcolonial resentment against Western economic and institutional power arises from being conscious that such dominance was acquired by exploitatively extracting the resources of colonized peoples. I feel it every time I am compelled to write a funding proposal to a Western donor agency or interact with partners in the Global North who evaluate our local ministries through the indices of Unreached People Groups, persecution or poverty. It hurts to be conscious of the disparities between the surfeit of resources enjoyed by Christians in the Global North (think, for example, of the seemingly infinite variety of Bibles packaged and branded for every imaginable theological and demographic niche in the North American Christian 'market') and the frustrating limitations that need to be constantly overcome to build basic resources for Christian communities in the Global South (such as paying seminary teachers a living wage so that they can have sufficient leisure for family, study and writing, rather than being compelled to work additional hours in church or other organizations doing ministry which lay volunteers can be trained for). Unsolicited funding is often offered for the translation of books or entire training programmes designed for North

48. Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths*, 144.

American, Korean or South Indian churches and then exported elsewhere. Many of these mega-church pastors or ministry organizations then commend themselves as the trend-setters in world missions because of their control over how resources are deployed around the world.

The mixed emotions of resentment (for being dependent) and gratitude (for being empowered to carry out local tasks), are umbilically linked with the memory of colonialism. Missionary paternalism and tutelage were arguably well-intentioned, but they handicapped the natural agency and confidence of local leaders who needed to learn for themselves how to envision, engage and share in the work of mission in the contexts they understand best.

3.3. Integrity always

I learn from my interactions with family (my wife is Dutch-Canadian with a large extended family), friends, and coworkers that whatever ethnocultural space we occupy across the honour-shame/guilt-innocence/fear-power matrices, people want to be respected for their intrinsic worth, appreciated for their efforts, told the truth gently, and treated fairly. I have also learned that whatever their ethnocultural background (or any other formative factor), when people are under pressure, their real level of moral integrity and spiritual maturity comes out. We are all very dependent on the Holy Spirit to be honest before God and each other, especially when our reputations and advancement are at stake. Ethnicity helps us very little here.

Similar dynamics apply to cross-cultural organizational partnerships too. Norms and expectations about honesty, accuracy and transparency about financial dealings and reporting must be discussed in advance with explicit reference to the honor-shame/guilt-innocence/fear-power contexts in which leaders of a local partner organization makes decisions, resolve conflicts, determine whether a programme has been successful or not, and how that assessment is reported. Great wisdom and sensitivity are required when there are reasonable indications that

ethical norms have been violated. How such situations may arise, how they will be investigated, and what consequences will follow must also be openly discussed and agreed in advance. These will prevent, to some extent, those convenient deflections of "cultural misunderstanding" (e.g. "In our culture we don't name and shame") and defensive counter-accusations of "ethno-centric prejudices" (e.g. "You can't impose your Western values on us") which can sour cross-cultural relations between organizations as much as between individuals.

The Bible's historical-theological narrative of God's interactions with Israel and the Nations provides a wealth of worldview insights for developing a Christian self-understanding of our racially- and ethnically-embodied identities and relationships. Wherever we find ourselves in the helpful-but-flawed binaries and intersectionalities that seek to understand the power dynamics of race and ethnicity, it is ultimately the incarnate Galilean Jew from Roman-occupied Palestine and the transformation He brings that will be the source of our real 'wokeness', reconciliation and liberation.

NEPOTISM: CHURCH LEADERSHIP AS FAMILY BUSINESS IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT

SANATH KUMARA ATHUKORALA

Abstract: *Nepotism was a common practice in the Roman Catholic Church in Medieval Europe. It has now become a serious issue in Pentecostal churches, especially in Asia. This paper discusses the practice of nepotism in relation to Christian leadership and succession, examining it in the contexts of Scripture, church history, and the present situation of the Asian church. As nepotism is a contentious issue, this paper considers arguments for and against it. Finally, some suggestions are offered to help churches tackle the issue of nepotism, particularly in Asian contexts.*

Keywords: *nepotism, church leadership, leadership succession, Pentecostal Church in Asia*

1. Introduction

Leadership and leadership succession are common phenomena in any human community or organization. Leadership is an art that includes mobilizing and empowering people.[1] However, nepotism (favoritism towards members of one's family) has become a significant dilemma in almost every leadership context, including the church. "Nepotistic behaviors are more or less present in every culture in different forms."[2] According to Jaskiewicz P. et al., the word 'nepotism' can be denoted as follows;

> Nepotism is an owner's or manager's preference for hiring family members (nepots) rather than

1. N. C. Everist and C. L. Nessan, *Transforming Leadership: New Vision for a Church in Mission* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008).

2. A. Caputo, "Religious Motivation, Nepotism and Conflict Management in Jordan," *International Journal of Conflict Management* 1, no. 28 (February 2017): 9. http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/28996/1/2017-IJCMA Religious%20Motivation%2C%20Nepotism%20and%20Conflict%20Management%20in%20Jordan.pdf.

> unrelated job applicants. Nepotism is a common hiring mechanism in (family) firms where families use their control to hire family members—therefore perpetuating family involvement over time and across generations. It is thus the practice of nepotism that facilitates commonly held family goals of passing the firm leadership on to the next generation.[3]

For a family member to follow in their parents' footsteps is not a critical issue within in secular setting. However, nepotism can create a risky (dangerous/ unsafe) situation when it comes to ecclesiastical settings.[4]

Leadership is essential, and the sustainability of leadership is most important when it comes to leadership succession. The continuity of organizational leadership is similar to a relay race; thus, leadership must be passed on from one generation to another. Every leadership position in the church is temporarily given to a person by God's grace (1 Cor 15:10). Leadership succession, therefore, is a definite responsibility of the standing church leadership. Proper leadership succession can help a church to flourish. Bird notes, "A church that doesn't handle it well faces significant losses, sometimes to the point of no return."[5] Therefore, proper leadership succession is not an option for God's people, but it is a mandatory task. The Bible has many stories on leadership succession through the guidance of God (and the Holy Spirit), from Moses to Joshua, from Saul to David, from Elijah to Elisha, and from Paul to Timothy.

The subject of nepotism has overshadowed leadership

3. Jaskiewicz, Peter et al., "Is Nepotism Good or Bad? Types of Nepotism and Implications for Knowledge Management," Family Business Review 26, (June 2013): 121.

4. C. T. Hartley, "About My Father's Business: Pastoral Succession from Father to Son" (PhD diss., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

5. W. Bird, "How Pastors are Passing the Leadership Baton," *Christianity Today*, 18 November 2014. http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/november/how-pastors-are-passing-leadership-baton.html.

succession throughout history, including the church.[6] Nepotism is expected in the political and business world, even today.[7] At present, nepotism is not a crucial issue in mainline denominations. Nepotism, however, has become a very critical issue in the Pentecostal denomination where there is the practice of "a big man rule." According to McCauley, "The concept of 'big man rule,' conventionally invoked to refer to a kinship-based relationship between patron and client, is now finding application in the charismatic Pentecostal movement in Africa."[8] Hundreds of potential Christian leaders worldwide have become the victims of church nepotism.[9] This trend is not uncommon within the Pentecostal churches in Asia as there are plenty of occasions of nepotism manifested within the church leadership in the Asian Pentecostal movement. However, there is not much academic research done or any consideration given to address nepotism in the Asian church. Therefore, this study is focused on exploring the matter of nepotism and its consequences on the Asian Pentecostal church.

This study aims to explore the subject of nepotism concerning church leadership and leadership succession within Asian Christian churches. Further, this study intends to examine (1) the historical development of church nepotism, (2) biblical understanding of nepotism

6. D. Kowalski, "Body of Christ or Family Business?" (Blog post; 3 April 2013). www.apologeticsindex.org/3001-nepotism-in-the-church; A. M. de S. Saraiva, "Nepotism, Illegitimacy and Papal Protection in the Construction of a Career: Rodrigo Pires de Oliveira, Bishop of Lamego (1311–1330†)," *E-journal of Portuguese History* 6, no. 1 (2008): 1-12. www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese_Brazilian_Studies/ejph/html/issue11/pdf/asaraiva.pdf..

7. I-Pang Fu, "Favoritism: Ethical Dilemmas viewed through Multiple Paradigms," *The Journal of Values-Based Leadership* 8, no. 1 (2015): 1-6. http://scholar.valpo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1115&context=jvbl.

8. J. F. McCauley, "Africa's New Big Man Rule? Pentecostalism and Patronage in Ghana," *African Affairs* 112, no. 446 (2013): 1.

https://gvpt.umd.edu/sites/gvpt.umd.edu/files/pubs/McCauley_African%20Affairs_2013_0.pdf.

9. K. L. H. Shaw, "All in the Family: Nepotism and Mission," *Evangelical Mission Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2013): 465.

concerning church leadership and leadership succession, (3) the practice of nepotism within the context of Asian leadership, and (4) offer suggestions to prevent the negative impact of nepotism over church leadership and leadership succession.

Statement of the research question: Nepotism within the church is an issue that needs to be examined. Nepotism can sometimes be helpful to churches and church leadership but can be a destroying factor. Therefore, this study focuses on answering the question "How to deal with the issue of nepotism in relation to God-honoring leadership succession within the Pentecostal Church in Asia?" Further, to answer the main research questions, the authors will deal with the following sub-questions related to the nepotism practice: (1) What are the supporting factors of nepotism to leadership succession? (2) What are the effects of nepotism in church leadership? (3) How can we overcome the nepotism question to ensure healthy church leadership succession for Kingdom advancement?

2. Understanding Leadership and Leadership Succession

Leadership is a common phenomenon from the beginning of humankind. According to one survey, the word 'leadership' has more than 850 definitions.[10] Many scholars agreed on the core definition of leadership as 'influence' over others.[11] Leadership is vital in any context, whether it be secular or ecclesiastic. Leadership is crucial and critical in the modern world because of the severe challenges produced by different changes such as global economics, environmental, political, as we as religious extremism. The world is on the lookout for leaders who can lead the communities through quaking situations due to political, environmental, and religious tensions worldwide.

10. W. G. Bennis and B. Nanus, *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge*, 2nd ed. (NY: Collins Business Essentials, 2007).

11. J. C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998); Maxwell, *Leadership 101: What Every Leader Needs to Know* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002).

Therefore, the word leadership is much talked about but less attractive because of the lack of godly leaders who are willing to serve than to be served. Further, "There is an obvious link between nepotism and leadership."[12]

Christian Leadership is significant in every context, including the church. There are many similarities as well as dissimilarities when church leadership is compared with secular leadership. Fernando remarks that the biblical view of leadership is an influence for good.[13] Christian leadership's central perspective is serving God for the expansion of His Kingdom and the benefit of humankind without self-gain. Christian leaders are the leaders transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, and therefore, are God's representatives on earth to bring the transformation to the nations. Further, Gangel has summarized Christian leadership as "the exercise of one's spiritual gifts under the call of God to serve a certain group of people in achieving the goals that God has given them toward the end of glorifying Christ."[14]

For leadership succession, the well-known statement "God buries His workmen but carries on His work" is attributed to the great church leaders John and Charles Wesley. As mentioned, leadership succession is a critical issue in the world as well as in the church. Chrispal remarks on leadership succession, that

> Succession isn't a process that can be done well under pressure or in a hurry. While it's possible to address the issues of finding a new leader, nurturing your future leaders, transitioning church members, establishing growth processes that will continue, drafting necessary agreements (practice continuation, encouraging and equipping), and more, those steps are best supported by progressing

12. K. H. Mhatre, R. E. Riggio, and H. R. Riggio, "Nepotism and leadership," in R. G. Jones, ed., *Nepotism in Organizations* (NY: Routledge, 2012), 172.

13. Ajith Fernando, *Leadership lifestyle* (Mumbai: GLS, 1988).

14. K. O. Gangel, "Biblical theology of leadership," *Christian Education Journal* 12, no. 1 (1991): 14.

and processing.[15]

Furthermore, as McQueen insists, there is "no success without succession.[16] Therefore, leadership succession needs to be addressed through a well-strategized, intentional, and God-honoring process. It must be initiated by current church leaders. However, neither church leaders nor Christian scholars have adequately addressed this issue.[17]

Moreover, it is surprising that there exists only one article that is directly related to the issue of nepotism. On the other hand, leadership succession was not only undiscussed but also discouraged. For example, in his book *The Empowered Leader*, Miller states that "good leaders never give their leadership away."[18] The context of the statement is the art of delegation based on 2 Sam 23. However, the book does not discuss the theme of leadership succession. In conclusion, the issue of leadership succession and the practice of nepotism have not been discussed adequately.

3. Understanding of Nepotism

The word Nepotism is derived from the Latin *nepos*, which originally meant 'grandchild' or 'descendent', but eventually came to mean 'nephew'. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* offers the basic meaning of nepotism as "favoritism (as in appointment to a job) based on kinship;" which when used disapprovingly denotes "the unfair practice by a powerful person of giving jobs and other favors to relatives."[19] The word's usage is traced to the

15. A. Chrispal, "Organizational leadership" (Powerpoint presentation), Torch Trinity Graduate University, Seoul, Korea, 2016.

16. M. McQueen, "No success without succession," *International Assembly Speeches 2010*: 3. www.clubrunner.ca/Data/7080/132/HTML/105658//NoSuccess.pdf.

17. The results of my initial online search for relavant literature pertaining to this paper confirmed my suspicions. The entry 'leadership' resulted in 1,459 hits, 'leadership development' 103 hits, 'leadership transition' 22 hits, and 'leadership succession' only six hits.

18. C. Miller, *The Empowered Leader: 10 Keys to Servant Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 158.

19. "Nepotism," *s.v.* Merriam-Webster.com. www.merriam-

practice of Popes in the Middle Ages "who would bestow high, ecclesiastical offices (such as that of cardinal) to nephews and illegitimate sons."[20] For this study, 'nepotism' is defined as favoritism, as seen in church leadership appointments and leadership successions based on kinship.

When it comes to church leadership, nepotism can be defined as favoritism as in church leadership succession based on kinship. Nepotism has become a social habit within any given social context, whether it is business or ecclesiastic. The history of nepotism, in the context of church leadership, has a remarkably poor reputation. According to church historian Philip Schaff, higher church offices in the Vatican were mainly limited to the members of seven aristocratic families.[21] Saraiva writing on Rodrigo Pires de Oliveira the Bishop of Lamego (1311–1330), says that he was "one of many fourteenth-century Portuguese clergymen who reached the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy as a result of the widespread practice of nepotism."[22] Pope Callixtus (or Callistus) III (r. 1455 – 1458) was notorious for his nepotism and was "especially resented."[23] Kelly notes his actions as follows:

> The quarrel continued, and on Alfonso's death, Callistus schemed that nephew of his own should become king of Naples instead of Ferrante…the king's natural son…. He appointed his nephew Pedro Luis, Duke of Spoleto, as governor of Castel Sant'Angelo and prefect of Rome. Two other nephews, he made cardinals in their early twenties; one of them Rodrigo Borgia (later Pope Alexander VI), he promoted as vice-chancellor of the curia.[24]

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webster.com/dictionary/nepotism (accessed 10 November 2017).

