



Christian Conference of Asia

# Lord, Send Your Light and Truth to Lead Us

**Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly**

6–13 April 2018 | Manado, Indonesia



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**Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia**

**6-13 April, 2018**

**Lord, Send Your Light and Truth to Lead Us  
Report of the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly**

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## ***Foreword***

When the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) kicked off in Manado, Indonesia, on 6 April 2018, it was the first such gathering in 34 years. Since I arrived in Manado two days before the AEYA was opened, my memory began retracing some of the history of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), especially my own participation in a similar kind of youth assembly, initiated and organised by CCA 34 years ago in 1984, which was held at St. Stephen's College in New Delhi, India. The first Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly by Asian Christian Conference was held in 1964. The AEYA–2018 was a major ecumenical youth event bringing together over 350 young men and women belonging to CCA member churches and councils from 23 countries across Asia and the Pacific and addressed some of the most pertinent issues in today's globalised world.

The young Asian Christians who came together tried to contemplate, worship, learn from one another, make new friends and create networks. When they left after spending six days together in fellowship, they testified that they were taking with them new insights on what they heard, discussed, and understood through their interactions and mutual learnings on issues and themes such as interfaith dialogue, the impact of digitalisation on spirituality, artificial intelligence, gender justice, HIV and AIDS, and social issues such as poverty, human trafficking, migration, sustainable development, family values and marginalisation. We provided a platform for young Asian ecumenists to meet and speak their minds.

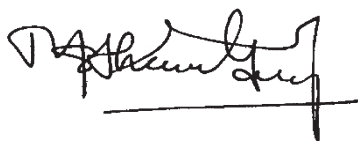
The deliberations of the AEYA became eye-opening for the young participants who came from diverse backgrounds. They understood the emerging issues better and reflected on Christian perspectives. Our humble effort was to make them understand Asia's diversities and to think in terms of unity within such diversities. We tried to equip them to think more sharply, beyond their traditional orbits. The entire event turned out well.

Engaging more young people in the ecumenical movement became a priority for the CCA since the new strategic programme plan was introduced at the beginning of the post-Jakarta Assembly period. The new strategic programme plan adopted by the newly elected governing board of CCA in 2015 included several programmes aimed at the ecumenical formation of young people, as well as their training and leadership development. Opportunities for year-long internship programmes at CCA's headquarters in Chiang Mai, Thailand, also became part of youth leadership development, and the

interns themselves were taking the lead in coordinating ecumenical youth leadership development as well as major events like AEYA. Recognising the fact that our youngsters are the future of the church and ecumenical movement, we have been trying to introduce creative and innovative ways to engage them. While making such efforts, we realised that this has not been an easy task because in general, today's youths are less engaged in the ecumenical movement than the young generation that lived and worked about 20 years ago. Today, youth movements are becoming weaker, and that is why we have to renew our efforts and attract more young people to the church and ecumenical movement. The young people of today are well-versed, extremely knowledgeable, confident, and independent; no one can influence them unless they are convinced. We cannot underestimate these young Asians. We have to nurture them properly, encourage their positive spirits, and give them more opportunities.

The socio-economic and cultural trends that we see emerging in today's era of 'digital nomadisation', is one where young people spend more and more time on internet-based jobs in different locations of the world as they move from place to place or country to country, instead of being physically present in one particular workstation or a fixed work environment. Consequently, young people are distancing themselves from the church and spiritual values. The question that arises in this context is whether this lifestyle brings young people closer to, or further away from, the church, and how the church can respond to such situations. We should not allow young people to cut themselves off from their roots in the church. It is time to think about an appropriate strategy to engage them. AEYA was thus meant to be a stepping-stone in a special direction to engage the youth through participation in the ecumenical network.

The issues facing today's youth are far different from what they were a few years ago. The proceedings of the AEYA focused on addressing several contemporary issues. The reports and summary of proceedings included in this volume are helpful indicators to understand the trends and concerns addressed by the Asian Christian youth in a particular historical juncture and context.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr. Mathews George Chunakara', written over a horizontal line.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara  
*General Secretary, Christian Conference of Asia*

# **Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) – 2018**

## **Manado Declaration**

### **‘Lord, Send Your Light and Truth to Lead Us’**

#### **Preamble**

“Lord, send your Light and Truth to lead us.” (Psalm 43:3)

We, the youth leaders of Asia, have gathered from twenty-three countries and around 100 Christian denominations and ecumenical councils for the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) from 6 to 13 April 2018 in Manado, Indonesia. We are committed to journeying together as youth from the Christian Conference of Asia’s (CCA) member churches and councils in search of light and truth in Asia’s diverse contexts. We listened to and discussed the current and future challenges in our local contexts. We strongly desire, as a united cohort of young Asian Christians, to have the mindset of Christ and to be his hands and feet (1 Corinthians 12:12–31). We seek God’s light and truth in our world that is increasingly overcome by darkness. Therefore, we want to be advocates of justice and peace in the changing times and the era of globalisation.

#### **Our Affirmation**

##### **Peace**

We affirm that:

- God creates diversities, such as race, sexualities, and abilities.
- God desires peace on earth (Isaiah 2) within our diversity. All religions bring peace, love, and justice; however, religious fundamentalism and radicalism are causing pain and suffering to people in our member countries, particularly in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, Laos, and the Philippines.
- God desires us to unite for good (Romans 8:28); however, we are hurt by the human-made divisions in Asia, particularly in the Korean Peninsula, Myanmar, Philippines, and Bangladesh.

##### **Justice**

We affirm that:

- We are created to coexist with all Creation (Isaiah 11:6–9); however, we are exploiting our environment by taking more than we need, not being good stewards of Creation.

- God desires humans to have a holistic life (Mark 2:1–12), free of stigma and discrimination; however, due to our ignorance and apathy, marginalised people, such as people living with HIV and people with disabilities, are still facing stigma and discrimination in our churches and communities. Consequently, there is limited access to care and education. The churches have not been adequately providing space for marginalised individuals to contribute their spiritual gifts.
- We are created as interdependent (Genesis 1) beings; however, there are people who are consumed by their own greed, taking the life out of our neighbour. Consequently, our neighbour, living in socioeconomic and financial disadvantages, is forced into migration and human trafficking.
- We are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27); but because of sin entering humanity (Genesis 3), the Church has historically had a distorted understanding of gender and sexuality.
- We recognise that we as a church have sinned against women and LGBTIQ+ individuals. They have been excluded, discriminated against and, in some cases, subjected to violence from the church. We recognise that there are a variety of views on gender roles and sexual orientations, and therefore we must respect one another's views. However, we are given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:14–18). As God reconciled us through Jesus, we also seek to be reconciled with those the church has injured.
- God desires the young to be nurtured (Proverbs 22:6); however, the ultimate aim of education in Asian societies has been unnecessary competitiveness, disproportionate wealth accumulation, and self-centred prestige. This culture has encouraged jealousy, greed and consumerism (1 Timothy 6:9–10). The real purpose of education is to nurture gifts and talents given to us and to transform communities.

## **Changing Times**

Technological advancements are unavoidable, and they are rapidly transforming the economic and social contours of the world in which we live.

We affirm that:

- God creates humans to edify themselves in creativity, to use available resources for the fullness of life (John 10:10); however, misuse of technology has harmed Creation.

- Social media and digitisation have made the world a smaller place by connecting people and providing them with novel work opportunities; however, it has also created platforms that admire inauthentic virtual images of self-edification and virtual activism without real engagement. It offers the young generation new freedoms but also instability and vulnerabilities. We are susceptible to becoming digital nomads with limited direction on how to use online spaces fruitfully.
- Futuristic technologies, like Artificial Intelligence, are likely to make inroads into our lives sooner than later. The Churches need to be wisely adaptive to new technology in the changing context.
- Indigenous technology and local wisdom must also be appreciated and supported.
- The concept of 'family' is changing from a traditional understanding to a variety of definitions; consequently, conflicts occur in the church. This has led to the exclusion, discrimination, and isolation of members of the church who do not fulfill the traditional concept, such as single parents, the divorced, and the unmarried.
- Many young people suffer from conditions like depression due to unemployment, cyberbullying, loneliness, social expectation, etc. However, the churches have not adequately addressed mental health issues, contributing to people's self-harm and, in some cases, suicide.
- There are certain communities in Asia facing militarisation issues. It was brought up only in small-group discussions, but we affirm its impact on the lives of young Asians.

## **Our Response**

We call on the CCA's member churches and councils to:

- Celebrate diversities by accepting and respecting religious others, through interreligious dialogues.
- Set aside a prayer day for peace.
- Support peaceful resolutions to conflicts, such as peace talks and peace processes, particularly in the Korean Peninsula, Myanmar, Philippines, and Sri Lanka.
- Proactively engage with marginalised communities and accompany them in their journey to be recognised, listened to, respected, and treated equally, particularly the Dalits and the tribals in India and the Lumads in the Philippines.

- Apologise for actions and inactions that have preserved the mistreatment of women and our LGBTIQ+ siblings. We seek to be more hospitable and welcoming church communities, seeking to be reconciled with them. We advocate continued pastoral care for them in their journey towards healing.
- Break physical and attitudinal barriers that prevent persons with disability from participating in the life of churches.
- End the stigma and discrimination towards people who are marginalised, including those who are living with HIV, by providing adequate awareness, information, care, and support.
- Discourage using non-biodegradable products, especially single-use plastic, in their meetings and conferences.
- Advocate climate justice by initiating programs in the local and national contexts.
- Stand with, support and empower families affected by human trafficking (Leviticus 19:34); and engage in advocacy with governments, non-government organisations, and civil society groups for the recognition of the human rights of people on the move and their families.
- Embrace futuristic technology meaningfully in vital development sectors, such as health, education, and agriculture, in collaboration with government.
- Support initiatives for technology to reach the peripheries of our churches, communities, and nations.
- Embrace the changing family values and norms and promote intergenerational dialogues about changing contexts.
- Break the taboo associated with mental health conditions; and re-examine doctrines that have negative implications on this situation.
- Advocate education for all. Education should acknowledge the variety of gifts and respond to holistic development. Education systems should be scientific, homegrown, and responsive to the needs of peoples. These should contribute to the community and nation-building, and shape a generation of global citizens.

We call on young Asian Christians to:

- Create interfaith friendship, be radical in compassion instead of fundamentalist ideology, and be faithful witnesses, through actual engagement with those who are oppressed due to their religious beliefs, as well as their appearance, mental state, and socioeconomic conditions.

- Advocate a holistic, community-based, and preventive approach to health care and access to treatment for people with physical and mental health issues.
- Use digital media sensibly, so we may engage with each other without judgement, hate, hurt and prejudice, and limit the proliferation of fake news.

We call on the CCA to:

- Develop training programs on Sex, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SSOGIE).
- Organise AEYA at least once in five years.
- Establish youth exchange programs among its member churches and councils.
- Translate this document into the languages of member countries to the extent possible.

*Are you ready to listen to the voice of silence?  
 Are you ready to walk together in the darkness?  
 Are you ready to touch the pain of other creatures?  
 Are you ready to see broken bodies in Asia?*

*O God, dear friend,  
 We hear Your voice in the silence,  
 We walk with You in the darkness,  
 We touch Your pain in all creatures,  
 We see Your broken bodies in Asia.*

*We will dance with You in the rhyme of Hope.  
 We will sing with You in the gesture of Justice.  
 We will play with You in the land of Peace.*



# **Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA)–2018: An Overview**

**6–12 April 2018 | Manado, Indonesia**

The Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) focussing on the theme ‘Lord, Send Your Light and Truth to Lead Us’ was held at the Grand Kawanua International Convention Centre at Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia from 6 to 13 April 2018 and was attended by more than 400 young people from across Asia.

The AEYA which was locally hosted by the Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa (GMIM) and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) was the largest Asian ecumenical youth event organised by CCA since a major youth event was held in New Delhi, India in 1984.

The week-long event provided a platform for young Asian Christians to discuss on a wide range of emerging Asian issues and themes such as, ‘Towards Shaping a Transformed World: Role of Asian Youths’, ‘Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light: Biblical-Theological Perspectives’, ‘Spirituality in a Digitalised World’, ‘Embracing and Appreciating Diversities and Human Dignity’, and ‘Changing Family Values and Cultures in Asia: Intergenerational Voices’.

Youths in Dialogue Sessions addressed issues and themes such as ‘Religious Intolerance and Politicisation of Religion’, ‘Artificial Intelligence: Future of Asian Youths’, ‘Trafficking in Persons and People on the Move within and Beyond Asia’, ‘Human Development and Technological Advancements in Asia: Are Young Asians Becoming Digital Nomads?’ and ‘Disappearing Values of Love and Care amidst Selfie Culture?’

On 7 April, with a solemn liturgical celebrative worship in a multicultural Asian context, AEYA was officially opened when North Sulawesi Governor Olly Dondokambey, Vice Governor Steven Kandouw, and Indonesian Foreign Affairs Ministry Director-General Cecep Herawan led the striking of the *tetengkoran*, a traditional Minahasa bamboo bell.

The ecumenical worship service began with a traditional Indonesian welcoming dance as the choir sang indigenous Asian Christian hymns. Prayers alluded to issues of the region; participants from different backgrounds and countries came forward to lead the worship.

In a sermon delivered during the worship, Rev. Dr Hein Arina, moderator of the host church Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa (GMIM), said, “We as a Church are one strong and powerful institution to be a change; we have the power to bring great influence towards social change.”

“Light your candles,” said Bishop Dr Willem T.P. Simarmata in his presidential address, and he asked the participants to rally behind the theme, ‘Lord, send your Light and Truth to lead us.’ Bishop Dr Simarmata also added that the times posed various challenges to young people, from falling prey to injustices to being trapped in an ‘individualistic, consumeristic, and hedonistic’ culture. He cited cases of religious intolerance, lack of education, poverty, gender-based injustices, and environmental issues as opportunities to act.

During an introductory welcome address, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary of CCA said, “Amidst complex realities, all of us are in search of guidance and we need divine guidance amidst the darkness, confusion and often chaotic situations... Through AEYA, the CCA tries to give a platform for young Asian Christians to come together at the regional level to address some of the most pertinent issues and wider Asian realities; and to evolve ecumenical responses for effective Christian witness. Many ecumenical leaders today are the product of youth and student Christian movements but nowadays, what we witness is a general decline of youth and student movements everywhere. The AEYA comes from CCA’s commitment to strengthen the Asian ecumenical movement with active youth participation and ecumenical leadership development for the future. CCA’s new program thrusts for 2015–2020 give priorities for youth participation at various levels, including long-term youth internships, the training of Young Ambassadors for Peace in Asia, and the Youth Leadership Development and Ecumenical Formation programs at national and sub-regional levels.”

During the opening ceremony, prominent Asian ecumenical leader Bishop Dr Soritua A.E. Nababan, who served as the first Youth Secretary of CCA (1963–1968), was felicitated for his services to the Asian and global ecumenical movement. Bishop Nababan was the organiser of the first Asia Youth Assembly held in the Philippines in 1964.