20. Kowalski, "Body of Christ or family business?"

21. P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume VI: The Middle Ages. A.D. 1294-1517* (orig. pub. 1882), Christian Classics Ethereal Library. www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc6.html.

22. Saraiva, "Nepotism," 1.

23. R. P. McBrien and H. W. Attridge, eds., *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (NY: HarperCollins, 1995), 1028.

24. J. N. D. Kelly, *Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford/NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 246.

Pope Alexander IV, the nephew of Callistus, later appointed Alessandro Farnese, his lover's brother, to cardinal and subsequently became Pope Paul III, who in turn continued the pattern and appointed two of his nephews, aged 14 and 16, as cardinals.[25] It is evident that Medieval ecclesiastical nepotism has left an enduring stain on the reputation of European Christendom. It seems that the church nepotism has regenerated mainly under the 'big man rule'.

Further, Shaw (2013) observes, "There is no one more desperate and miserable than the person called and gifted by God who, because of a lack of family connections, has one door of ministry after another shut in his or her face... Nor is there anything more damaging to the church of Jesus Christ."[26] It is time to rethink the practice of nepotism within the body of Christ.

4. Nepotism in the Scriptures

Leadership, as well as leadership succession, is within God's heart and within His plan for humankind; "The whole of the Scriptures is the story of how God involved His people in God's work".[27] Theologically God appoints the leaders (I Cor 12:28). Further, in the Scripture, we can notice that leadership transition is a significant issue in the Bible. God uses human agents to raise proper successors; He used Samuel to bring David, Moses to develop Joshua, Paul to raise Timothy.

On the other hand, the Bible contains various examples and many teachings on leadership nepotism. There are many leadership successions among ethnic clans based on kinship, from Abraham to Isaac, Isaac to Jacob. It is evident that in the Old Testament, Nepotism has become the primary practice regarding the Kingship succession (Mt 1: 6-11). Further, according to the Old

25. Kowalski, "Body of Christ or family business?"

26. Shaw (2013) (p. 465)

27. L. Stahlke and J. Loughlin, *Governance Matters: Relationship model of Governance, Leadership, and Management* (Kindle version, Governancematters.Com Inc, 2003), 43.

Testament, the Temple priesthood's successions only happened among Aaron's descendants. Nepotism was the long-standing tradition of the Levite's priesthood (Exodus 28:1–3). However, God calls and chooses people based on his grace and mercy, not based on favoritism or merit. He chose David, the youngest, and rejected the elders. He rejected Esau, who had the birthright to become the family successor but chose Jacob (Mal 1:2; Rom 9:13). In other words, God does not show favoritism in his sovereignty. God chooses a person for leadership based on the relationship between Him and the individual. Nehemiah, one of the Old Testament's great leaders, seemed to have practiced nepotism and appointed his brother Hanani as ruler of Jerusalem. However, it is evident that Hanani "was a faithful man, and feared God above many" (Neh 7:2).

As mentioned before, nepotism became one of the critical issues with the early medieval church. According to Adam Bellow, "Christianity introduced new complications into the relationships of families and wealth, mucking things up with distinctions between the 'spiritual nepotism' of Augustine, where charity made sure the church got its cut and traditional family nepotism."[28] However, the New Testament teaching does not promote nepotism (Jas 2:1-4; 1 Tim 5:21). Yet, James, a brother of Lord Jesus, became a leader of the early church, although he did not gain any personal advantage by being a leader, and later, he became a martyr.[29] Further, nepotism undermines the biblical doctrine that the church belongs to Christ alone who purchased it with His blood (Acts 20: 28).[30] Therefore, a church office can never be the property of any human agent who can possess or sell it as if it were a private business.

On the other hand, no one can claim a ministry as family heritage because, as it is said, "You are not his to whom you have been born, but His to whom you have been

28. A. H. Joffe, "Nepotism for All Tmes," *Society* 41, no. 6 (September 2004): 75.

29. J. Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999).

30. Shaw, 2013, 465.

born again, and who has purchased you at a great price."[31] God respects family units, and even working together in his ministry has been admired (Josh 24:15). However, it is fair to say that the whole teaching of the Bible is not much in favor of nepotism in the context of the church.

5. Leadership Nepotism: Advantages and Disadvantages

The practice of nepotism has been debated within as well as outside of the institutions and organizations. Some remarks support nepotism as well as comments against nepotism. It is evident that most Asian countries admire nepotism because of its socio-cultural context. Asians commonly manifest family-centered behavior than individualistic behavior patterns. By definition, nepotism is a family-centered phenomenon and is not considered bad practice in the Asian context. Further, Asians have much adult-oriented culture, and most of the time, the youth respect elders and their decisions even though some decisions are questionable. Furthermore, the concept of Guru and "*Guru Mustiya*" has become one of the key concepts concerning leadership succession.[32]

> Gurus are used to practicing *guru mustiya*, which means the 'fist of the guru'. Consistent with the *guru mustiya* concept, the gurus do not pass on all the knowledge to their disciples. Usually, gurus keep the best part of their wisdom with them, not passing it on to their ordinary disciples but only to the family members, son or son-in-law.[33]

Most Christian leaders in the Asian context are recognized and respected as religious gurus, just as Buddhist or Hindu priests.

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31. A. Bellow, *In Praise of Nepotism: A Natural History* (NY: Doubleday, 2003), 168.

32. S. K. Athukorala, "A comparison of Jesus leadership model and Sri Lankan guru model to develop a leadership curriculum for the Pentecostal church in Sri Lanka" (master's thesis, Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology, 2008).

33. Athukorala, *A comparison of Jesus leadership model,* 52.

5.1. Potential Advantages of Nepotism

Generally, outsiders criticize nepotism, but sometimes there can be positive factors of nepotism. However, these benefits only can be notable primarily concerning socio-cultural factors. Some of them are:

1. *Trustworthiness:* Most of the time, political leaders tend to depend on family relatives as their assistants and successors mainly because of loyalty.
2. *Values and ethos:* Every leader has their values and ethos and wants to see a continuation of their legacy. An outsider does not assure it of a family.
3. *Leadership sustainability:* Fewer succession conflicts can arise if the successor is related to the current leader. Most of the time, those loyal to a current leader have the same respect for his family members. Therefore, nepotism can be an aid to prevent immediate successions conflicts.
4. *Leadership blessings:* One of the significant leadership succession crises is the lack (or complete absence) of blessings to the predecessor's successor such as continually supporting the successor by helping him or her to be established in the leadership passion. This can be because of jealousy (Saul syndrome). It is sad to see that only a few leaders wish to see their successors surpass them (Jn 14:12-14). Parents always want to see their children surpass them. Therefore, nepotism can be considered a plus factor in some contexts.
5. *Peaceful transition*: Any leadership change brings challenges to the successors concerning the exercise of their authority. According to Maxwell, a leadership position never guarantees authority over subordinates because leadership authority is best exercised within the context of a relationship.[34]

34. Maxwell, *Developing the leader within you* (25th anniversary edition), Nashville, TN: HarperCollins, 2018).

Nepotism helps to get and practice all the authority from the existing leader by the succession leader. Father God has given all the authority to His Son (Mt 28:18).

5.2. Disadvantages of Nepotism

As explained, often, nepotism can be justified by a leader or a group when they consider immediate succession issues of a community or an organization. However, nepotism can be a hazardous factor. The word nepotism itself conveys a negative and unethical connotation. Most of the time practice of nepotism has been criticized by the outsiders and insiders of an institution. Some of those criticisms are as follows:

1. *Injustice to more deserving successors:* One of the main problems of nepotism is it can create frustration for gifted, talented candidates who are legitimately suitable to become succeeding leaders.
2. *False security:* Nepotism creates temporal success for an organization because of fewer conflict situations. This situation can give the wrong perception to the successor that they can match the former leader's shoes. However, this kind of success can be temporary and later can be devastating if the successor does not gain the team's support.
3. *A church ministry becomes a family ministry:* Nepotism can be devastating in a church ministry. A church ministry is for building the Kingdom of God rather than building a family empire. Most of the time, the main accusation of nepotism is the transfer of financial benefits to the family members. This can hinder the Christian witness not only within the church but also to the outsiders.
4. *Inappropriate role model for successive generations:* The practice of church nepotism began in the middle ages in the Roman Catholic Church. Successive

leaders repeated nepotism because of the previous examples.

5. *Hindrance to organization's growth:* Nepotism results not from merits or qualification but favoritism in most cases; nepotism gives power and authority to a person who has less competency and talent. This can stop or push backward the growth of an institution. When it comes to the church, nepotism can destroy a church's ministry.
6. *Potentially contrary to God's will:* When it comes to leadership selection one of potential danger is trusting human resources than depending on God, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, and trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the LORD" (Isa 31:1). Therefore, human decisions can go against God's agenda. The church belongs to God, and He has already planned its growth and its results. Hence, the practice of nepotism can go against God's plan.

Most of the time, the practice of nepotism flourishes when things are going well. In Sri Lanka, many church leaders have left the country or have sent their families to western counties during the civil war as they did not want even their family members to be part of their ministry.

6. Nepotism in Asia

Makhlouf has listed some of the most recognized forms of corruption in the business world, and the practice of nepotism was the seventh on his list (out of ten).[35] According to Bellow, "The persistence of nepotism in business is perhaps to be expected when we consider that something like 90 percent of all American businesses is

35. H. H. Makhlouf, "Corruption in the international business environment," *The Journal of Human Resource and Adult Learning* 12, no. 1 (2016): 34. www.hraljournal.com/Page/5%20Hany%20%20Makhlouf.pdf.

still family-owned or controlled."[36] Also, the practice of nepotism is not uncommon when it comes to the political world. Gjinovci states that "Nepotism is a common accusation in politics…. The phenomenon of political nepotism has taken deep roots in the provincial and regional mentality in Society."[37] According to Bellow, in the year 2000, both the leading candidates for the USA presidential election, Al Gore and George W. Bush, were the sons of important political families.[38]

According to Kuznar, et al., "Nepotism heavily influences political activity throughout the developing world, the Middle East, and central Asia where family ties are essentially for gaining access to power, state resources, and privileges."[39] In Sri Lanka, Nepotism has become extensive in every area of human engagement. "One word that is increasingly mentioned when discussing contemporary Sri Lanka is authoritarianism because… due to President Mahinda Rajapaksa's frittering away of citizens' civil liberties even as he and his 'First Family' arrogate power and—together with their close relatives, cronies, and supporters—govern extra-constitutionally and extrajudicially."[40] *The Colombo Telegraph* (March 15, 2016), under the heading 'Nepotism, Grows', cites that "The Sirisena-Wickremesinghe regime's policy of helping friends and family appears to have spread to the Foreign

36. A. Bellow, *In praise of nepotism: A history of family enterprise from King David to George W. Bush* (NY: Anchor Books, 2004), 8.

37. A. Gjinovci, "The impact of nepotism and corruption on the economy and HR," *Economic and Environmental Studies* 16, no. 3 (2016): 421,423.. www.cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element...4f08.../ees_16_6_fulltext.pdf-2..

38. Bellow, *In praise of nepotism* (2004), 1.

39. L. A. Kuznar, W. Frederick, and F. Wayne, "Simulating the Effect of Nepotism on Political Risk Taking and Social Unrest," (paper presented at North American Association for Computational Social and Organizational Science (NAACSOS) Annual Conference at Notre Dame, June 26-28, 2005). http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.61.8049&rep=rep1&type=pd

40. N. Devotta, "Sri Lanka's ongoing shift to authoritarianism," *Asia Pacific Bulletin* 201, nos. 1-2 (2013): 1. https://www.eastwestcenter.org/sites/default/files/private/apb201_0.pdf 2.

Ministry with career diplomats being overlooked in favor of loyalists and their kin."[41] This is not different in other Asian countries. "Current and former national leaders of the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore are members of political dynasties, and elsewhere in the region family networks play central roles in the political lives of these nations."[42] However, it can be noticed that most political nepotism-affected regimes in Asia have been toppled by the people who love fair democratic societies and good governance.

7. Church Nepotism in Asia

In contrast, the practice of nepotism has become a critical issue when it comes to the church, mainly within the Pentecostal churches. Tushima states that "The pattern of leadership succession observed in contemporary Pentecostal, and charismatic movements and churches often are characterized by a dynastic succession of the kind more often found in personal kingdoms than in the kingdom of God."[43] This is a common trend, including in the Asian church.

Many Asian church leaders are guilty of nepotism, but no significant research has been done on modern-day church nepotism and its consequences. Moore has identified some church nepotism examples as follows: (1) A pastor's wife is either co-pastor or has a title such as 'Pastor Betty'; (2) A pastor's son is appointed as the Youth Pastor, Worship Leader, or to a similar capacity; (3) The pastor gives positions and titles to the family, financial

41. "Nepotism grows: Hirunika's aunt appointed as Sri Lanka's consul in Los Angeles," *Colombo Telegraph*, 15 March, 2016. https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/nepotism-grows-hirunikas-aunt-appointed-as-sri-lankas-consul-in-los-angeles.

42. J. Purdey, "Political families in Southeast Asia," *South East Asia Research* 24, no. 3 (2016): 319.

43. C. Tushima, "Leadership succession patterns in the apostolic church as a template for critique of contemporary charismatic leadership succession patterns," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2016), a2968. http://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/2968/html.

supporters, or other favored folk; (4) Church finances are closely controlled, guarded, and administrated by the pastor's family; (5) The management of the church is kept within a family, and their children are groomed to take over their church when they are old enough and trained; and (6) When the "senior" pastor retires, his son or son-in-law takes over the church. Retirement benefits are usually part of the package.[44] According to this list, it is tough to identify a Pentecostal church, governed by 'big man rule', that does not practice nepotism. Most church leaders give excuses for their nepotism, such as that there is no one outside the family that understands the ministry better than the late leader's son, son-in-law, wife, or daughter; or that it is the members of the congregation who wants the son or daughter to be the successor.

Cooke comments, "I know pastors or business executives who have children in the positions of authority. They would argue that those children are respected within the organization, people aren't afraid to challenge their decisions, and they are thriving. But I know (and the employees know) the exact opposite is true."[45]

The South Korean church watchdog organization, Association for Movement Against Nepotism, (교회세습반대운동연대 *gyohoeseseubbandaeundong-yeondae*), has published many details of their surveys and research on the practice of nepotism in that country.[46] During March 2012 and November 2017, they reported that nepotism was evident in 143 churches. In 95 of them, it was direct nepotism, and in 45 it was indirect nepotism.[47] It is worth noting that 55 out of 143 were in the Seoul area. Choi Seung-Hyun reports that in 2015 there were 122 nepotism

44. R. Moore, "Nepotism: The family-run church" (blog post, 16 February 2011). http://preparinghisway.blogspot.kr/2011/02/nepotism-family-run-church.html..

45. P. Cooke, "Why Nepotism Hurts Organizations" (blog post; 28 November 2017). http://www.philcooke.com/nepotism_hurts/.

46. The South Korean church watchdog organization, Association for Movement Against Nepotism (교회세습반대운동연대.http://www.seban.kr/home/sb_what_map.

47. bid.

occurrences in leadership successions in Korea, and two of them were third-generation nepotism; from father to son and from son to grandson.[48]

According to Lee, in the Korean church context, nepotism sometimes helps the church to maintain congregational harmony mainly at the leadership succession.[49] The question is whether the harmony of the congregation is a human desire or the actual will of God for the church. Nepotism-based successions or appointments can be a destructive factor if the successor does not have God's calling and the necessary competency to become the real successor. However, it is evident that the issue of church nepotism is not critically discussed in the Asian context, even among the more middle-class English-speaking congregations who tend to follow American models of church organization.

In India, a much-loved evangelist and the founder of a large ministry was succeeded by his son. But that was not all. The most prominently featured ministers in their denomination's television programmes were the members of their immediate family. According to the Scriptures, it is beautiful to serve the Lord as a whole family (Josh. 24:15). However, what kind of organizational culture do we proclaim through this kind of nepotism in societies where politicians practice the same methods to control their parties?

In Sri Lanka, it has become a common practice to replace church leadership with family members; mainly sons or sons-in-law of the senior pastors. Just as in South Asian politics, in the South Asian church, the only time a woman has been recognized as the leader has been upon the tragic demise of her husband. However, I have never heard anyone question this kind of leadership transition. I assume it is because of our traditional feudal thinking which

48. Choi Seung-hyun (최승현), "우리 동네 교회 세습 지도전국 122개 교회 시각화, 세습은 현재진행형" (trans. 'Hereditory map of our neighborhood church: Visualization of 122 churches nationwide, heredity is in progress'). 5 April 2017. www.newsnjoy.or.kr/news/articlePrint.html?idxno=210112.

49. Y. W. Lee, interview by author, South Korea, November 29, 2017.

connects legitimate succession to blood ties.

On the other hand, a common feature of nepotism practice is plentifulness and success. No leader wants their family members to get involved in ministry leadership when things are not going well, sometimes because of a deficiency of resources. Therefore, nepotism has connections with economic factors. Again, the Bible is clear that one cannot serve both God and money. Christian ministry cannot be considered a profitable business or family enterprise.

8. Suggestions to Overcome the Practice of Nepotism

Nepotism is not the best practice when it comes to Christian ministry, especially for church leadership. The practice of nepotism had become a common practice in medieval churches. Nevertheless, nepotism has become a developing practice among modern-day Pentecostal churches. The practice of nepotism has been debated throughout history, and some argue that it is good, but many are maintaining nepotism as an unhealthy practice for the Christian ministry. Based on the biblical and historical evidence and observations in the ministry context, nepotism has created more leadership catastrophes than generating God-honoring leadership transactions. Therefore, the practice of nepotism is necessary to be avoided within the church and church leadership successions. Pastors (or leaders) must deliberately support each other to prevent nepotism within their own ministry contexts. The church leaders must have an intentionally developed methodology to answer the issue of nepotism. We suggest following theoretical conception as a solution to some extent.

8.1. Recruitment Policy

Staff selection and recruitment are vital to any kind of business organization. According to the author's view, this includes the church as well. Most organizations have

a separate department for this vital function. Several criteria need to be met in each and every organizational recruitment. Every established organization has recruitment policies to avoid unnecessary scandals with staffing. The author of this article worked for World Vision Lanka (WVL) from 2009- to 2013, and at that time, one of his nieces applied for a position at WVL. However, she could not get the job though she had all the qualifications because the recruitment policy of WVL prohibits recruiting family members. Moreover, each staff of WVL must sign a conflict of interest MoU each year to prevent family members of WVL staff from getting any advantage from the organization because of the employee.[50]

8.2. Agreed Organizational Leadership Structure

As is popularly defined, "Organizational structure refers to how individual and teamwork within an organization are coordinated to achieve organizational goals and objectives."[51] For its functions, every primary organization, such as a family, should have established norms and administrative structures. According to Wendy Bloisi, an organizational structure is crucial because it serves to get people to work towards a common goal and help employees willingly forgo personal interest.[52] Further, Latif, et al., adds that "failure to choose an effective structure has its consequences on the organization as it will not only affect the health."[53]

On the other hand, the church is an organization that has been established by Jesus Christ (Mt 16:18). However, the

50. World Vision, *Conflict of Interest Policy* (World Vision, 2019), https://www.wvi.org/publications/world-vision-partnership-policies/conflict-interest-policy.

51. Saylor.org (Open Source), *Principles of Management v. 1.1* (2013), www.saylor.org/site/wpcontent/uploads/2013/06/Principles%20of%20ManagementNEW.pdf.

52. K. I. Latif, Q. B. Baloch, and M. N. Khan, "Structure, corporate strategy and the overall effectiveness of the organization," *Abasyn Journal of Social Sciences 5*, no. 2 (2012): 1-13. www.aupc.info/volume-5-issue-2/.

53. Latif, Baloch, and Khan, "Structure": 12.

New Testament does not present a particular organizational structure for its administration. The Apostles took the first administrative decision to solve the food distribution issue in Acts 6. They chose seven men. According to the apostle of the early church l this decision, "not only averted a serious crisis of disunity but also led the church to take a significant leap forward in terms of organizational structure".[54] Later we can identify that almost every church denomination has developed its administrative structure that guides all church business conduct, including the succession of leadership. The Reformation has developed its administrative structure as a reaction to the practice of nepotism by some Popes. However, most Pentecostal churches are mainly depending on a charismatic leader who has all the decision-making power. This kind of leader can create or remove leadership positions without the consent of any others. This can be avoided if the church organization has developed a clear structure for its leadership and its roles. Further, this structure should indicate the procedure for leadership succession.

8.3. Succession Strategy

Leadership transition should not happen mechanically or aimlessly. On the other hand, a leadership position must be replaced by another whether the existing leader likes it or not. It is essential to have a succession plan ahead. Fapohunda makes a good point on leadership succession and said, "A succession plan involves documentation providing for the continuous operation of an organization when key members exit the organization owing to factors like termination, retirement, or death."[55] Further, the Scripture explains that God in sovereignty has planned leadership succession. God has declared Cyrus as

54. Ajith Fernando, *Acts: NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 226.

55. T. Fapohunda, Human resource planning and succession planning in Nigeria's Higher Education. *International Journal of Research in Management & Business Studies* 2, nos. 2 (2015): 59-65. http://ijrmbs.com/vol2issue2/tinuke.pdf.

the Persian emperor before his birth (Eze 1:1; Isa 44:28). God raises godly men and women, generation after generation, as his kingdom front-runners. Every church leader has a God-given task to be fulfilled and, in the end, hand over the baton to his or her successor (2 Tim 4:7). Leadership mentoring and succession practice can be traced throughout the entire Bible. Moses mentored Joshua (Ex 32:17-18), Eli mentored Samuel (1 Sa 24-25); Paul mentored Timothy (2 Tim 2:2).[56] Further, the Scripture has evidently recorded that Jesus has a systematic plan for leadership development; selecting (Mk 3:13-19), training (Lk 9:1-6), empowering (Mt 10: 1, Ac. 1:8), safeguarding (Jn 17:6-26), and releasing (i.e. authorizing to function independently (Mt 28:18-20; Jn 20:21).

Every leader has a responsibility to create opportunities for each person to grow and develop as the person God wants them to be. However, to escape from the nepotism scandal, it is necessary to avoid family members' inclusion for a succession leadership development strategy. According to Shaw, the best is to "provide gifted outsiders with all of the encouragement, mentoring, training, and connections that the leader can."[57] On the other hand, it is the responsibility of younger leaders to find a senior leader who is not building a family enterprise in the name of Jesus Christ.

8.4. Empowering Non-family Successors

It is a requirement, that existing leader should have a pre-plan for the preparation of their successors. Most of the time, the excuse for nepotism is that there is no suitable candidate except the leaders' family members. If a leader has an intentional strategy to groom his or her replacement, it is not problematic when it comes to succession. Raising

56. R. M. Ngomane and E. Mahlangu, "Leadership mentoring and succession in the charismatic churches in Bushbuckridge," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 70, no. 1 (2014). http://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/2065.

57. Shaw, 466.

the next generation is a biblical mandate, and it is a must. Leaders must give serious attention to developing others as leaders.[58]

However, empowering non-family members as successors needs to be done purposefully and willingly by the existing leaders. On the other hand, it is not an easy decision for a pastor who sacrifices his or her whole life to develop a ministry to hand over their ministry to an outsider. However, the truth is that a church ministry is not a family business but is God's work (Mt.16:18). Furthermore, Jesus had brothers and sisters, but he did not include his own siblings as his original disciples though, among them, there were blood-relations: Peter and Andrew; James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

8.5. Leadership Accountability

The theme of accountability is always attached to Christian living. Lakeland argues that "accountability is the public face of responsibility, illustrated in our wiliness to submit our actions to the judgment of others."[59] The bible teaches that "each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Ro 14:12). Pue states that church leaders have many scandals due to little or no accountability.[60] There are many temptations for leaders who are at the top. Most of the time, they give in to temptations, mainly because of not having proper accountability to the people leading them. According to the Scripture, we all need to be accountable (Ro 14:12). Accountability is one of the great demands of church leadership.[61] Leadership accountability is critical for leadership succession because the consequences of the decisions can create a disaster if they do not accord with

58. Everist and Nessan, 165.

59. P. Lakeland, "Accountability, credibility, and authority," *New Theology Review: An American Catholic Journal for Ministry* 19, no. 1 (2006): 6-14.

60. C. Pue, *Mentoring leaders: Wisdom for developing character, calling, and competency* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 239.

61. R. R. Gaillardetz, "Accountability in the church," *New Theology Review: An American Catholic Journal for Ministry* 19, no. 2 (2006): 33-45.

the Holy Spirit's guidance (Ac 15:28). Church nepotism mainly satisfies individuals; it may be the top leader or the beneficiaries of him. However, the nepotism scandal can be diminished if the leaders can practice greater accountability to fellow community members. Therefore, I suggest that every leader should practice a great deal of accountability in their leadership and mainly in leadership successions that can lead to nepotism or its appearance.

9. Conclusion

Leadership succession is an inevitable phenomenon for humankind. Nepotism has become a common phenomenon when it comes to leadership succession. Nepotism, however, is a questionable practice, whether it is in a secular or ecclesiastic setting. The practice of nepotism has become a significant concern within the business of God's house, the church. Nepotism is a common exercise in the Old Testament regarding the Temple service and the rulers. Levites' families were responsible for organizing and conducting Israel's activities concerning the Temple (Nu 26:57-59). The New Testament, however, clearly indicates that the mission of the church is not a family business because the church belongs to God and only God (Mt 16:18). Nepotism is not encouraged by the early church leaders. There were several motives to discourage nepotism among church leaders. First, God does not show favoritism (Ro 2:11). Secondly, leadership is a call of God than a human appointment (Ac 20:28). Thirdly, biblical leadership is a gift of the Holy Spirit (Ro 12:8). Fourthly, there is an ethical concern with nepotism or favoritism. Therefore, the Bible advises against doing anything from partiality (1 Tim 5:21).

It can be argued for healthy nepotism practice within the church. However, the practice of nepotism within the church cannot justify any given situation. Nepotism, though at times, has reasons to be justified, mostly amounts to unfair favoritism. Further, when a pastor practices nepotism, it can well be interpreted as the pastor is building a family kingdom at the expense of the Church ministry.

Finally, the practice of nepotism can be identified within the context of contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. However, the New Testament teachings generally do not support nepotism. Historical evidence proposes that nepotism has incurred more harm to the church than assisting in God's mission. In our personal view, nepotism is not the best practice for the Christian ministry because it discourages younger leaders who have God's call, competency, and talent to become next-generation leaders. Therefore, it is recommended that churches must avoid nepotism or its appearance as a matter of biblical principle.

HOSPITABLE CLASSROOMS IN A SRI LANKAN SEMINARY SETTING

MANO EMMANUEL

Abstract: *The motif of hospitality in theological education has become popular over the last two and a half decades. Sri Lanka, like the Mediterranean regions of the Bible, values hospitality. However, other aspects of Sri Lankan culture such as its hierarchical structure, its desire for personal honour and the fragmented nature of its society bring their own challenges to inviting students into hospitable classrooms. This article looks at aspects of hospitable classrooms, and discusses what openness, boundaries, and hospitality could look like using the experience of one Sri Lankan Seminary.*

Key words: *Theological education, hospitality, Sri Lankan culture.*

1. Introduction

Over the past twenty-five years, the motif of hospitality in education has become widespread.[1] The notion was first popularized by Henri Nouwen. In his book *Reaching Out* (1975), on Christian spirituality, one of the three main sections traced the movement from hostility to hospitality and used the teacher-student relationship as one situation in which this movement could be applied. Parker Palmer then discussed the need for openness and hospitality in his book *To Know as We are Known* (1983) a topic he continued in *The Courage to Teach* (1998).

Educators have pointed to the theological principle that God is hospitable in his interactions with humans, beginning with his act of creation where Adam and Eve are provided with all they need to feel at home (Gen 1:1-29).

1. See Perry W. H. Shaw, "A Welcome Guest: Ministerial Training as an Act of Hospitality," *Christian Education* Journal, Series 3, 7, no. 1 (2011): 8-26 for references to primary texts on the hospitality motif in education.

God prescribes the Passover meal to symbolize his people's rescue from tyranny (Ex 12:1-14). He is host to his people in the wilderness (Ex 14:1-16) and feeds his exhausted prophet Elijah (1 Ki 19:5-7. See also 17:2-6). The New Testament emphasizes the significance of hospitality in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus came "eating and drinking" (Matt 11:19), often with those who were marginalized (Lk 5:29-32; Lk 19:1-10, Mk 2:15) and spoke in parables about banquets (Lk 14:15-24) and invitations to wedding feasts. (Mt 22:2-14); He fed the multitudes (Mt 14:13-21, Lk 15:29-39), instituted a meal as a memorial of his death (Lk 22:14-20, 1 Cor 11:23-25) and made breakfast for his disciples on the beach after his resurrection (Jn 21:12). On the cross God displays the ultimate act of hospitality, laying down his life for his friends.[2] Christians are urged to offer hospitality willingly (Rom 12: 13). Hospitality is listed among the qualifications for church leaders (1 Tim 3:2, 5:10; Titus 1:8). The author of Hebrews exhorted his readers not to neglect showing hospitality to strangers, reminding them that "by so doing, some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb 13:2; cf. Abraham's and Lot's experiences in Gen 18 and 19). Peter too includes hospitality as part of demonstrating Christian love and serving others (1 Pet 4:8-11).