In the afternoon of 8 April, the AEYA participants, together with thousands of faithful from more than one thousand congregations and denominations of Christian churches in Indonesia, attended the

Asia Easter Celebration in Tondano Stadium in the Minahasa region, North Sulawesi.

In a homily delivered at the opening worship, Rev. Dr Henriette H. Lebang, General Chairperson of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, expounded on the meaning and relevance of resurrection to the churches today.

“In Christ, there is new life beyond death and futility. Just as Christ has risen from the dead, so we are to live in the newness of life. Thus, commit ourselves to the newness of life, to the newness of hope. Whatever problems we face in our families, churches, nations, and the world, we can overcome them because of the risen Christ,” said Rev. Dr Lebang.

Rev. Dr Lebang also powerfully challenged the participants to be witnesses of the light of Christ and to let the truth shine in their daily lives to overcome falsehood, lust, corruption, and greed.

“Let the resurrection of Christ inspire us and to renew us to walk in the light and truth. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we should be changed significantly from being children of darkness to being children of light. We should transform from loving ourselves to loving others; from marginalising and excluding others to embracing inclusivity with the love of Christ and sharing the light with others... stop manipulating the truth and start speaking the truth and light of God. Keep our integrity as children of Christ and be witnesses of resurrected Christ through concrete actions. In whatever difficult situation that we face today, the light of God will shine in the whole world.”

On 9 April, for the first panel presentation titled ‘Emerging Issues and Concerns in Asia,’ three panellists brought to the floor powerful presentations drawn mostly from their own lives and work.

Ruth Mathen, who belongs to the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India, spoke powerfully about two issues which she felt needed urgent attention.

“There are two main issues I feel strongly about. The first is that rise of religious fundamentalism and extreme nationalism in India curtails the expressions of Christian faith and identities. The second is about the place and position of women within the church, which places a double burden on those under its ambit... We must recognise

those rituals of practices and teachings that are patriarchal, value males over females, and take the male as the norm of 'human' while defining women as relative, dependent and inferior," said 20-year-old Ruth.

Rev. Jimmy Marcos Immanuel from the Protestant Church in Western Indonesia expanded on Ruth's first point and spoke about religious intolerance, especially in South Asia. Pointing to some of the recent terror attacks around the world, he said, "It not only created deaths, refugees, physical, and economical losses but also intolerance towards religions and religious identities." He also proposed that such instances of religious intolerance were often exploited by local political parties to further their political agendas. He argued that the development of technology had made it easier for radical and terrorist groups to spread their messages of hate. Over a period of time, they moved from fighting with guns and bombs to fighting with words and visualisations. He said that one of the main reasons why youth turned to religious intolerance was economic poverty. Rev. Jimmy urged today's youth to not become merely a generation of 'job seekers' and instead take up political roles in societies to counter intolerance movements.

Meanwhile, Kim Minji, a young woman theologian from South Korea, who is currently working as a programme coordinator for the National Council of Churches in Korea's (NCCK) Human Rights Centre, beautifully touched upon how the power of youth could be channelled to make positive changes in society. She referred to the stories of South Korean protests, popularly known as the 'Candlelight Struggle,' which saw the ouster and later imprisonment of South Korean President Park Geun-Hye.

"What triggered the movement was the sinking of the Sewol Ferry, which resulted in the loss of 304 children's lives. The former president's inaction, which led to a huge loss of life, galvanised South Korean society like never before. Millions of people attended twenty candlelight vigils," she said.

She also spoke about work undertaken by the churches in furthering the idea of peaceful reunification of North and South Korea. She ended her presentation by challenging the Asian youth to reach out to each other and communicate more.

"Asian youth should try to be interested in each other's issues and pains and that is the way forward to re-establish the dream of the Asian Ecumenical Movement."

On the third day of AEYA, two sessions focused on interfaith dialogue between religious leaders and scholars from Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Taoism, and the AEYA participants. They reached a common ground to discuss relevant issues about religion and their implications to the Asian society. The panellists—Swami Navananma Jnana Tapaswi (Hinduism), Venerable Dr Phramaha Boonchuay Doojai (Buddhism), Prof. Chongfu Zhang (Taoism), and Dr Media Zainul Bahri (Islam)—made presentations on the theme ‘Light and Truth in a Pluralistic Asia’ in the perspectives of their respective religion.

Swami Navananma, who started his presentation with a brief prayer in Sanskrit, took on questions of religious extremism by saying regional and geographical interpretations of different Holy Scriptures were dividing people instead of unifying them. He said that instead of making people’s lives more harmonious, interpretations of religious texts were being used to create more friction and rifts in society. He extolled the participants of AEYA to change ‘internally’ so that the change could be reflected in their homes and society. “As time passes, the true sense of truth keeps fading. While it should be enriched, it should be done spiritually and not religiously. Once we do that, peace will automatically follow,” he added.

Dr Media Zainul Bahri, who represented Islam, said that wrongdoings in the ‘name of Islam’ were based on wrong interpretations of the Holy book. “Islam is known as a religion of peace, but unfortunately, there are a lot of extremist acts being carried out in Islam’s name... People talk about Jihad. But what is Jihad? There is a great difference between Jihad and war. Jihad just means the ‘struggle for a better life,’ while war is war. Nothing good ever comes out of it. Jihad is never Islam’s call to fight against others. Nothing connects Jihad with war.”

Venerable Dr Phramaha Boonchuay Doojai was of the opinion that conscious steps needed to be taken towards building bridges with other religions and making friends. He spoke about one of his personal experiences. “A great way to understand others’ religions is to visit their places of worship. Go to a church or a mosque and ask if you are allowed to enter. Once, I visited an ancient mosque in Phuket, Thailand. The Imam welcomed me and said I was the first Buddhist monk to have visited the mosque. I feel this is the first step we have to take if we are to see changes happening,” he said.

Prof. Chongfu Zhang, a scholar on Taoism, stated “We cannot change things over a few days or a few months. These are problems that grew

over many years and generations. In the past, many suggestions were put forward on how to resolve ecumenical issues. But none of them succeeded. What could you possibly do to help resolve it? The first thing is to open your eyes. Many people refuse to do so and isolate their religion from the rest of the world. Secondly, respect others. Even though we may not be able to resolve things completely, we can contribute to making things a little better. The AEYA conference is a good beginning for people from different religions to exchange their views. That is why I think this meeting in Manado is a very important gathering.”

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, CCA’s General Secretary who chaired the session, summarised the whole interfaith dialogue with challenging words, “I am reminded of an ancient Indian adage ‘I believe I have the truth; you believe you have the truth; I will respect your truth, so you please respect my truth.’”

On 10 April, the third thematic session of the AEYA brought various perspectives on challenges to spirituality in a digitalised world and touched a chord among hundreds of young Asians who were in attendance. Two young Christian leaders—Ismael Fisco Jr. and Manna Prasad—from the Philippines and India respectively, kept the audience engaged in deep deliberations with their speeches and responses during a lively session titled ‘Spirituality in a Digitalised World: Responses of Asian Youths’.

The common thread between the two presentations was how digital media was becoming increasingly influential in the lives of Asian youth, often negating the values of spirituality.

Ismael, a digital media company’s operational director, noted advances of digital technology in maximising the ministry and programmes of the church and how it affected many areas of life. However, he also proposed that technology was not without negative implications especially in the understanding of youth’s spirituality.

“We live in an era of increasingly pervasive digital technology. This is embedded deeply in the way we do things—in our church, ministry, work, organisations, and even in our daily lives. These pervasive digital innovations are radically changing not only our approach of doing mission but our very understanding of spirituality and our reason-for-being as a church. Today’s generation is called Generation C (for ‘connectedness’) having the strong desire to be connected and present online. Digital technology has reached an ‘inflection point’ reaching into every corner of young people’s lives.

We spend unbelievable hours browsing online and playing with our gadgets, leading to shorter attention spans, information overload, and anxiety among people. It has also led to an increase in cases of cyberbullying, human trafficking, and oppression of certain sectors of society. Fake news, which was a term we had not heard a few years ago, is all too common now. Private and political entities use it to propagate hate, prejudice, and anger. A direct consequence of this is the rise of digital activism, which further decreases human interaction and sense of community,” he said.

“Churches around the world have started to invest more in reaching out to youngsters via social media and that has proved to be effective. But what it has also done is influence our understanding of Jesus Christ’s ministry as something limited only to virtual reflections, inspirational, YouTube videos, and blogging,” opined Ismael.

“When Jesus commissioned his disciples to ‘go and make disciples of all nations,’ he was not constructively telling them to tweet about it or post something about him in their social media statuses. He intended them to go ‘physically’, to live and commune with the people, identify themselves with them, and be one with them in their sufferings and struggles. Our present realities call for us young people to get out of the comforts of our churches to be present on the streets, in the margins, in war-torn communities, with the sinful and the most unloved sectors of our society to be their beacon of hope and light. Our church has always emphasised that spirituality shall liberate human beings. It must lead us to live a life of dignity and fullness. To promote spirituality is to embrace practices, trends and systems that we perceive to be of relevance to our existence and everyday lives as human beings. But this should never be abused and used to diminish our sense of spirituality, and never be at the stake of human dignity.”

Manna Prasad, a digital media expert from India’s digital communication epicentre Bangalore (known as the Silicon Valley of India), spoke about an alarming aspect of the proliferation of digital media in our lives by highlighting the ‘rise of virtual churches’.

“In countries like the USA, studies have revealed that fewer people are going to churches as they are busy logging on to the internet. Some shun going to church under the pretext that they can access church services and prayers on mobile applications. There is a real false sense of being comfortable with the ‘cyber-church,’” she said. Manna strongly emphasised that ‘technology cannot replace human

emotions' by showing a short video clip about a crying child and his frustrated parents who were in different places and communicating via a mobile video call. While nothing online could stop the child's cry, his father taking him in his arms immediately did so, a human touch making all the difference.

She extolled AEYA's participants to be change-makers by satisfying four conditions. "Be a change maker by being faith-bearers, God-seekers, risk-takers, and gospel-sharers at places that we are planted."

She felt churches around the world had a duty to pass on the Christian faith's sacred teachings and heritage to youngsters in a language they understood. "The Church must not hesitate in passing on its sacred heritage to young people of our age. It can meet young people where they are and entice them with the message of Christ as well as the teachings of the Church through a new way of delivery. But having said that, technology in itself will not make you any more spiritual. It is a tool that will help and enhance you on your spiritual journey. One should understand that digital technology is not passive. It has somewhat become an extension of our life."

"In the digital age, information is available at our fingertips. So, there is very less of believing and more of knowing. But what we need at this point is a spiritual direction, spiritual mentorship, spiritual programming, and small faith-sharing groups. Despite all challenges of technology, there are still several unique opportunities presented by the modern age of digital lifestyles. The spiritual needs of the youths should be met in a digitised way," she said.

Both speakers encouraged the AEYA participants to be critical and responsible while using and consuming technology and to be on guard as to how it affected their sense of spirituality.

In the third thematic panel discussion on 'Changing Family Values and Cultures in Asia: Intergenerational Voices', three panellists echoed similar concerns that traditional family values nurtured over the centuries in Asia had changed and the nuclear-family system had been disappearing in many cultures in Asian countries.

"The image of a family itself has been changed in Japan. A typical family today in Japan is like this: they are a dual-career couple. Harassments against working mothers, single parents, and pregnant women exist. The young couple does not live together with parents or relatives, and at the same time when parental care becomes a



problem, they are always looking for a nursery school for their children,” said Dr Sawako Fujiwara who is teaching at Tohoku Gakuin University, Japan. She also tackled one of the contemporary issues in Japan, the problem of ‘karo-shi’ (deaths related to overwork) which was happening due to the ‘Japanese Agenda’ that wanted to increase women in the workforce as a matter of money.

Lawrence Chong, an active member of the Roman Catholic Church’s Focolare Movement in Singapore, talked about the similar kind of changes that were happening in families across Asia. He zeroed in on some changes in the family landscape. Within 10 years, he said, traditional families will make up less than 50 per cent in Asian countries. The year 2018 was forecasted to see over 50 per cent of Asia-Pacific’s population in urban areas; resulting in soaring prices for housing. Health costs will be a burden in Asia because of the increase of cancer, strokes, and dementia in the next decade. He also cited a study saying that between 2015 and 2034, the older population will grow by 22 per cent in East Asia, posing an imminent labour force issue. Politics in those parts also cannot be ignored.

“The centrality of family and traditional family values is undeniably changing in Asia. However, family is still very deep in our culture as Asians,” said Dr Henriette Hutabarat Lebang, General Chairperson of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia. She added, “Family is an enduring characteristic of Asian cultures. Asians are also very community-oriented, practice intergenerational cohabitation, value extended families, respect older people, and see a mutual responsibility for the care of parents and children. However, the market economy has introduced high competition. There is a shifting of value in Asian society. Thus, people have been increasingly individualistic, exclusivist, and greedy. Face-to-face communication has taken a backseat because of new technology. Still, we have some positive values and we need to hold this: respecting differences, family ties, for example. If we miss this one, we will commit the mistake of many parts of the world.”

Lawrence Chong proposed some ways to respond to the changing character and needs of young people of Asia today. Among others, he said, parents must increase their engagement with their kids, find “new ways to love” and appreciate the new way of family. “If you do not engage the child, you lose the child,” he said. Traditional power structures were also bound to change because of the cultural landscape, said Chong. “Gender equality has to happen. Women are

increasingly accessing information, quality education. Some places in Asia are moving. It is a complex situation, but...Asia is moving.”

In the last thematic panel presentation on ‘Embracing and Appreciating Diversities in pluralistic Asia’, Rev. Stephen Arulampalam and Kaythi Min Din called for unity among Asian youths and inclusion of people with disabilities.

Kaythi opened her session by drawing the AEYA participants’ attention to a popular saying in Manado, “Torang samua basudara,” which means ‘we are all one family’. Kaythi reflected on the vast diversity of Asia that made up the ‘one family’. “Embracing and appreciating diversities is very important; otherwise, social cohesion and peaceful coexistence will be threatened. We need to understand and appreciate the interdependence of humanity within the diverse community, promoting mutual respect between people from different ethnicity, religion, cultural norms, traditional practices, and sexual orientation.”

Rev. Stephen, who has been blind since the age of 20, spoke passionately about people with disabilities and the need to acknowledge and include them in society. “Jesus was someone who passed through the diversity of experiences of a disabled person before he died on the cross. Today, when you participate in the Holy Communion, you are celebrating the disabled body of Christ. I tell people to put their trust in the disabled God. Unfortunately, in many parts of Asia, stigma about people with disabilities is a part of the culture and a reality. It cannot simply be changed overnight. One way to work on changing it is by educating people. Another way is to wait for changes to happen through people’s experiences.” He called upon AEYA participants to embrace and encourage disabled people whenever they met them.

In the last session before the closing of AEYA, the participants of AEYA adopted the AEYA Manado Statement 2018, calling on churches to address the challenges of technology, migration, peace, inclusion, and pluralism.

The Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly 2018 stemmed from the CCA’s commitment to strengthen the Asian ecumenical movement with active youth participation and ecumenical leadership development for the future.