The Greek root of the words translated as "hospitality" or "hospitable" in the New Testament is *philoxen*-, literally, fond of strangers or guests.[3] It is well known that in the Mediterranean world hospitality was extremely significant, being a symbol of "friendship, intimacy and unity."[4] Being invited to a meal was a symbol of intimacy and trust. Thus, a betrayal by one who had shared a meal was doubly heinous (e.g. Judas, Matt 26:23). A meal could signal the end to hostility and the beginning of reconciliation. The New Testament describes how conversion to Christ gives a new

2. Shaw, "A Welcome Guest": 11

3. David W Anderson, "Hospitable Classrooms: Biblical Hospitality and Hospitable Classrooms." *International Journal of Christianity and Education* 15, no. 1 (2011): 16.

4. Scott Bartchy, "Table Fellowship," in *IVP Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 796.

impetus to hospitality across cultural boundaries, as, for example, in the case of Samaritan villagers inviting Jesus to stay with them (Jn 4:39-42), Lydia opening her home to the church (Acts 16:13-15,40) or Peter accepting the Gentile Cornelius's invitation to stay with him (Acts 10:27, 48).[5]

2. Hospitality as an andragogical model

Viewing education in terms of hospitality might seem like just another technique to pursue. However, educationists like Perry Shaw contend that "developing hospitable space in the classroom is more than merely an issue of methodology; it is in itself an essential theological act. When we welcome students as guests this very act of hospitality communicates dramatically the divine reconciling work that is at the heart of our educational mandate."[6]

Eschewing both classical and liberal models of education, Shaw proposes that the model of hospitality answers the three main questions of education thus:

1. What is knowledge? Knowledge is not, as the classic model of education suggests, a body of knowledge and ideas. Instead, it is relationship.
2. What is the goal of education? It is not mastering the content, as the classical model posits, but to be in relationship with God and engaged in his ministry of reconciliation with all of creation.
3. What methodology will facilitate this goal? It is not merely transmission of content but the cultivation of a hospitable community.[7]

Hospitality thus envisioned goes beyond technique to forming the framework and philosophy that undergirds our practices. Shaw insists that it is more than having a few

5. See Davina Hui Leng Soh, The Motif of Hospitality in Theological Education (London: Langham Global Library, 2016) for a detailed analysis of the motif of hospitality in Scripture.

6. Shaw, "A Welcome Guest": 8.

7. Shaw, "A Welcome Guest": 12- 16.

courses or non- formal activities which have hospitable elements. Education that is truly holistic means that how we treat students in the classroom is as important as the content we deliver.[8] Hospitality then is "an intentional practice that reflects a process and perspective rather than specific tasks teachers must add to their already overtaxed schedules."[9]

Bringing it home

Sri Lankan culture, like that of the Mediterranean region, values hospitality. So, the motif of hospitality ought to resonate with those in a Sri Lankan Seminary. Sri Lankans also know how desperately our country needs reconciliation across all manner of boundaries. But there are challenges that stem from our cultural understanding of hospitality as well as from the restrictions placed upon us by accrediting agencies, our necessity to measure up to secular institutions and our own lack of resources. There is also the danger that faculty will feel obliged to attempt the practices without being convinced of the theological perspective behind them.

Christine Pohl observes the rise of the term "hospitality industry" which now associates hospitality with business. In this context, hospitality is available to a favoured few, such as those with a credit card. Sri Lanka's economy being heavily dependent on the hospitality industry, it is easy to see the analogy. Although the hospitality industry thrives on meeting the needs of its clients, providing them with the experience of being cared for and their every need anticipated, and training their staff to engage in small talk and proffer beaming smiles, we know the hospitality is transactional not relational. This danger is present in the Seminary too. Merely asking faculty to follow certain techniques, must be avoided if we wish to create a hospitable culture. If we believe hospitable classrooms have the power to equip our students to be agents of

8. Shaw, "A Welcome Guest": 8.
9. Anderson, "Hospitable Classrooms": 17.

reconciliation in this country, we need to understand and embrace the power of hospitality.[10]

3. Choosing your guests

So, how does the motif of hospitality impact our recruiting of students and welcoming them into class? The Sri Lankan notion of hospitality has its strengths and weaknesses. Sri Lankans in rural areas typically will notice a person in need and be willing to share what they have, even with a stranger. There is anecdotal evidence to show that those who have little will still share it with a guest, giving the guest the best, they have even if it leaves very little for the host family themselves. But in more urban contexts, hospitality is restricted to those from a similar status and class. Those who do not belong are asked to enter through the back door, eat off crockery reserved only for them and sit separately. Jesus was noted for the fact that he broke similar cultural taboos in his culture, eating with outcasts, such as tax collectors and risked his reputation to share the hospitality of those of no repute or ill repute.

Colombo Theological Seminary (CTS), being an inter-denominational and trilingual seminary (Sinhala, Tamil and English) invites students from a diversity of backgrounds to enrol in classes. Ways in which the Seminary's education is inclusive include the setting up of extension centres in rural areas, holding classes during both day and evenings to include those who are employed during the day, and providing scholarships to make education more affordable. The campus allows access to those whose mobility is impaired. In line with accrediting agencies' recognition of students' prior learning, some mature students who do not hold academic entry qualifications may be permitted to enroll in classes. In some centres those who struggle with

10. Davina Soh cites the work of who distinguishes between hotel hospitality and that of the home. The hospitality we are considering is more like the latter. Each guest and the hosts share a common space as opposed to guests in a hotel who can maintain indifference to other guests and see their hosts as mere providers of a paid service. (Unpublished PhD Thesis "The Motif of Hospitality in Theological Education,"46-47).

literacy are assessed orally so they can be included.

In on-line education, accessibility is both improved and restricted. Students can be invited in from all parts of the island and even overseas. On the other hand, access is restricted to those who can afford a suitable device and the relatively expensive internet. It might mean that those without those accessories, or whose children or other family members must have priority are excluded.

On the one hand, we can be satisfied that the Seminary is seen to accept without discrimination those who are called to train. But we might still need to consider whether our separation of students into three different language groups mediates against the concept of reconciliation. Sri Lankan culture is deeply divided along language and ethnic lines. Church, which brings together people of all ethnicities is still divided into monolingual congregations. Bringing students together in a multilingual, multicultural seminary does not automatically mean students learn to cross ethnic and social barriers. In research conducted among Teacher Candidates training to teach English as a link language in Sri Lanka, it was found that TC's had lived segregated lives deriving from their early separation into language streams in school. "…. the narratives of the participants reveal that personal lives, experiences and sociocultural backgrounds were never discussed or analyzed to gain a better understanding of the larger social fabric the teachers lived and worked in."[11] Bringing these teachers together in a residential programme opened their eyes to the narrative of other ethnicities and provided an experience of relating to these others. However, the researcher goes on to say, that "merely throwing people together and expecting them to learn from each other without any explicitly knowledge conceptual lenses can prove to be counterproductive."[12] Thus reconciliation takes intentionality. Conceptual lenses

11. S. M. Herath, 2019. The Complexity and Fear of Teaching the "Other": The Role of Teachers in a Larger Process of Social Cohesion and Peace. *OUSL Journal*, 14(1),2019, 91.

12. Herath, "Complexity," 93.

must be challenged by a biblical worldview. Students need encouragement and space to explore their common humanity, face the past and forge a different future as a reconciled community.

The Seminary has sought to address this in various ways. Tri lingual chapel services and weekly fellowship groups allow students to meet others from the other mediums, as do faculty mentoring groups, retreats and sports days. However, this is an area that might benefit from further consideration.

4. Knowing what to serve

Educationist Jane Vella argues that adult learners ought to be known even before the course is fully planned. She suggests that a needs assessment is one of the 12 principles necessary for dialogical learning.[13] This is not practical for the Seminary as students often register very close to the date of the class, or even on the day itself. However, her point about knowing the needs of students is necessary, as she says, not to "form the class, but to inform it." In a hospitable classroom, students have a say in the content offered to them. Just as one would ask a guest if there is anything they do not eat so as to make the meal 'safe' for them, knowing the needs of an adult learner helps us plan the menu in a way that optimizes the benefit to learners. How can this be done?

Most classes in our Seminary begin with a time of introduction. Usually, students will identify themselves by name, local church, and ministry involvement. Our anxiety that the content of our class is not compromised usually prohibits a longer introduction and perhaps a sense of reticence keeps students from a lengthy introduction. In her research Vella found that lecturers use a variety of ways to get to know students before the course begins. One visited students at their places of work.[14] Other ways include

13. Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 6.

14. Vella, *Learning to Listen,* 6.

having an informal meal together before the class, or calling students and asking good questions, such as asking them to describe "critical incidents" they face at work. Talking to at least a proportion of them, says Vella, will let the teacher know the common themes in the class.[15] At a recent class I taught, this was observed when several younger students posited the same question which was a critical issue for their generation, but which was not addressed in the curriculum which covered what I had considered standard content. In other words, a "theme" emerged from their context which had not been considered. Nouwen makes the point that in our educational systems, solutions are offered to questions that are not being asked, while students are not given space to ask the questions and offer what they have learned from their own experiences.[16]

A system that allows a teacher to let his or her students' 'themes' inform the syllabus needs a certain amount of flexibility. How this can be encouraged and balanced with institutional requirements for content, early approval of course syllabi and so on, is something that needs to be considered. For now, the Seminary seeks to allow these voices to be heard by discussing current trends in the church at faculty meetings and hoping that this will inform the classes we teach. The offering of new electives also seeks to address critical and current issues.

In the pandemic situation at the time of writing, when classes were held on-line, one new avenue that presented itself was the chance to make a telephone call to each student. In my calls to students, in this relaxed context, the students could give a more detailed description of their background and context, their ministry, questions they brought to the course and other more personal information. It also gave them a chance to ask questions about my own life and context. Even if not before the course, such conversations early on can give the lecturer a

15. Vella, *Learning to Listen,* 4; citing Dana Zohar whose list includes safety, sound relationships, and respect in her 12 principles.

16. Henri J. H. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (London: Fount, Harper Collins, 1975), 59-60.

better feel for who their guests really are beyond the face they present to the class. Of course, with large classes and busy schedules, lecturers will struggle to find time, and this too must be addressed institutionally.

5. Feeling at home

Palmer lists three "essential dimensions of a learning space" as openness, boundaries and an air of hospitality."[17] One aspect to openness is the removal of barriers to learning, one common barrier being fear.[18] Both students and teachers enter the classroom with unspoken fears.[19] Students might fear the power the teacher has over their future, their ignorance being exposed, having to relate to peers not from their social context and perhaps looking foolish in front of them. They might fear their theological stance is a minority one which they might have to defend and perhaps find dismissed; they might fear having to see points of view they would rather not, and so on. The teacher has his or her own fears. The fear of being inadequately prepared, of their ignorance being exposed or of not being entertaining enough. Each needs the affirmation of the other.[20] Letty Russell writes of how fear of being different results in "othering." If a student or group of students fear being seen as different because of some aspect of their identity, like gender, denomination, theological stance, they will bury that aspect of their identity and seek to conform to the dominant paradigm.[21] This probably occurs more than we know and we might see this when a student leaves, having appeared to be completely orthodox, but then publicly preaches, or posts views that they never expressed in class.

17. Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 71.

18. Palmer, *To Know,* 71.

19. Shaw, "A Welcome Guest": 18-19; Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life.* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 35-60.

20. Palmer, *To Know,* 84; *Courage to Teach,* 36-37.

21. Letty M. Russell, "Encountering the World of the Other, *Harvard Theological Review* 99, no. 4 (Oct 2006): 457-458.

Nouwen points out that our understandable fear of the stranger who might turn out to be dangerous also flows over into those who are our students (and colleagues) who are then seen as a threat to our "intellectual or professional safety."[22] In Sri Lankan culture, these fears are exacerbated by the desire for honour and fear of shame. A throw away remark, laughter or a put down not only raises questions about the student's intellectual capacity in the eyes of the class (and their own eyes) but diminishes their whole person. That this is not confined to honour-shame cultures is borne out by Palmer who says of his fear of failing as a teacher, that "when a class that has gone badly comes to a merciful end, I am fearful long after it is over – fearful that I am not just a bad teacher but a bad person, so closely is myself tied to the work I do."[23] This is something to think about especially when grading and commenting on papers. Shaw would go so far as to say that hospitality is increased when we decrease the value we attach to grades and the attendant competition it can evoke.[24]

One example of fear is demonstrated in the completing of class evaluations. Students are told that the evaluations are anonymous, and their honesty is appreciated. However, it is quite common to find that students are reluctant to express any kind of dissatisfaction, though they might express that among themselves. Students fear reprisals and spread that fear to new students. That this fear is matched by the teacher's fear is demonstrated if a teacher who has received some kind of critique in their evaluation berates the class for shaming him or her in front of the leadership of the school. In state universities, students face reprisals in the form of lower grades for those identified as critical of the teacher. Fear displaces trust and students learn to be silent. In secondary schools, a parent once told me, her child was taught something factually incorrect. Still, she told him to write exactly what the teacher taught in his exam, and on no account challenge

22. Nouwen, *Reaching Out,* 47.
23. Palmer, *Courage to Teach,* 36.
24. Shaw, "A Welcome Guest": 20.

what was said. In fact, we might say that both students and teachers display a level of suspicion. Teachers are suspicious of students expecting them to cheat at exams, not really read what they were supposed to, lie about the reasons they are absent and plagiarize their assignments, because some students do. Students have seen those in authority abuse their power and take advantage of vulnerabilities, penalize them unfairly and expect students to agree with their opinions. Building trust will be time consuming and risky because we will sometimes be let down.

A student may feel fearful to state an opinion contrary to what the teacher seems to hold. In one class a student advised another to make sure they quoted the teacher's book frequently in their assignment to get a good grade. Students also find it hard to offer feedback on a peer's presentation since they value their relationship which they do not feel will survive such honesty. And contrary to what we feel is a cultural norm in South Asia, students can be very individualistic often preferring to work alone rather than in groups, partly because they wish to earn the grade they feel they deserve and not be brought lower by less able students.

Fear is not compatible with hospitality and is not conducive to learning. Only in a hospitable space can emotional and cognitive development take place.[25] So how is fear dispelled?