*Opening Worship of AEYA*



*Cecep Herawan (Director-General of IDP) opening the AEYA*



*Opening Inaugural Session*





*Bishop Dr Willem T.P. Simarmata,,  
Moderator of CCA*



*Dr Mathews George Chunakara,  
General Secretary of CCA*



*Olly Dondokambey,  
Governor of North Sulawesi*



*Steven O.E. Kandouw,  
Vice Governor of North Sulawesi*



*Rev. Dr Hein Arina,  
Moderator of GMIM, the host church*



*Bishop Dr Soritua A.E. Nababan,  
First CCA Youth Secretary*



*AEYA Participants in the 'Siyahamba' March*



*Token of Appreciation presented to Steven O.E. Kandouw, Vice Governor of North Sulawesi*



*Bishop Dr Soritua Nababan felicitated on behalf of CCA by Dr Mathews George Chunakara*





*Dr Farhana Anthony Nazir,  
Pakistan*



*Ismael Fisco, Jr.,  
Philippines*



*Manna Prasad,  
India*



*Rev. Stephen Arulampalam,  
Sri Lanka*



*Kaythi Min Din,  
Myanmar*



*Rev. Jimmy Marcos Immanuel,  
Indonesia*













*Rev. Dr Henriette T.H. Lebang,  
Indonesia*



*Swami Navananma Jnana Tapaswi,  
Hindu Swami from India*



*Ven. Dr Phramaha Boonchuay Doojai,  
Buddhist monk from Thailand*



*Dr Media Zainul Bahri,  
Islamic Scholar from Indonesia*



*Prof. Chongfu Zhang,  
Taoist Scholar*



*Rev. Seo Young Kim,  
Korea*



*Dr Sawako Fujiwara,  
Japan*



*Ruth Mathen,  
India*



*Rev. Dr Aris Margianto,  
Indonesia*



*Lawrence Chong,  
Singapore*



*Rev. Hui Young Han,  
New Zealand*



*Minji Kim,  
Korea*

# **Towards Shaping a Transformed World: Challenges to Asian Youths**

***Cecep Herawan***

*Director-General for Information and Public Diplomacy  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia*

Asia, a continent of 4.4 billion people, covers about 30 per cent of Earth's total land area. It is home to a majority of the human population, comprised of diverse geographical and cultural units. The region has enjoyed decades of peace and stability and despite setbacks of the financial crises, is now the world's economic powerhouse: the biggest contributor to global growth.

We have proven that diversity is an advantage and treasure for the region, and those who truly benefit from these advantages are all of you, the youth in Asia. Your generation is better poised than before to participate in and benefit from the advancement of social, economic, and political developments.

Compared to previous generations, you are getting a better education. The majority of youth in the region is healthy, having survived childhood years, which only a few decades ago had a considerably higher infant and child mortality. Furthermore, across the region, you have shown great initiatives to participate in local, national, and regional development as important and equal participants, rather than as passive bystanders unable to shape your own future.

However, despite all this, challenges still lie in front of you:

- First, we are still witnessing an alarming rise in the wave of violent extremism, radicalisation, and xenophobia.
- Second, the influx of current migrations all over the globe brings forward the issues of pluralism and political identity.
- Third, the principle of freedom of expression in many countries has unexpectedly caused prejudice, intimidation, and discrimination.
- Fourth, the increasing use of social media as a platform for disseminating hate speech has fuelled acts of violence among different groups.

These problems have triggered restlessness among countries and threatened peace and harmony. In this light, I wish to share some thoughts.

Distinguished participants, friends, ladies and gentlemen, as a pluralistic nation, Indonesia practices tolerance and moderation. We are grateful that our founding fathers envisioned Indonesia to live as a united society in its diversity. They incorporated five guiding principles, 'Pancasila', as an unailing foundation for binding us as a strong country.

Pancasila becomes state ideology with the following principles:

- Belief in one Supreme God;
- Just and civilised humanity;
- The unity of Indonesia;
- Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives;
- Social justice for all the people of Indonesia.

We do not emphasise one principle over another. Instead, we pursue the full implementation of all principles of Pancasila as integrated ones. I would like to underline the first principle, which is a recognition that we are human beings and equal before God Almighty. We are a religious society, yet Indonesia is not a state based on religion. Although our country still has issues to address, tolerance and dialogue are still the keys to peace and harmony.

In a world increasingly at risk owing to misunderstandings, intolerance of other religions, lack of appreciation of diversity, and religious extremism, the positive values of Indonesia need to be shared. Moderation and tolerance should consistently be the core values that touch all levels of society, from the grassroots level to the civil society community, the media, the academicians, and the government.

As we all know, Asia is set to remain as the economic powerhouse and the world's biggest contributor to global growth. The stability and growth of our region have reassured investors amid certain geopolitical tensions in some parts. However, growth, peace, and stability in Asia cannot be built without you, my friends. The role of youth is very important. To be precise, it cannot be built for you; it has to be built with you.

Before I conclude, allow me to share some thoughts for possible further involvements of the youth in nurturing a peaceful and harmonious society, not only in Indonesia but also in other parts of the region:

Firstly, I encourage the youth to spread the message of peace and tolerance, especially through social media. At the same time, I urge you

all to combat extremism and hate speech. Secondly, I encourage all community and religious leaders to maintain and promote peace and tolerance. They are not only leaders but also motivators and inspirers for the better. Lastly, I urge the youth to work hand in hand with the government and other elements in our society, to diffuse counter-narratives for extremism and hate speech through digital platforms.

I hope the discussions and exchange of views in this Assembly will give you a better understanding of Asia and generate your innovative, explorative, and constructive ideas. Finally, I have to say that peace and stability in the Asia region, and in the world, lie in the hands of all of you.

# **Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light: Biblical-Theological Perspectives**

***Dr Farhana Anthony Nazir***

*Gujranwala Theological Seminary, Pakistan*

The Meaning of Prophetic Witness:

- What is the Biblical meaning and examples of Prophetic Witness?
- What is the meaning of Light and Truth in such Witnesses?
- What is the implication of Witness, Light, and Truth in contemporary South Asia (Pakistan)?

Biblical Meaning of Prophetic Witness:

‘Prophetic witness’ comes from the prophets’ encounters in the Bible at different times, places, and different purposes.

The objectives of Prophets:

- Hebrew/Urdu (Nabi) is the ‘one who makes announcements’.
- Greek prophētēs is the one who speaks on behalf of God.
- Prophet also is the ‘one who invokes or appeals’.
- The one who sees and knows: 1 Samuel 9:9—Formerly in Israel, if someone went to inquire of God, they would say, “Come, let us go to the seer,” because the prophet of today used to be called a seer.

Prophets were those who:

- Became an agent of true ‘public declaration’ (Freedman et al. 1992:477; Von Stuckrad 2006:1522).
- For example, Jeremiah was concerned with society’s misery. On behalf of the oppressed, he denounced evil practices of leaders of his time (Jeremiah 6:7,11; Jeremiah 8:8–13; Jeremiah 22).

A Prophet is the one who fulfils:

- One of the most important responsibilities to become an ambassador to deliver God’s message.
- For example, Moses brings the message to Pharaoh.
- He also represents a radical break with the social reality of Egypt.

A Prophet is one who witnesses:

- The prophet is the one who is a true witness for social justice and liberation (Migliore 1980:14).
- For example, Isaiah’s prophecies are directed at evil and untrue



religious practices. For him, religious faith was incompatible with injustice, crime, and oppression (Is. 58:5,7).

A Prophet is one whose:

- Prophetic witness empowers people to take an initiative and walk on the true path.
- For example, the Prophetic Witness is a legacy that has been bequeathed by Jesus who said, "As God sent me to the world so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18).

Jesus sent us to the world, therefore:

- Witness can be a duty of every believer to set and perform a task to transform the society (Evans 1992:17, Williams 2003:171)

How to witness?

- Witnessing with the 'Light and Truth'.
- Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).
- To light the lamp in the Temple on the Feast of Tabernacles is the remembrance of Israelites' protection.
- Remembrance of Christ as the clear and true light.

What is the Light and Darkness of the Young Church?

- Have bright ideas (e.g. Joseph used his wisdom to strengthen the nation in his youth).
- They can inspire (Jesus inspired teachers in his youth).
- They can bring their blessings and skill.
- They can fight against evil and weakness.
- They can inspire through academics and music to reform society.
- Solomon to youth: "Do not let anything worry you or cause you pain... Enjoy your youth" (Ecc. 11:9–10).
- On the contrary, youth can cause pain.
- Various examples in South Asia (Pakistan).

You can bring the light to the darkness:

- Use words: either spoken or written carefully to witness.
- Keep dignity and respect.
- Clarify your witness. Jesus asked, "But what about you?" "Who do you say I am?"
- Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden." (Matthew 5:14)

Be a true witness and a light in the darkness!

# **Spirituality in a Digitised World: Responses of Asian Youth**

***Ismael Fisco Jr.***

*United Methodist Church in the Philippines*

I am excited to be standing here before you today and see the face of Christ in the faces of different young people from across Asia.

Indeed, the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly is an affirmation of the growing ecumenical youth movement, both at the local and international levels, as it brings together the best and the brightest ecumenical youth leaders to a safe and open space of unity and dialogue. It gives us a deeper appreciation of our unique identity as Asian youth, founded in our colourful tradition and long history of struggles and resistance throughout our collective existence as one Asian region.

It is truly both an honour and privilege to be here today and share perspectives not only on how digital media influences our sense of spirituality, but more so to understand our vulnerabilities, and more importantly, our strength and capacity to transcend these challenges into how we—as young people of the church and Asian society—become a more relevant generation in our present times.

We live in an era of increasingly pervasive digital technology. This is embedded deeply in the way we do things- in our church, ministry, work, organisations, and even in our daily lives. These pervasive digital innovations are radically changing not only our approach of doing mission but our very understanding of spirituality and our reason-for-being as a church.

So today, allow me to put spirituality in the perspective of the digitised world and invite you to a discussion on how we, as Asian youth, respond to the challenges of our time.

## **Understanding Spirituality**

By the year 2020, an entire generation, Generation C (for ‘connected’), will have grown up in a primarily digital world. Computers, the Internet, mobile phones, texting, social networking—all are second nature to members of this group. Their familiarity with technology, reliance on mobile communications, and desire to remain in contact with large networks of family members, friends, and business contacts will transform how we work and how we consume.



The phenomenon of digitisation is reaching an inflexion point. The effects of an increasingly digitised world are now reaching every corner of our lives because three forces are powerfully reinforcing one another. These are:

1. Consumer Pull  
(A natural expectation to be always connected and to share personal data);
2. Technology Push  
(Low-cost devices, cloud computing, and innovation to vast-processing machinery);
3. Economic 'Benefits'  
(A wave of capital has poured into the new digitisation technologies and companies).

In retrospect, Asia-Pacific has become a hotspot of digital markets, boasting of some of the most expensive costs of telecommunication yet having some of the poorest internet connections. Our people have become labourers of big technology companies while our countries have turned into depositories of massive technological waste. Of course, our natural resources are not exempted from this whole technological hullabaloo as they fall prey to exploitation by foreign companies to support the manufacturing of technological devices.

So, is digital technology right or wrong? Well, the answer to this question is always subjective and must be put into perspective.

Our church has always emphasised that spirituality shall liberate human beings. It must lead us to live a life of dignity and fullness. To promote spirituality is to embrace practices, trends, and systems that we perceive to be of relevance to our existence and everyday lives as human beings. This should, however, never be abused or used to diminish our sense of spirituality, and never be at the cost of human dignity.

Digital technology has improved our 'connectedness' with one another. It enables us to gather and disseminate information to almost all corners of the world. It makes communication much faster and easier through different social media platforms. It allows the church to reach out to a wider audience of interested spiritual seekers and to different mission 'hotspots' from all over the world through different platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, website, etc. The internet is a very powerful tool that allows 'spiritual' activities to spread beyond different verticals of culture, economy, geography, and socio-political dimensions.

Given these advantages, our churches have invested massively on technological facilities and innovative programs that will maximise their ministry and virtual presence both in the local and global communities.

Of course, these are not without implications especially in our very sense of spirituality.

## **Our Challenges**

To understand spirituality in a digitised sense is to understand the challenges that confront the churches—and the whole humanity—amidst an overwhelmingly pervasive digital age.

What are these challenges that confront our spirituality amidst the digitised world?

i. *We use digital technology as a means to oppress people*

Short attention spans, information overload, anxiety about people's impression about us, endless distractions, etc., are some of the harmful effects of technology on us. We spend an unbelievable number of hours browsing online and playing with our gadgets.

However, it is not just that. Digital media has reached such a level that we use it (either consciously or unconsciously) as a tool of oppression, suppression, discrimination, and to demean other people.

We have heard about many stories of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is the use of digital media to harm others. This includes sending messages through social media, e-mails, or text message to make the victim feel uncomfortable, powerless, or threatened.

We have heard about cyber-sex trafficking, child pornography, identity theft, hacking, and forgery, among others. We have heard about young people committing suicide because they were bullied or blackmailed online; of many members of LGBTQ community who are afraid to come out due to fear that they will be judged and discriminated against by the world.

We have heard about women and victims of human rights abuses who have been subject to name-shaming or victim-blaming; of indigenous people and cultural groups who are treated with indifference, prejudice, and made subjects of exploitation, commercialisation, and racism.

We now live in an interesting time in history where social media status has become the standard of how people should be treated.

ii. *The proliferation of 'fake news', false information, misinformation, and sensationalism*

Fake news (hoax or alternative facts) is not a term many people would use more than a year ago, but it has now grown into a potential threat to democracy and political affairs of many states across the world. It is being used by many political entities as a means to manoeuvre news to boost either hate or sympathy, and thus has raised serious tensions among individuals and nations.

The Philippines, for example, is in great turmoil because of opposing partisan politics, amplified by sensationalism by the media and the politically-driven 'online trolls' and 'keyboard warriors'. They only exist to engage in heated arguments and spread misleading news and information online, aimed to confuse the public, stir hate, anger, or fear and to damage an individual/organisation's reputation.

While it is easy to sit back and point fingers at the government and mainstream media as the culprits of the compost we are seeing online, the truth is, that many individuals (yes, including us Christians) are guilty of this unwarranted and irresponsible practice.

We have used digital media as a tool to promote false, superficial, and whimsical interpretations of the gospel to serve our selfish ends and to proselytise members to our church. It has become our means of affirmation and validation of how blessed we are by posting about lucrative materials we have, about the places we travel to, and the food we eat.

Digital technology is a powerful tool to disseminate information but it is also terrifying because it gives the unscrupulous power to destroy, to corrupt, and to even alter the very precepts of our theology and spirituality as a church.

iii. *It has radically transformed our participation into complete 'virtual activism'*

The impact of digital media is two-fold. First, it makes the mobilisation of people's participation more convenient and easily accessible, especially in terms of responding to issues that need urgent attention. Second, it replaces conventional activism by diminishing people's active physical participation and human interaction- thus transforming our participation into complete virtuality!