In a hospitable classroom, diversity is valued, and each student is respected and welcomed for who they are. When students feel they are appreciated and their contribution valued, there is a sense of belonging.[26] Allocating time getting to know the student beyond their programme and grade is essential for making people feel they belong. An essential quality of a hospitable teacher then is curiosity. Curiosity about students' stories and experiences. This can make the difference between someone feeling at home and feeling alien.[27] Openness to

25. Nouwen, *Reaching Out,* 61. Also, Shaw, "A Welcome Guest": 19.
26. Anderson, "Hospitable Classrooms": 17.
27. Lloyd Kornelsen, "Teaching with Presence," *New Directions for*

the other entails curiosity about what one might learn as well as offer. "Hospitality means authentic, not feigned, interest in the other - the reality, not just the appearance, of openness. Throughout there is appreciation that the best one has may indeed be surpassed by what the other can offer."[28] Some of the best teachers in the Seminary invest their personal time in visiting students at their places of ministry, attending meals, birthday parties and weddings, and inviting students to their own homes to meet their family. Sports days, retreats, shared ministry opportunities are all occasions to get to know one another, creating a culture of openness to the other. Hospitality can be shown in small ways in Seminary life- in greeting students by name, asking them about their families, praying with them individually and being willing to share personal stories about our own families and even struggles we face. It is also shown in honouring commitments and keeping to expectations such as starting classes on time, giving students the information, they need to prepare and complete assignments, and giving marks on time. If, however, lecturers frequently cancel classes at short notice, or leave the class to take phone calls, or delay handing in their marks, they abuse their position as "host". The classroom becomes an inhospitable place as students are made to feel helpless, hostages to their host's whims.

In a polarized and competitive culture, respect, warmth, and kindness in interactions is rare, especially when offered while disagreeing with a viewpoint, or pushing students beyond their comfort zones. A teacher who does that also models for them what respectful interaction ought to be when students encounter hostility outside the classroom. Increasingly Christian engagement is characterized by hostility and derision. In a recent Twitter post, Timothy Keller appealed to Christians who use social media that

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Adult and Continuing Education 111 (Fall 2006): 76.

28. John B. Bennett, "The Academy and Hospitality," CrossCurrents.org. http://www.crosscurrents.org/Bennett.htm. Originally published in *CrossCurrents* 50, no. 1-2 (Spring/Summer 2000): 23-35.

Preachers and teachers who engage in a great deal of mockery toward their opponents, instead of speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15; Gal 6:1; 2 Tim 2:24-26), often nurture an abusive spirit that brings down their own ministries in disgrace.

There are many on social media whose main goal, stance, and practice is to mock and deride the people whose positions they oppose. But this is spiritually dangerous for them, and it accomplishes nothing for their side.[29]

Jeanette Romkema posted a list of suggestions made by ten graduate students in Toronto for hosting hospitable classrooms. A key element was listening. Listening attentively gives a student confidence that they are valued. The students elaborated on this point to suggest that teachers listen for cues. Sensitivity to the differences in student temperament and character can help the lecturer be specifically encouraging with a quieter student, whilst also limiting the contribution of more vociferous students.[30] It can alert the teacher that something being discussed is personal and painful. It is not sufficient to listen to words. Reading body language is also crucial. Issues such as mental illness, guilt over a past sin, family conflict and low self image are some of the realities students are wrestling with as they engage with classes that can either bring healing and hope or add to their burden of secrecy and shame.

Nouwen observes that the world is full of strangers who are estranged from their cultures, their past, their community, themselves and their God, desperately in search for a hospitable place and community.[31] Our initial response might be to feel that this does not apply to theological students. However, a closer look at our student body often reveals that Nouwen is proved right. Students

29. Timothy Keller (@timkellernyc), "Dear Social Media-," Twitter post, September 30, 2021, https://twitter.com/timkellernyc/status/1443567207070552066?s=20.

30. Jeanette Romkema, "How Can We Design and Facilitate for Hospitality?" *Global Learning Partners* (blog) April 15, 2016. https://www.globallearningpartners.com/blog/how-can-we-design-and-facilitate-for-hospitality/

31. Nouwen, *Reaching Out,* 43.

who enroll in the Seminary, including those approved for pastoral or other church ministry are not immune from the brokenness of human life. This is made more acute by our context of many years of intercommunity conflict, economic hardship, and sporadic hostility from the surrounding communities, sometimes including one's own family, particularly for first generation Christians. This brokenness is sometimes added to by ministry situations in which students have been made to feel inadequate or as if they had nothing of value to offer. Low self-esteem is not uncommon and feelings of suspicion aroused by broken confidences and betrayals within the Christian community. All these with past hurts make for barriers to be taken down.

In summary, in a hospitable space, each student will feel welcomed and affirmed, both for who they are and what they bring to the community. It is a place where they find a teacher who is genuinely interested in them and who affirms their opinions and experience. Such a classroom may be the place where our students who inhabit a fragmented and sometimes competitive culture, learn to interact with the "other" and may find friends who last beyond the classroom, both among their classmates and their teachers.[32]

6. Openness

Nouwen says that "hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place."[33] It is a space where guests discover their own style, vocation, and words. It is an intentionally created openness which offers alternatives without the obligation to take on board the host's beliefs or lifestyle but to discover their own.[34] "Hosts often feel they have to talk all the time to their guests," he observes, "and entertain them with things to do, places to

32. Anderson, "Hospitable Classrooms": 22. Anderson cites the work of Nicholas Long, listing aspects of kindness which enlarge upon the way to be hospitable. These include protection, emotional support, empowerment, and personal commitment.

33. Nouwen, *Reaching Out,* 49.

34. Nouwen, *Reaching Out,* 49

see and people to visit. But by filling up every empty corner and occupying every empty time their hospitality becomes more oppressing than revealing."

As Palmer says, "space" may seem an abstract concept, but we all understand the difference between being crowded and crushed whether by people en masse, a slew of deadlines or heavy expectations. We also know the relief of open spaces in gardens and countryside, extended time to complete a task and the acceptance of friends and colleagues. We experience creativity, energy and freedom to be who we are in the open spaces.[35] Palmer says "to sit in a class where the teacher stuffs our mind with information, organizes it with finality, insists in having the answers while being utterly uninterested in our views, and forces us into a grim competition for grades-to sit in such a class is to experience a lack of space for learning."[36]

Nouwen bemoans the fact that "much real mental and emotional development is inhibited by an educational situation in which students perceive their teachers more as demanding bosses than as guides in their search for knowledge and understanding."[37] A hospitable classroom is one in which the teacher is willing to allow that the most important contribution he or she will make is not to make authoritative statements on every aspect of the content but to help students learn to find answers for themselves. As Robert Fried puts it, "Students need us, not because we have all the answers but because we can help them discover the right questions."[38]

Our fear as teachers is that if we are not the authority on everything the students ask, we appear incompetent or unsure. Paradoxically, says Kornelson, the more competent the lecturers, the more passionate they are about their subject, the more they know it thoroughly, living it and

35. Palmer, *To Know*, 70.

36. Palmer, *To Know,* 70.

37. Nouwen, *Reaching Out,* 59.

38. Robert L. Fried, "The Heart of the Matter" (Opinion), *EducationWeek*, October 1, 1995. https://www.edweek.org/education/opinion-the-heart-of-the-matter/1995/10.

acting it, the more it is possible for them to recognize moments when they can let go and allow the momentum of the discussion take over, allowing students to sharpen one another. They are content to set aside their agenda for the class and "live with chaos" that turns into connectedness.[39] Kornelson's research showed that teachers moved from being preoccupied with technique in their early teaching days, to focusing on relationships with their class as they gained more confidence and competence.[40] Shaw points out that while there are many ingredients that go into being an excellent teacher, such as passion for the subject, competence, and creativity, "even more so are warmth, genuine concern for the students' learning, even love—all characteristics that speak of relationship and a hospitable classroom environment."[41] It includes speaking kindly even when they do not deserve it.[42]

I have seen examples of openness at work in various ways in the Seminary. Firstly, there is openness to experience new situations. One of my colleagues is known for his availability and willingness to visit students at home, preach at their churches and organize student trips to encourage students to get to know the country better. He frequently introduces students to people and places they would not normally encounter. The fact that he is one of our most senior lecturers makes his interest in students all the more encouraging for them. He is offering them space to encounter what they would not normally meet within their church context, and to explore and evaluate new ideas.

Then there is openness in sharing vulnerabilities. In a recent class I heard the two co-lecturers share openly about struggles in their own life through which they grew spiritually. Such openness is rare in a culture where the teacher has an image to protect. After they shared, students in small groups were similarly open about their own lives. Some of their fears of being judged or dismissed were

39. Kornelsen, "Teaching with Presence": 77-79.
40. Kornelsen, "Teaching with Presence": 79-80.
41. Shaw, "A Welcome Guest": 19.
42. Shaw, "A Welcome Guest": 22.

allayed. Openness includes the willingness to hear students' feelings. On the whole lecturers require students to argue logically and leave feelings for the pastor or counsellor to deal with. But since learning is holistic, feelings matter.

Openness can also be through shared lives. Students do not see much of their teachers' lives if their interaction is limited to the classroom, as it can be in a non-residential Seminary like ours. And yet, often when students are ready to graduate, and they express thanks for what they learnt from their teachers, they almost always also mention that they learnt from the teachers' life. So we must not underestimate the impact of daily interactions even in these limited circumstances. The teacher becomes what Soh calls the "articulate presence" confronting students not by words, in this instance, but by their modelling of Christlike lifestyle.[43] This presence is enhanced when students are invited to a teacher's home. To be a guest in a teacher's home, to meet their family and be waited on by the teacher is a special moment for students. At the Seminary, most faculty have an "open door" policy which means they are accessible to students. They try to demonstrate by giving their attention to students in need of a listening ear, that some of their work is these "interruptions" as Nouwen said.[44]

So, some ways openness can be demonstrated in sharing vulnerabilities, in willingness to listen to different opinions, in accepting students and faculty from all backgrounds and denominations

7. Setting Boundaries

Hospitality requires openness but also boundaries. Hospitality is not found in entertaining chaos! As Nouwen says hospitality does not entail leaving your house to the guests to do as they please. The host is an "unambiguous presence" whose ideas, opinions and lifestyle are not hidden.[45] This aspect of hospitality coheres with Shaw's

43. Soh, *Motif,* 203.
44. Cited by Soh, *Motif,* 198.
45. Nouwen, *Reaching Out,* 71.

critique of the liberal (as opposed to classical) model of education. Liberal educationists seem to hold to some aspects of the hospitality motif, in that they value students' experience to the extent of equating it with knowledge. The liberal education model sets self-discovery as the goal of education, with creativity, self-expression, and individual growth as the method of educating. However, as Shaw argues, theological education insists that there is truth to be found, truth that is discovered in community, gleaned from the wisdom of those who have gone before us.[46] For CTS, "rooted in the scriptures" is part of the Seminary's mission statement and graduate profile. It is a reminder that the individual student's experience must be processed withing a biblical framework, and in community. The Seminary holds to a Statement of Faith which might be seen by some as a barrier but is meant to be a boundary within which there can be discussion, questioning and contextualizing.

Soh points out that while there may be many legitimate boundaries necessary for the institution, such as entry requirements, class size, there are other invisible boundaries that must be deliberately transgressed in hospitable classrooms. These include boundaries of gender, race, and doctrine.[47] In the Sri Lankan context, we could also include financial status, physical disability, and location since these make education inaccessible for some. Ways in which the Seminary makes these boundaries more porous is to offer scholarships, to open extension centres and to focus on essentials in the Statement of Faith. The result is a community that represents the diversity in the church-male and female, clergy and lay, rural and urban.

Bennett says "intellectual hospitality includes but goes beyond being courteous and civil. Acts of courtesy and civility can be used to limit or even avoid interaction with others on difficult or controversial subjects –thus continuing rather than correcting inhospitable customs and traditions."[48] The seminary teacher has to be willing to

46. Shaw, "A Welcome Guest": 15-16.
47. Soh, *The Motif*, 188.
48. Bennett, "The Academy and Hospitality"

challenge and confront. There is both "confrontation and receptivity." The receptivity which welcomes, affirms, and invites disclosure must be balanced with a willingness to confront. Mere receptivity leads to "bland neutrality" which is of no use in the educational journey. Hospitality is not an end in itself, says Palmer. "It is offered for the sake of what it can allow, permit, encourage and yield…not to make learning painless but to make the painful things possible."[49] Painful things will include exposing ignorance, challenging long held beliefs, and giving and receiving criticism.

In an honour-shame culture such as ours, any kind of criticism in a public forum, even a small classroom, can be seen as shaming. And yet students must learn to think clearly and defend their positions with academic rigour, as well as respectful teachable discourse. With this in mind, the Seminary has set aside certain important classes to be conducted in the style of seminars where students will present papers and have their peers question and critique them. That students struggle to develop critical thinking skills is in large part due to their secondary education which emphasizes what Paolo Freire named the "banking method" of education.[50] Karunaratne bemoans the fact that teachers exclude discussion, critical thinking and questioning and instead enforce a "competitive exam culture that calls for the pedagogy of rote memorization and every question having one right answer." [51]

What Bennett says below about hospitality in scholarship, that is, among teachers, would also be appropriate for a classroom dynamic.

> Intellectual hospitality…is no license for muddle-headedness. It calls for clear and thoughtful articulation of governing standards, both as a courtesy to others and to determine one's faithfulness to these standards - even as it prompts

49. Palmer, *To Know,* 74.

50. Natasha Karunaratne, *The Battleground of Sri Lankan History Education:Barriers to teaching Inclusive Histories,* (Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2021) 26, 28.

51. Karunaratne, *Battleground,* 60.

> regular reconsideration of their adequacy. Being hospitable does not mean dwelling in constant self-conscious doubt. It does require abandoning the self-absorbed shrillness that often characterizes debate….[52]

In areas where there is a diversity of opinion, the teacher must not impose his or her own views. On the other hand, the teacher must, where appropriate explain his or her position, while allowing students to hold their own position without fear of penalty or ridicule.[53] In a recent lecture, a colleague informed students that he was "agnostic" about a particular aspect of eschatology. In a culture where certain leaders make their mark by proclaiming their certainty, such an attitude is risky but authentic and helps students recognize that there are areas in which they can grow and change.

8. Host and guest

In many of the encounters with strangers recorded in scripture, the roles of guest and host unexpectedly reverse themselves or break down altogether. Abraham's lavish hospitality to the three strangers at Mamre turns out to be a divine encounter (Gen 18:1-15), Elijah, the guest of the impoverished widow promises her that her meagre supplies will not run out and they do not (1 Kgs 17:7-16). Jesus the guest at the home of the disciples on the Emmaus Road blesses the bread and reveals himself as the Messiah (Luke 24:13-35).[54]

> This potential for fluidity is contained within the Greek language itself, for the noun *xenos* denotes simultaneously a guest, a host, or a stranger, while the verb *xenizein* means "receive as a guest" but also "surprise" and hence "present someone or something as strange." Correspondingly, *philoxenia,* the term for hospitality used in the New Testament,

52. Bennett, "The Academy and Hospitality"
53. Soh, *Motif,* 202.
54. Bennett, "Teaching with Hospitality"

> refers literally not to a love of strangers per se but to a delight in the whole guest-host relationship, in the mysterious reversals and gains for all parties which may take place.[55]

Thus, in hospitable classrooms, sometimes the guests become hosts.[56] In fact, Nouwen goes so far as to say that the distinction between host and guest "dissolves" as strangers become friends.[57]

Sri Lankan culture being hierarchical, there is a power distance between teacher and student, even an adult student. It is expected and considered essential for learning by some teachers. Added to that is the influence of the *guru* model of student- teacher dynamic. In the Buddhist and Hindu culture, the guru (teacher) is a highly respected member of society who is sometimes considered a conduit of the divine.[58] The *Guru* imparts his knowledge to his students but the student cannot reach the level of the guru. Sanath Athukorale explains the concept of *Gurumustiya* as follows,

> In the ancient educational system, the Guru has the power and authority to give his knowledge to anyone he wishes. However, the common practice was that most Gurus did not teach or give all their knowledge but kept the best to themselves. The main reason is the fear of the Guru that the disciples may misuse the knowledge. However, if the Guru is satisfied with a disciple who can be trusted, the full knowledge is taught, and appoints that disciple as the successor. If the Guru cannot find a disciple that can be trusted, most of the time, the Guru died along with all their knowledge.