Digital media has reduced our understanding of Jesus to a ‘virtual being’ who sees everything we read and post online. Does it not bother us that someone looks at what we type in our e-mails or social media statuses every time?

While social media is an effective tool to conduct our ministries and reach out to people who need God’s love, it also has influenced our understanding of Jesus Christ’s ministry as something limited only to virtual reflections, inspirational Youtube videos, and blogging.

We have boxed Jesus in the comfort of our tablets and smartphones, capable of being readily shared online.

At its worst, it has become our excuse to not go out of our comfort zones because we think that we can participate ‘virtually’ anyway. We have used it as justification to not go to places where Jesus wanted us to go. We have used it as an excuse to turn a blind eye to the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, and the marginalised sections of our society.

It has mellowed down our human relations at a certain level and promoted the highest sense of individualism, cynicism, and apathy in many areas of our church and communities.

## **Responses of Asian Youth**

In the midst of all these, I believe that young Asians can transcend these challenges and rise to our common calling to respond to the pressing issues of our time, especially those affecting our sense of spirituality.

What is our response as Asian youth then?

### *i. Spirituality: Empowerment vs Oppression*

However we look at it, it is undeniable that the digital revolution has radically transformed the world. It has made it a smaller place by providing a platform for communication and space where people can build their social network and connections. It has increased the virtual presence of our churches and has brought the ecumenical movement to the attention of the international community.

As young Asian Christians, we are called to use our spirituality to empower the people of the world through our creativity and technological inclinations. We should never use digital technology to oppress people but rather to uplift and empower our brothers and sisters.

Let us use it to provide a space where young people can openly express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas; make it a platform to promote inclusion and engage with other young people without hate, prejudice, and judgement.

Ephesians 4:11–13 says, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

### ii. *Speaking the ‘Truth of the Gospel’ vs Fake News*

In these changing times, the truth of the gospel of Christ remains the same. The story of resurrection and the message of his love continues today, from one generation to another. His saving grace does not change no matter what time or place we are in.

Amidst misinformation and lies proliferating in our society, let us choose to speak the truth of Christ by sharing his gospel of love and compassion. Let us use our technological advances to reach out to more young people and make them feel important and loved.

Ephesians 4:14–16 says, “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Young people are the prophets and evangelists of our time. In a world characterised by anger, lies, and hate, let us choose to speak the truth of God’s all-embracing love and help liberate our society from the systems and structures that steal the dignity of life.

### iii. *Engagement vs Virtuality*

Jesus went to the outskirts of the city to minister to the marginalised sections of the society. He went to the most uncomfortable places on earth to share God’s message of love and compassion for those who needed it the most. He lived, ate, prayed, communed, and even suffered with them.

His physical presence was the ultimate source of inspiration for those who longed for love and care. His fellowship with them transformed their lives and their communities- a revolutionary act that challenged the status quo and the prevailing oppressive system.

Mark 5 narrates very powerful evidence of Jesus' physical presence with a woman who had been sick for 12 years. She believed that she would be healed by just touching his clothing, thus she walked through the crowd and did so. She was healed immediately and Jesus turned around and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

Look around you. Does not our society need healing?

When Jesus commissioned his disciples to 'go and make disciples of all nations', he was not constructively telling them to 'tweet' or post something about him in their social media statuses. He intended them to go 'physically' to live and commune with the people, identify themselves with them, and be one with them in their sufferings and struggles.

Our present realities call for us young people to leave the comforts of our churches and be present in sectors of our society to be their beacon of hope and light.

### **Conclusion: Beyond the Digitised World**

Our spirituality must be anchored in liberating human beings. It must serve as a force to empower the people by leading them to a life of peace, dignity, and fullness. We can only do so if we start sharing the gospel of Christ actively and proactively through our acts of love and service for others—beyond the digitised world.

Through the changing times, I believe that young Asian people have the capacity to think critically, resist, and challenge the systems that affect our sense of spirituality and transcend them to deepen our understanding of our life-giving mission as a body of Christ.

As we participate in this Asian Youth Ecumenical Assembly, we represent the muffled voices of young people all over Asia. Let us strive to empower people, especially the weak, to speak the truth of the gospel and actively participate in the most pressing and relevant issues of our time, both in our local and global community.

Today is a day of awakening! Let us remain grounded in our own identity as Asian nations and stand united in solidarity with those

who need God the most—the poor, the oppressed, and marginalised sectors of our society.

Let us be a generation known not as ‘digital nomads’, but as a generation that is critical and responsive to the challenges of the present times.

As young Asian people, we have a God who has bestowed upon us unique gifts and graces, colourful cultures and traditions refined by our long history of struggle and resistance. These unique gifts and diversities are our own offerings to transform our societies and realise peace and justice towards the restoration and realisation of the fullness of life that Jesus Christ has promised for all.

This is our spirituality, this is our calling as an ecumenical movement, this is our response as young Asian people!

# **Spirituality in Digitised World: Responses of Asian Youth**

***Manna Prasad***

*Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India*

## **Introduction**

- As the world becomes rapidly digitalised, it is no surprise that recent surveys across the globe have found that a majority of people are overly dependent on technology and technological devices.
- While these devices are wonderful and provide several opportunities, there is a big risk that people become so entranced by what they see on the screen that they lose their connection to the real world, and ultimately, their spirituality.

## **What is Spirituality?**

- Spirituality deals with the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.
- For many people, spirituality is connected to a religion or concerned with religious matters.
- For others, spirituality is a less well-defined idea and more of a general sense of a higher being, a connection to their surroundings and nature.

## **Spirituality is...**

- Beyond all religions yet contains all religions.
- Beyond all science yet contains all science.
- Beyond all philosophy yet contains all philosophy.

## **Understanding the Digital World**

- The media has become an important, if not the primary, source on religious issues.
- Religious experiences and information are moulded according to the demands of popular genres.
- Media takes over many of the functions of institutionalised religions by giving spiritual guidance and moral orientation.

## **The Threat Posed by Digitalisation**



- The problem with digital technology is that it ensnares young minds.
- Many young children become interested in or develop their own sense of spirituality through their interactions with the world around them.
- The screens distract minds and lead to questioning and quizzing of the most basic objects around them; this is a clear impediment to developing a sense of spirituality.
- For Christianity, the consequences are already being felt as millennials are leaving the church in droves.

## **Trends in the Digital Age**

### **Decline in Church Attendance**

- In countries like the United States, a study discovered that fewer people were going to church because they were busy logging onto the internet.
- There is a tendency for some to not go to church under the pretext that they can access the church service/prayers on mobile applications. This apparent media-mania creates a false sense of being comfortable with the ‘cyber-church’.

### **Individual Replaces Community**

- Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, etc., are individual-oriented.
- Such platforms create a false sense of community through information sharing and communication with people that may or may not be known or seen.
- The implication is that the individual replaces the community. In this case, the sense of a community is submerged in an individual’s whims and fancies.

### **Gadgets Without Human Interaction**

- Human communication through interpersonal and group communication is crucial to human existence.
- Since social media communication is often a private affair, the sense of real face-to-face communication appears endangered.

We need spiritual direction, spiritual mentorship, spiritual programming, and small faith-sharing groups.

Digitalisation needs to be the embodiment of compassion and an agent of transformation.

Internet works on what it is. A power of progress, the need for speed, the efficacy of efficiency, and the omnipresent media.

## **The Church's Response**

### **Embracing New Media**

- The Church should use various platforms of social media in a positive way to reach out to those in need.
- Christians must not make the usual excuse that the media has been polluted—if it is so polluted, who would purify it?