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55. John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 7-8; Shaw, "A Welcome Guest": 21.

56. Shaw, "A Welcome Guest": 22.

57. Nouwen, *Reaching Out,* 44.

58. Sanath Kumara Athukorala, "A comparison of Jesus' Leadership Model and Sri Lankan Guru Model to Develop a Leadership Curriculum for the Pentecostal Church in Sri Lanka" unpublished dissertation (Korea, 2008) p41-42.

> However, on the other hand, some Gurus are selfish, and they do not want to see their disciples becoming greater than they do.[59]

To counteract this understanding, it has become common to hear lecturers at the Seminary tell students that we expect them to do better than us, and to reach greater heights. To say this is to challenge the concept of *gurumustiya.*

While we may be ready for students to become our friends, are we ready for guests to become hosts? Are our guests ready for that? When the status boundary is breached, this can sometimes be misunderstood. Students may now assume the teacher is weak, can be manipulated or can be taken advantage of. The teacher needs to be prepared for that and be willing to maintain discipline, be firm as well as fair and show competence. During the pandemic when all classes have been on-line, one colleague has found that his kindness has been rewarded with responsible responses. He has deposited some money with the administration so that a student who runs out of data can ask for an immediate add on, to ensure connectivity during the class. No one has abused that privilege, he says.

Small acts such as spending break time with students in the canteen rather than retreating to an office allows for lecturer and students to be guests together. Sometimes a student will delight in buying their teacher a cup of tea. In Sri Lankan culture, hierarchy is maintained even at mealtimes. This means that in a home, the male head of the house may sometimes eat at the table with guests, while his wife waits on them and then eats separately. People of a lower caste are generally not allowed to eat from the same utensils as a high caste family, and domestic workers will usually eat in the kitchen and not share the table or utensils with the family. So, sharing a meal at the canteen becomes a means of making a teacher accessible in more ways than one.

Co-teaching, where a trainee lecturer teaches

59. Athukorale , "A Comparison", 53.

alongside a senior lecturer allows students to glimpse what kind of relationship can exist between teachers, where a more senior lecturer contributes to a junior colleague's advancement. In a culture where envy and competitiveness is normal,[60] they see that a senior lecturer can promote the scholarship of his or her younger colleague and is not threatened by their rising up the ranks. At a workshop we held, that included students and teachers, a student came up afterwards and said that what struck her most was the way the faculty interacted as colleagues.

A hospitable teacher will be celebrating a students' success in ministry, even introducing them to ministry opportunities and showing them that the cultural tendency to envy has no place in the seminary.

What else can the host do to facilitate this reversal? Kornelsen says that authenticity is one characteristic of hospitable hosts. Authenticity includes the willingness to be vulnerable, allowing students to know about the teacher's weakness and faults as well as their dreams and desires.[61] This quality of authenticity is threatening to our perception of teacher-student hierarchy, but could be one of the ways we allow a student to turn host. Teachers who are secure in an identity that is not bound up in their job can discover in adult learners hosts who reveal, recognize, and serve up fresh insights to the class. Such teachers will not fear recognizing and appreciating the gifts of others, including their students. In a recent class a teacher was open about her spiritual journey, areas of weakness and even (unspecified) sins and the way that God had dealt with her. Students were then given an opportunity to share their own journey in small groups throughout the term. The students showed a similar willingness to share their vulnerabilities. It would be interesting to share these experiences as a faculty

60. Bruce Malina identifies envy as a consequence of the honour-shame culture's concept of limited good. That is, the view of reality that sees all that one desires in life as limited, including honour, influence, power and friendship. *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology,* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 89, 112-118.

61. Kornelsen, "Teaching with Presence": 74.

to see if firstly, this openness is shared across the three mediums (whose culture varies slightly) and if this is more likely among women students (the class observed being predominantly female).

Teachers who model lifelong learning will also be open to learning from students. "When we are no longer learning," warned Fried, "we no longer teach because we have lost the power to exemplify for young people what it means to be intellectually active. Even though we may still be able to present them with information, we have become simple purveyors of subject matter, "deliverers of educational services," in the jargon of the field."[62]

We might say that when we cease to learn, we become hosts who serve processed fast food instead of wholesome and nourishing fare.

While our class evaluations are geared towards documenting what students have learned from the teacher, maybe we could also include a time of reflecting on what students have learned from one another.

9. Conclusion

Sri Lankan culture values hospitality as did the Mediterranean lands of the Bible. If we have not considered this motif as applicable to theological education before, we can be comforted by Bennet's observation that "fortunately, hospitality is practiced more than it is preached."[63]

However, in our stratified and hierarchical culture, hospitality is often reserved for those of our social class and those we wish to honour. Many of our students enter the classroom carrying a level of brokenness and estrangement from their past and from ministry experiences, coupled with fears of how they will be perceived and treated. These fears and hurts limit the impact of the teacher's influence.

62. Fried, "Heart of the Matter"

63. John B. Bennett, "Teaching with Hospitality," podnetwork.org. http://programs.weber.edu/tlf/POD/packet12 v12n1teachingwithhospitality.htm. Originally published in *Teaching and Learning News* 10, no. 3 (2001): 88-89.

Creating a hospitable classroom requires intentionality on the part of the teacher who recognizes that having prepared well and being confident of their competency will then allow themselves to be, as well as do. It will challenge our natural cultural tendency to retain our position of authority, to want order and predictability and demonstrate our competence by having the last word. It will also challenge our desire to save face by being above criticism and avoiding any display of weakness, vulnerability, or willingness to change. It requires a genuine love for students, whether deserving or not, whether of our own theological stance or not and a willingness to empower them to think differently to us.

Taking cognisance of these dynamics, CTS has set out to practice classroom hospitality as stated in our Educational Philosophy.

> The classroom will be a safe environment where students and faculty are treated with respect. Our students' opinions and their questions will be taken seriously. Lecturers will treat students fairly with no partiality with regard to gender, race, denomination etc. Student evaluations will be accepted and acted on by the Seminary. Students will have no fear of reprisals for their feedback.

I recognise that the motif of hospitality will not provide the last word on our pedagogy. However, considering our culture and ministry context, re-visiting the various aspects of hospitality will surely help our students grow more whole and more confident to engage with a conflict-ridden world with grace and truth.

"IDENTITY CRISIS" OF POST-COLONIAL CHURCH ARCHITECTURE IN SRI LANKA[1]

ARCHT. SAGARA JAYASINGHE

Abstract: *With the Colonization of Asia, the Christian Church introduced a new form of religious architecture, which was much in contrast to the era's prevailing religious architecture. However, during the period of post-independence, 'the post-colonial church architecture' is seen as becoming resistant to the colonial identity. Within Asia, Sri Lanka is a country which has been colonised by three European powers, hence a good example for the study of the decolonisation process of religious architecture. The objective of this paper is to examine the typologies that were re-invented as alternative means of 'indigenous Christian identity' and also to analyse such architectural examples which illustrate the 'native form of the church' during the de-colonising process of religious architecture in Sri Lanka.*

Keywords: *De-colonization, Post-colonial church architecture, Indigenous Church identity and Inculturation*

1. The Asian context

Regarding the indigenisation of Christian art and architecture in Asia, Jyoti Sasi remarks–"the Church in Asia claims to date back to apostolic times. The Aramaic or Syrian Church which spread to the West coast of the Indian subcontinent, and further East as far as the Great Wall of China, became 'inculturated' from its very inception. (,) It is asserted that when Vasco de Gama touched the shores of Kerala, he found it difficult to distinguish between Christian places of worship and Hindu ones."[2] Nevertheless, the main forms of religious

1. This paper was originally presented for: ARCASIA (The Architects Regional Council Asia) Design Analysis Forum 2015, Ayutthaya, Thailand, 2015 – November.

2. Jyoti Sasi, "Incultured Art and Architecture," in *Rooting of Faith*

architecture in Asia can be seen as mostly the places of worship related to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam. From the 15th century onwards, along with the colonisation, the Christian missionaries introduced a new form of religious architecture to the region. Then–"subsequent to what may be called the colonial period … the dominant tendency of Christian art in Asia seemed to ape the styles in painting, sculptures and architecture which prevailed in the West."[3]

The religious space of the colonial church in Asia was seen as one of the many attempts to maintain the hegemony of colonial culture. As Masao Takenaka observes–"with few exceptions, most of churches in Asia are the product of the Western missionary movement, beginning with the period of geographical discovery."[4] During this era, although–"some of the missionaries were farsighted enough to advocate and encourage the indigenous expression of Christian faith from an early stage, generally Western forms of church structure and church architecture were transplanted in Asia. Moreover, many Asian churches at that time imported not only Western architectural styles for their buildings but also the interior decoration and atmosphere was often dominated by colonial mentality."[5]

In any case, the decolonisation process of Asia is a result of a gradual growth of independence movements, leading ultimately to the retreat of foreign powers and the creation of a number of nation-states in the region. It is evident that a number of events were catalysts for this shift, most notably World War II. However, prior to the Second World War, some countries in Asia, such as the Philippines had proclaimed independence from Spain in 1898. And the last state that was to gain independence was Macau

in Asia, ed. Mario Saturnino Dias. (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2005), 365.

3. Ibid., 365.

4. Masao Takenaka, *The Place Where God Dwells: An Introduction to church Architecture in Asia (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1995), 11.*

5. Ibid., 11.

in 1999.[6] Likewise, by the middle of the 20th century, within the period of 1945 to 1960 nearly 40 nations of the world acquired their political independence, which gave a clear signal that colonial domination was coming to an end.[7] Within this context, the Christian Churches of the de-colonised nations–"came under new political, cultural and social influences, especially the winds of freedom sweeping across the world. The mission centres, missionary societies, agencies and the missionary movements were forced to rethink their strategies."[8] In the arena of Church architecture, many events and agendas have been influential over the decades in creating a native expression of the universal Christian faith by integrating native culture and heritage with the church's worship.

2. The architecture of colonial churches of Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka had been ruled by three consecutive Euro-Christian nations for nearly 450 years from 1505 to 1948. It is a fact that apart from their pursuit of wealth and power while competing with one another, they attempted to implant their own brand of Christianity in the colonies: Portuguese – Catholic, Dutch – Calvinist and British – Anglican. However, up to the 16th century, the dominating form of religious architecture in Sri Lanka was the Buddhist temple which is "comprised of a seemingly informal arrangement of several buildings including the stupa, the image house, the monk's residence and preaching hall; buildings ranging from the porous flexibility of a collonaded space to the solid mass of the stupa."[9] Subsequently, with the establishment of Portuguese control over the country's coastal areas in the 16th century, a new form of religious architecture made its appearance– the Catholic Church. This new architecture, which was

6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decolonisation_of_Asia
7. Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi. *Faithing the Native Soil (Colombo: Center for Society and Religion, 2012), 121.*
8. Ibid., 121.
9. Anoma Peiris. *Imagining Modernity: the Architecture of Valantine Gunasekara (Pannipitiya: Stamford Lake Pvt Ltd, 2007), 94*

implanted with a missionary identity, was so much in contrast to the prevailing architecture of Sri Lanka. As post-colonial critic Anoma Peiris suggested, "their intention was to emphasise the distinctiveness of the Roman Catholic religion."[10] The studies regarding the earliest churches which were built during the Portuguese period suggest that two types of architectural forms emerged: one comprised small churches with a single nave; the other consisted of larger churches built in stone, with three naves divided by large columns.[11] Today it is not possible to find any one of the Portuguese churches except for the ruins of the chapel in the Kalpitiya Fort (North-Western Province), the church of Holy Trinity in Chankanai (Northern Province) and the church of Our Lady of Assumption in Vaddukottai (Northern Province).

Later, during the Dutch occupation from the mid 17th century to the end of 18th century, under the decisive period of persecution of Catholicism by the Dutch, "many Roman Catholic churches were modified or destroyed to be replaced by Dutch Reformed churches with their Greek cross plan and high gable ends."[12] Ronald Lewcock describes this situation as–"the buildings were often re-decorated, and sometimes given entirely new facades, less 'post-reformation' than those of the Portuguese, i.e. the Dutch replaced the superimposed ranges of engaged Baroque orders with plain facades confirming more to Calvinist taste".[13] The most notable examples of Dutch Reformed churches of this period are the Groote Kerk (1755) in Galle Fort (Southern Province) and the Wolvendaal Kerk (1757) in Colombo (Western Province).

By the beginning of the 19th century, with the advent of the British occupation, the Roman Catholics

10. Ibid., 94.

11. Hélder Carita,"Portuguese-Influenced Religious Architecture in Ceylon: Creation, Types and Continuity" in *Re-exploring the Links: History and Constructed Histories between Portugal and Sri Lanka, edi. Jorge Flores. (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2007), 272.*

12. Peiris. *Imagining Modernity, 95.*

13. R.K.de Silva and W.G.M Beumer. *Illustrations and Views of Dutch Ceylon 1602 – 1796 (London: Serendib Publications, 1988), 122.*

were liberated and were free to exercise their religion once again. In addition to Indian Oratorian missionaries, who had already laboured in the country, Sri Lanka was entrusted to the Italian congregation of Sylvestrine Benedictines and French congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. It is suggested that the arrival of these European congregations set the beginning of a new tradition in the missionary architecture of Sri Lanka. This distinctive "change to a strongly European church architecture can be attributed to the influx of missionaries from Europe who brought with them Gothic and Roman architectural styles."[14] In the context of the architectural style, the forms of these churches–"were hierarchic, symmetrical, typically a cruciform plan with nave and transept and with a dome incorporated into some of the larger churches. (,) In scale, they loomed large above the architecture of indigenous residences and temples."[15] The best examples of churches built during this period are St. Philip Neri's (1862) church in Colombo (Western Province), St. Mary's church (1870) in Negombo (Western Province), St. Jame's church (1873) in Mutwal (Western Province), St. Mary's cathedral (1876) in Galle (Sothern Province) and St. Anthony's cathedral (1877) in Kandy (Central Province). The finest of these is the present cathedral of Colombo St. Lucia's (1889) in Kotahena (Western Province).

At the same time, during this period several numbers of Protestant missionary societies also took root in Sri Lanka: the Baptists in 1812, the Methodists in 1814 and the American Mission in 1816. Finally, the Anglican Church was established in 1818 as an extra-provincial diocese of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Regarding the architectural style of Anglican churches–"the preferred architectural style was Gothic, and for three-quarters of a century, churches were built in style best described as Modified Gothic (called Victorian Gothic by hostile critics)."[16] Unlike

14. Peiris. *Imagining Modernity, 95.*
15. Ibid., 95.
16. F. Lorenz Beven, ed. *A History of Diocese of Colombo: A Centenary*

the church architecture during preceding colonial powers that had undergone many transformations – "British colonial churches seemed to have been transplanted from some little town in England."[17] This architectural style is remarkably exemplified in the St. Paul's Church in Kandy (1848), the Christ Church cathedral (1854) in Mutwal and the All Saints Church (1871) in Galle.

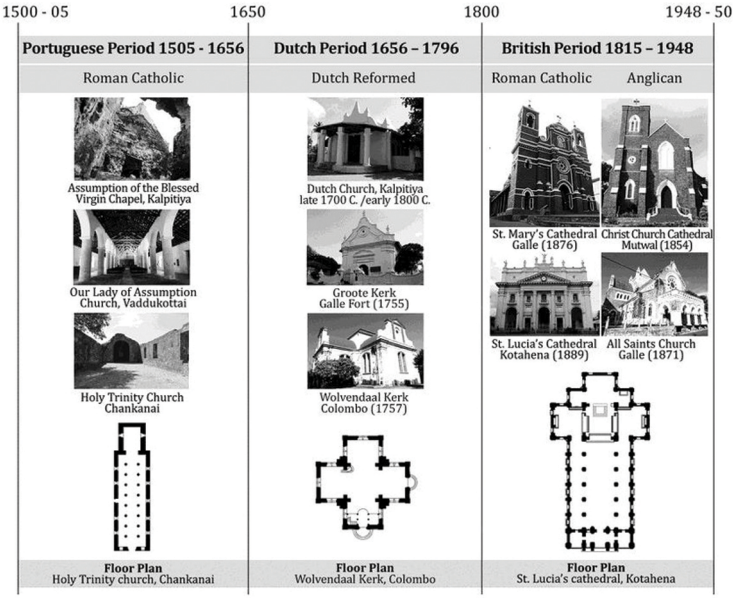

Figure 1 Timeline chart of church architecture of colonial Sri Lanka (Author, August 2015)

Volume (Colombo: The Times of Ceylon Co. Ltd.), 401.

17. Anoma Peiris. "The Trouser under the Cloth: Ceylon/Sri Lanka, personal space in decolonization" (MSc diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1994), 41.

3. The decolonisation process and the impact of nationalist movements

The decolonisation process of church architecture in Sri Lanka needs to be understood within the context of anti-colonial nationalist movements that emerged in the late 19th century. It is noted that these reformist movements, especially the Buddhist revivalists, radically influenced the process of indigenisation of the colonial church. For instance–there have been some genuine efforts, especially on the part of the Anglican Church to become an indigenous faith as early as the 1930's when the word 'Anglican' was dropped, and it began to call itself as 'The Church of Ceylon'[18] as an autonomous local church.

Since the architectural dimension of colonial period, church buildings had been neo-classical in style with no pretensions of a context or identity of the country–"the rising challenge of Buddhism during the early years of anti-colonial nationalism produced an exemplary shift towards an indigenised expression in church architecture. Pressure against Christianity led to the adaptation of Buddhist architectural forms for both Protestant and Catholic churches."[19] On the other hand–"the pressure of criticism against the Christians in Sri Lanka had increased with the growing strength of the nationalist discourse and an effort needed to be made in support of their endeavour."[20] As a result–the influence of nationalism came in the 1930s in the form of religious architecture.[21] The buildings that chose to make this statement were the chapels of Trinity College (1935) in Kandy (Central Province) and Teacher Training College (1920) in Peradeniya (Central Province).

18. Hettiarachchi. *Faithing the Native Soil, 222.*
19. Peiris. *Imagining Modernity, 95.*
20. Peiris. *The Trouser under the Cloth, 124.*
21. Ibid., 124.

3.1 Chapel of Trinity College, Kandy

Referring to the necessity of building a chapel for Trinity College[22], McLeod Campbell[23] spoke to BBC network in 1931 and quipped – "their thoughts naturally turned to the re-discovery of their ancient heritage. They could not be content to fall back upon the traditions of Byzantine, classical or Gothic architecture. They set their hearts upon revivifying, re-interpreting and adopting for purposes of Christian worship, their own great Sinhalese traditions…It is not enough to translate the scripture into the vernacular tongue: their message must be interpreted in terms of vernacular thoughts and culture."[24]

The chapel is cruciform in plan and comprises a nave, transepts, a chancel, a side-chapel and a tower – accommodating a vestry and a belfry.[25]

The specific form that inspired for the Trinity College Chapel was a collonaded hall that existed in several examples of the traditional architecture of historical eras. The forest of fifty stone pillars standing on a high stone podium closely resembled the king's Audience Hall[26] in Kandy. The top and bottom of each pillar are square. But the main stem remains octagonal with carved panels of square facets, carved with traditional motifs of "pineapple design", "lotus flower" and "cobra hood" with an occasional introduction of the crucifix. The capitols of stone pillars

22. Trinity College in Kandy was founded in 1872 by the Anglican missionaries. The chapel was completed in 1935. The architect was Rev. L J Gaster who had been the vice principal of the college from 1916-1921.

23. McLeod Campbell was the principal of the college from 1924-1935. Most part of the chapel building was erected during his tenure.

24. Peiris. *The Trouser under the Cloth, 124. And Centenary Magazine, of Trinity College Kandy 1872-1972, 76-77*

25. Lakshman Alwis. *British Period Architecture in Sri Lanka (Colombo: Vasthu Shilpa, 2003), 34.*

26. The construction of the Audience Hall of Kandy began in 1783 during the reign of King Rajadhi Rajasinghe and completed by King Sri Vikrama Rajasinghe. The building has been designed to suit the state functions with tall carved pillars resting on stone bases and are morticed into huge beams of the wooden roof.

are in timber and carved in traditional details of 'Pékadas'[27] representing the inverted lotus blooms.

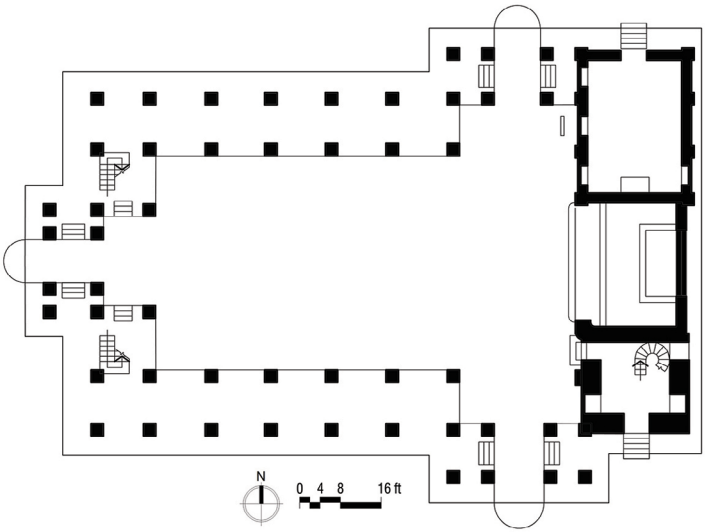

Figure 2 Ground floor plan of Trinity College chapel, Kandy (Source: J McLeod Campbell. A Sinhalese Chapel for Trinity College, Kandy 1926)

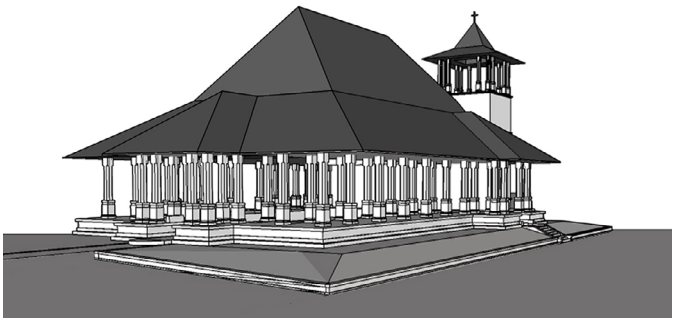

Figure 3 Perspective view of Trinity College chapel, Kandy (Author, August 2015)

27. 'Pékada' is a traditional decorative pillar capital which is morticed into the top of the pillar to carry the load of the large beams.

The entire wall behind the altar is transformed by a life-size mural of the crucifixion. The theme of the murals, though biblical in inspiration, was always represented in a localised context with local people as its models which further indigenised the interior. However, the architectural details of the chapel – "differ marginally from its traditional antecedents. The columns, unlike in the Kandyan period timber tradition, are of stone. (,) At the roof level, there is a major deviation where steel trusses replace the traditional expectation of large timber beams."[28]

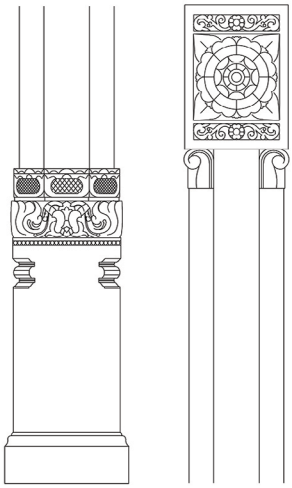

Figure 4 Typical column base and a capital, Trinity College chapel, Kandy (Author, August 2015)

According to Anoma Peiris – "the importance of the Trinity College chapel lies in its ability to reformulate our conceptions of church architecture. In a colonial typology that was most imitative of European styles, it has achieved a complete reversal. In doing so, it has created a building that is far closer to the pre-colonial cultural experience of

28. Peiris. *The Trouser under the Cloth, 125.*

the people."[29] And she further writes – "whereas previously stained-glass windows had been imported from Europe, from this period onwards local artists . . . began to paint scenes based on indigenous themes, inside churches. They used local fisherfolk or indigenous plants and landscapes for their inspiration. Moreover, the use of local materials such as timber and brass, particularly for the tabernacle, and the application of motifs typically found in Buddhist temples further indigenised the churches."[30]

4. The sway of post political Independence

Sri Lanka was granted independence in 1948 as a Dominion nation within the British Empire. From this episode onwards–"the desire to indigenous church architecture responded to the rise of a form of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. Although it was guided by an act of self-preservation, it had originated in a concerted effort by the church leaders to voice their own support for the nationalist cause during the quest for independence."[31] Thus, the initiatives are taken by the 'Christian nationalists' with the authority of priests greatly influenced the Christian architecture of the island, especially in the immediate post-independence era. It can be noticed that during this period, 'indigenisation of colonial expression' had become a necessity; many of the new churches deliberately adopted the forms of Buddhist aesthetics. As Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi point-outs–"these attempts to become indigenous ecclesial communities, rather than churches planted in the manner and style of their 'mother church' in Europe or elsewhere, developed a praxis that led to relations with other national movements."[32] Once again, the Anglican Church led the process of indigenisation as an ecclesial priority in several projects in this era. The continuation

29. Ibid., 126.
30. Peiris. *Imagining Modernity, 96.*
31. Ibid., 96.
32. Hettiarachchi. *Faithing the Native Soil, 123.*

of preceding architectural experiments of the Anglicans was demonstrated in their cathedrals of 'Christ the King' (1960) in Kurunegala (North-Western Province) and 'Christ the Living Savior' (1973) in Colombo (Western Province).

Figure 5 Exterior & interior view of Christ the King cathedral, Kurunegala (Author, 2015 July)

The plan of the Cathedral of 'Christ the King',[33] Kurunegala is cruciform. Most of the architectural details of the building have been inspired by the traditional architecture of the Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Kandyan periods. The main feature of the superstructure of the building is the Buddhist Octagon.[34] Another noteworthy detail is the arches found in the building as in the Lankathilaka temple. Following the Hindu concept of Vimana[35], the altar of the cathedral is placed within the highest part of the building.[36] The roof of this sacred area has been constructed as an octagon structure to resemble the form of "Paththirippuwa"[37] of Temple of Tooth Relic in Kandy.

33. The cathedral of Christ the King in Kurunagala was designed by architect P. H. Wilson Peiris of the Public Works Department and it was took shape under the direction of Bishop Lakdasa de Mel, an Asian pioneer of indigenous art and the first Sri Lankan to become a bishop. The cathedral was consecrated on 21st January 1960.

34. Fredrick Medis, ed. *The Church of Ceylon: A history 1945-1995 (Colombo: Diocese of Colombo, 1995), 122.*

35. The term 'Vimana' is commonly used for the pyramid-shaped roof-tower above the Shrines of south Indian Hindu temples.

36. Fredrick Medis, ed. *The Church of Ceylon: A history 1945-1995 (Colombo: Diocese of Colombo, 1995), 108.*

37. The octagon shape structure which had been used as the

4.1 Cathedral of Christ the Living Savior, Colombo

The apex of architectural experiments of the post-independence era is seen in the Cathedral of Christ the Living Savior[38], Colombo Although the architectural form of the cathedral is reminiscent of a Buddhist temple, it goes a step further, and attempts to give a contemporary statement of Christian sacred space and a rationale for the process of indigenisation within the context of architecture. The theological background of the cathedral is stated as follows – "the whole mission of the cathedral must take into account the biblical plan of personal and social salvation and the authentic Scriptural tradition conveyed through the early fathers and the history of the Church of the East and the West down the ages, as we seek in our own day to bring to God's Kingdom the riches of our own land with the riches of all the nations."[39]

The hexagonal shape of the main space and its two-tiered roof is intended to look like a tent: which is to remind the faithful that even while they seek to live meaningfully and relevantly, they have no abiding place here, and are but sojourners on earth. An effort has been made to make the building an open place. The slope of the floor downwards towards the sanctuary suggests the glory of God who came down to earth to dwell among the people. Therefore, the bishop, priests and people are all seated at the same level. The communion table (altar) has been placed in a central position to receive a great prominence in the building, suggesting the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the midst of the people. The entire building looks unfinished. It is by design in order to constantly remind the faithful of the unfinished task accomplishing the journey of the mission.

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symbol of identity of Kandyan period architecture.

38. The cathedral of Christ the Living Savior was designed by Wynne Jones and P. H. Wilson Peiris. The foundation stone was laid on 28th October 1968 and was consecrated on 7th November 1973.

39. Cathedral of Christ the Living Savior, 25th Anniversary Souvenir 1973-1998

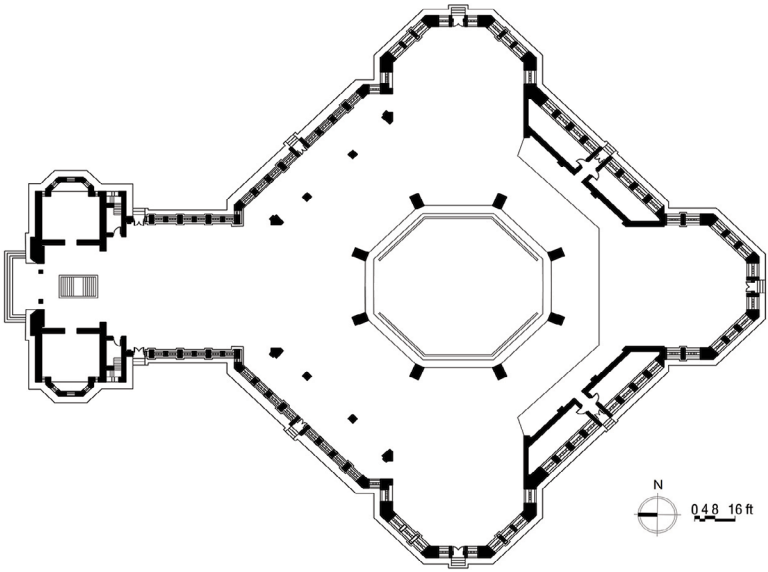

Figure 6 Ground floor plan of Christ the Living Savior Cathedral, Colombo (Author, 2015 August)

Figure 7 Perspective view of Christ the Living Savior Cathedral, Colombo (Author, 2015 August)

Figure 8 Exterior & interior view of Christ the Living Savior Cathedral (Author, 2015 August)

5. The renewal of Second Vatican Council andits impact on the Catholic Church

Like most of the post-colonial nations in Asia, the process of decolonisation of church architecture in Sri Lanka also coincided with the – "evolution towards community–based forms in Roman Catholic Church architecture worldwide"[40], initiated by the Second Vatican Council[41] (also known as Vatican II) in the 1970s. The council recommends that the church should everywhere become a 'native Church' integrated into the national cultures, and it also advocates a wholesome feeling for the country, while it warns of excessive nationalism.[42] From this point, the missiological[43] and ecclesiastical[44] approaches which give the worshiper a sense of native expression in art and architecture, signs and symbols, postures and gestures of

40. Peiris. *Imagining Modernity, 96.*

41. Vatican II was the twenty-first ecumenical council of the Catholic Church and the second to be held at Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. It was opened under the pontificate of Pope John XXIII in 1962 and closed under Pope Paul VI in 1965.

42. Dornberg, Ulrich. "Searching through the Crisis", *Logos, 31, nos 3 & 4, (1992), 44.*

43. Missiology is defined as the theological study of the mission of the church, especially the character and purpose of missionary work.

44. Ecclesiology is defined as the study of church architecture and adornment.

the liturgy were commonly termed as 'inculturation'. In technical interpretation – "inculturation has become the viable substitute for indigenisation, even though one finds these two terms being used interchangeably in certain missio-theological writings. It is commonly accepted that this term is Roman Catholic in origin and inspiration".[45]

The sanctions of Vatican II emphasised the original form of service as prevailed in the times of Catacombs where the priest faced the congregation and prayed with them as part of the community.[46] Therefore architectural inculturation has enabled the forms and functions of church architecture to transform from universal standards to local variations. Thus–"this shift instigated a complete re-conceptualisation of church design to a spatial organisation that was closer to indigenous or traditional patterns."[47] The implementation of Vatican II liturgical reforms in Sri Lanka created more opportunities to the Catholic Church to extend and continue architectural experiments like their counterparts in the immediate pre- Vatican period.

Vatican II also brought in a change of the architecture in the interior of the church. The ornately carved altars were no longer in vogue, and instead, a single slab embodying the idea of a table was used as the altar conforming to the said reforms of Vatican II. The council devoted – "a whole chapter to the subject of sacred art and furnishings, in its 'Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy', but left it to the territorial bodies of bishops to adapt matters to local needs and customs."[48] This change in thought too made many churches use the cross as the central symbol and thereby removed the relevant statue of the Saint in whose name the church was dedicated to, to a

45. A. J. V. Chandrakanthan. *Catholic Revival in Post-Colonial Sri Lanka: A critique of Ecclesial Contextualization (Colombo: Social and Economic Developments Centre, 1995), 08.*

46. Manel Abhayaratna. *Reflections of Faith (Colombo: Archbishop's House, 1996), 170.*

47. Peiris. *Imagining Modernity, 96.*

48. Julian Saldanha. *Inculturatio, (Mumbai: St. Paul's, 1997), 84.*

side niche.[49] In terms of re-modelling and re-furnishing of the interior, from this period onwards traditional arts and crafts like colourful lacquer work have adorned the wooden facets on crosses, communion rails and candlesticks etc. It can also be noticed that local designs and materials including "Batik" have been used for altar furnishings.

Figure 9 Exterior and interior view of Basilica of Our Lady of Lanka, Ragama (Ranal Murray, 2014)

The Votive Basilica of Our Lady of Lanka[50] (1974) in Ragama (Western Province) can be seen as a precedent for the architectural programme which was sandwiched between the post-colonial Sri Lanka and the world of Vatican II. The Catholic Church has even tried to promote the Basilica of Ragama as the 'National Shrine' of the native Catholic community of Sri Lanka. In that sense the dedication of the Basilica is significant; it was consecrated under the title of 'Our Lady of Lanka'. Lotus flower, another national symbol of Sri Lanka was incorporated to the statue of Our Lady of Lanka.[51] From an architectural point of view, it was intended to meet the requirements of combining ecclesiastical tradition with oriental architecture. However,

49. Abhayaratna. *Reflections of Faith, 171.*

50. The Basilica of Ragama was commenced by the Sri Lanka's first indigenous Archbishop Thomas Cardinal Cooray who represents Sri Lanka at the Second Vatican Council. Even though the construction of the Basilica was started in 1950 the building took many years to complete and finally it was consecrated in 1974

51. Chandrakanthan. *Catholic Revival in Post-Colonial Sri Lanka, 44.*

the original plan[52] tended to be more weighted on the side of Indian traditions, particularly the 'Chaitiya Salawa' model.[53]

5.1 St. Philip Neri's Church, Kalutara

The peculiarity of the architectural programme of Vatican II era is well attested in the Church of St. Philip Neri[54] (1968), Kalutara (Western Province).

The layout of the church is a conventional cruciform with two verandahs that run along the length of the sidewalls of the nave. Next to the main façade, a high choir supported by two columns can be seen in the interior.

Even though the structure has acquired some indigenous motifs and sculptural establishments, the overall architectural dimensions and proportions of the main façade and other two lateral façades still duplicate the gravity of a colonial church.

The most significant element of the building is the octagon structures atop the main entrance and the sanctuary: it has been constructed similar to the "Paththirippuwa" of the Temple of Tooth Relic, Kandy.

52. The original design of the Basilica was prepared by the Proto-Dravidian historian and archaeologist Rev. Henry Heras, a Spanish Jesuit who served in India from 1922. He was acknowledged to be the "Father of Christian Indian Art" as he did much to render Christian themes through Indian symbols and styles of art in painting, sculpture, iconography, and architecture.

53. Abhayaratna. *Reflections of Faith, 182.*

54. St. Philip Neri's church was the brainchild of Rev. Henry Rodrigo OMI, the builder of similar church of St. Mary's, Badalgama (Western Province) which was begun in 1953 and completed in 1957.

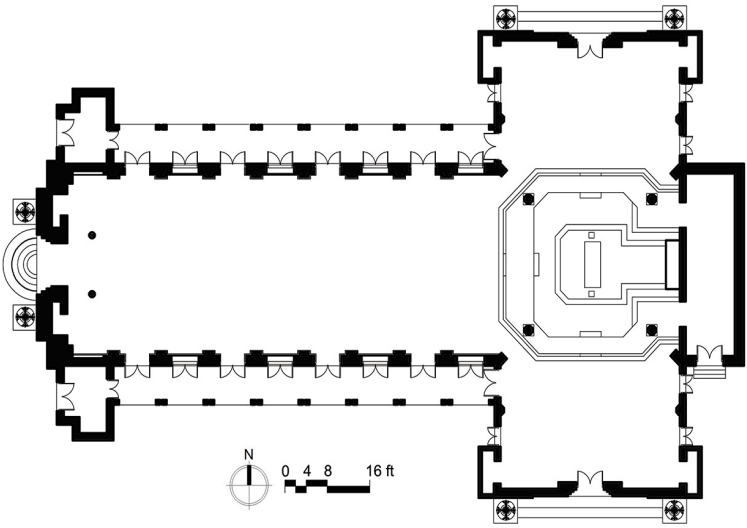

Figure 10 Ground floor plan of St. Philip Neri's church, Kalutara (Author, 2015 August)

Figure 11 Perspective view of St. Philip Neri's church, Kalutara (Author, 2015 August)

The symmetrical pair of large lotus-shaped "Punkalasa"[55] and a highly ornate semi-circular "Sandakada Pahana"[56] have been carved at the church's main entrance the entrance of an ancient Buddhist monastic building in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa periods.

Most of the decorative details of the church are seen to have been inspired by numerous representations of traditional lotus flower designs.

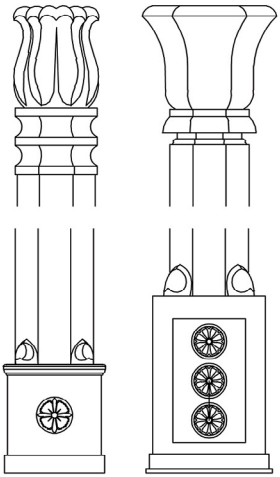

Figure 12 Pilaster/ column bases and capitals
St. Philip Neri's church, Kalutara (Author, 2015 August)

6. Conclusion

The architectural identity of any Christian church goes hand in hand with its ecclesiological perspective. Ecclesiology guides the architecture and its adornment

55. '*Punkalasa' is an ornamental stone pot carved with different representations of lotus flower designs. It was used as a symbol of prosperity, good luck and abundance in most of buildings and landscapes of ancient days.*

56. '*SandakadaPahana' also known as Moonstone, is generally a carved semi-circular stone slab which stood at the foot of a flight of steps in most of ancient Buddhist buildings of historical periods.*

of a particular church, and in turn, architectural identity expresses the ecclesiology in a particular historical period. Therefore, the de-colonised church architecture in Sri Lanka must be viewed as the "history of a marginal tradition"[57] with colonial origins and relations. It is evident the making of architectural identity of the 'indigenous church' in Sri Lanka can be deliberated under two considerable periods. They are: firstly, in general, with the attempts made at the process of cultural revival by emergent 'nationalist movements' formed within the country both before and after political independence and secondly, in particular, the process of 'Catholic inculturation' after the liturgical reformation of Second Vatican Council of the 1970s.

However, the Anglican Church has played the pioneering role in this process. It can be understood that while the Anglican Church seemed to have granted more liberty for architectural experiments as a result of their autonomy as a local church, the Catholic Church until the Vatican II tended to think in terms of universal and Roman categories and standards. The overall reading of architectural characteristics of the above discussed architectural examples of 'native church' suggests that there are three forms of experimentations;

1. Replication of existing forms of traditional temple and palace architecture.
2. Repetition of existing forms of colonial church architecture
3. Innovation of new forms with theological rationale

57. Peiris. *Imagining Modernity*, 94.

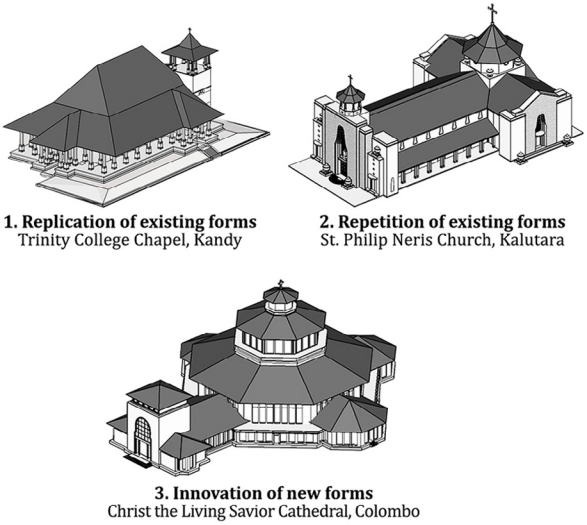

Figure 13 Comparison of forms of experimentations (Author, 2015 August)

While Trinity College Chapel, Kandy and Teacher Training College Chapel, Peradeniya convey very clear examples of replication of existing forms of the traditional temple and palace architecture, repetition of existing forms of colonial period church architecture can be seen in Christ the King Cathedral, Kurunegala, Basilica of Ragama and St. Philip Neri's, Kalutara. The Christ the Living Savior Cathedral, Colombo is an example of Innovation of new forms with theological rationale.

It is remarked that all these typologies are more or less identically embellished with oriental overtones which have been used as practical and obvious solutions for the church becoming indigenous. But there was an inherent problem with this kind of overtones of architectural features; that is, they had their own historically developed religious symbolism that conveyed typically Buddhist and Hindu world views. During this decolonisation process, it is noticed that this cross-cultural adaptation occurred without much awareness and reflection on these Hindu-Buddhist

symbolisms. Since religious architecture has deeply rooted traditions, it always connotes a meaning, and it is evident that architectural details cannot be uprooted from one culture and imposed in another in an arbitrary manner without genuine sensitivity to its historical unfolding.

According to Anoma Peiris, this cross-cultural appropriation can be interpreted in two ways: as a genuine effort to fit in with indigenous culture or an effort to disguise the unfamiliar in a more acceptable form.[58] However, especially decorative embellishment of post-Vatican II Catholic church buildings in Sri Lanka was not resilient enough to hide the architectural character that had been consolidated in the minds of the local Catholic community over the previous centuries. Post-colonial critics like Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi reasons Christian thinkers and leaders of that period – "had no pre-colonial perception of the self-understanding of Christianity, except to accept a colonial construction of Christian expression. It is for this reason that a process of indigenisation was imperative as the churches lacked a pre-colonial body of knowledge and a possibility of an indigenous Christianity, as in the case of the Kerala experience of an indigenised Christianity of the Ma Thoma (St. Thomas) tradition."[59], On the other hand, it is regretted that during this period local churches in Sri Lanka had lost the opportunity to experiment with a local style of Christian architectural tradition, more importantly – "to situate the Christian understanding of sacred time and space within the context of building techniques which have been evolved to suit local environmental conditions."[60] Hence the following observation can be made in this regard: that so far the attempts at indigenisation have been inadequate–"as churches could not sustain indigenisation arising with its natural manifestations."[61]

58. Ibid., 94.
59. Hettiarachchi. *Faithing the Native Soil*, 225.
60. Sasi. "Incultured Art and Architecture", 369.
61. Hettiarachchi. *Faithing the Native Soil*, 223.

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