### **Targeting the Youth**

- The Church must not hesitate in passing on its sacred heritage to the young people of our age.
- It is possible to meet young people where they are and entice them with the message of Christ, as well as the teachings of the Church, through a new manner of delivery.
- The phenomenal growth of social networking sites is a testimony to the desire of young people for friendship and human relationships.

### **Engaging Lapse Christians**

- Indeed, the internet offers the Church opportunities to showcase the gospel of love, justice, peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation through the use of customised messages, icons, and images, especially to those who are ill and cannot come to Church or to lapsed Christians.

### **Paper Bible vs Bible App**

- Paper Bible enables our brains to learn quicker than the app.
- Paper Bible is a tactile memory aid that requires forethought.
- Paper Bible tends to be well bound and printed on premium paper reminding you that it contains God's holy address to his people, whereas the Bible app sits within your phone surrounded by apps for social media, games, photos, and so on.
- Paper Bible enables a vantage point in the unfolding story of scripture.
- Paper Bible allows you to visually see your progress as you read through the entire Bible.
- Paper Bible comes with a battery that is never exhausted.

## **Change-Makers are Faith-Bearers**

- In Numbers 27:1–11, we see the five daughters of Zelophehad had faith as they trusted in God’s provision for them.
- They had faith that they could be used by God to bring about change.

### **Change-Makers are God-Seekers**

- In Acts 16:11–15, we see Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from Thyatira.
- She was a true worshipper and a keen listener.
- She found time for prayer.
- The Lord opened her heart to Paul’s message.
- Lydia was a God-seeker.
- She became the first documented convert to Christianity in Europe.

### **Dr Ida Sophia Scudder**

- She was the daughter of Dr John and Dr Sophia Scudder.
- She had a sorrowful experience of not being able to help three women in child birth who died needlessly in one night.
- The Lord opened Ida’s heart that night.
- She started a tiny medical dispensary in Vellore.
- Today, the Christian Medical College is one of the largest Christian hospitals in the world.

### **Change-Makers are Risk-Takers**

- Bill and Gloria Gaither changed the history of Gospel music.
- Gloria was Bill’s best writing partner.
- They risked their careers to compose gospel music.
- Their collaboration has resulted in more than 700 gospel songs, including the song, ‘Because He lives, I can face tomorrow’.

### **Change-Makers are Gospel-Sharers**

- In John 4:23–30, we see the Samaritan woman’s encounter with Jesus.
- She became a change-maker at that very moment.
- She shared the gospel she received.
- She went in great hurry to share the gospel with others.

### **Daya Bhai (Mercy Mathew)**

- She is a social activist from Kerala who works for the upliftment of tribal communities.

- She travels to share the Gospel with those who have not heard of Jesus.

### **Change-Makers**

- Can we be faith-bearers?
- Are we God-seekers?
- Are we ready to become risk-takers?
- Are we in a haste to be a gospel-sharer?

### **Conclusion**

- Since our century is characterised by mass media or means of social communication, it is up to Christians all over the world to safeguard the Church from what Pope Francis calls ‘mental pollution’. This harms our relationships and shields us from the joy that comes from interaction as well as living in a community.
- There is no doubt that the digital culture calls for opening up and connecting with people where they live—in the real world and virtual space. Instead of waiting for the distracted and wandering youth, the Church should meet them in the terrain they are familiar with.
- It is the responsibility of all Christians to ensure that the church and its mission are sustained and fulfilled throughout all ages of history.

# **Embracing and Appreciating Diversities in a Pluralistic Asia**

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## **Introduction**

Disability issues have been historically low on the Church's agenda. From biblical times, people with disabilities have been stigmatised and intentionally excluded from participating fully in church practices and worship by restricted access and theological assumptions regarding impairment. The Bible itself has often been used to oppress people with impairments and keep them from fulfilling their God-given calling in the church. Yet the fact remains that disabled people continue to be a minority in most church congregations. It is important to develop a theology of disability amongst the congregation. Unless churches take this seriously, people with disabilities will never feel fully integrated, included, and welcome in the body of Christ.

Theological reflection from the perspective of persons with disabilities is almost silent in all our theological discourse. Persons with disabilities whose voices were never heard in the Church, and whose experiences were never considered in doing theology, are raising new theological questions: Are we not created in the 'Image of God'? Is our disability a curse from God? Is our physical impairment a result of our parent's sin or our personal sin? Are we sinners? Why are we excluded from the Church which is for all? Why do people look upon us as inferior? How do we contribute our gift to the Church and society? Christian theology and ministry of our Church will remain incomplete without addressing those issues and concerns. It demands a new way of reading the Bible, doing theology, and ministerial practice.

## **Who is disabled? What is disability?**

Generally, people refer to this community as 'Handicapped', 'Disabled people', 'Mentally retarded' (mentally challenged), 'Differently abled people', 'People with Disabilities', and 'Crippled' or 'Wheelchair Users'. One billion people, or 15 per cent of the world's population, experience some form of disability. 80 per

cent of persons with disabilities live in developing countries, according to the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The World Bank estimates that 20 per cent of the world's poorest people are disabled, and tend to be regarded in their communities as the most disadvantaged. 70 per cent of people living in poverty worldwide are female! Women with disabilities are more likely to be poorer, less healthy, and more vulnerable to abuse than men with disabilities or non-disabled women. Women with disabilities are recognised to be doubly disadvantaged, experiencing exclusion on account of their gender and their disability. All members of society must enjoy equal rights and opportunities and should fully participate in civil, political, economic, social, and cultural spheres of life.

In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 23 (1) states, "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and protection against unemployment." The National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka promotes and protects the rights of people who have disabilities in the spirit of social justice. They will have opportunities to enjoy a full and satisfying life and to contribute to national development through their knowledge, experience, and particular skills and capabilities as equal citizens of Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, the School for deaf and blind in the northern part in Sri Lanka, School for deaf and blind in Rathmalana Colombo, VALVAGAM (giving life) in Jaffna are the education centres concerned about the education of the disabled children. Deaf Link Methodist Church, Siva Boomi (Land of Shiva) are the institutions concerned with the empowerment of children. The House of Hope in Vavuniya and New Light Centre are concerned about the employment of these people.

When we come to religion, an exclusive way of reading the Bible (Exodus 4:11, Leviticus 21:14–16, John 9:1–3), Doctrine of Sin (Mark 2:1–12), Interpreting the Miracle in the light of faith (Mark 9:14–29) focus our attention on the exclusion of disabled people. Giving opportunities, respecting human dignity, and inclusiveness are key figures of the social and economic stigmas.

### **Building the Communities—Unity in Diversity**

We live in a pluralistic society in which different religions and ethnic groups, while maintaining their separate identities, strive to participate in a common civic society. The differences can be a source of interminable conflict and tension but they can also be an opportunity for mutual enrichment and creativity, provided each

group realises how much their lives are bound up with members of the other groups. Mutual acceptance is at the heart of the gospel of forgiveness: the communities that enrich and widen their horizon by mutual acceptance and solidarity.

The church talks about its mission in the context in which it exists. If the church's mission is contextual then it cannot be blind to this new context of socio-political, economic, and cultural challenges. While the worldwide church struggles for the fullness of life, the poor in two-thirds of the world cry for the right to life. "Samartha says that building community is like building a good city, it takes time, effort, and planning. One needs to lay pipelines to bring in freshwater as well as gutters to drain off the waste. A city needs places to do serious work as well as parks and playgrounds and meeting places." In light of this statement, building a community is a necessary mission of the church in the context of healing for building communities from the disabled people's perspective.

### **How can we create an inclusive community?**

Here I would like to give some suggestion to embrace and accept disabled people.

#### *i. Image of God and Disability*

There is a traditional teaching of the image of God among humans. Patrick McArdle describes the theological link between *Imago Dei* and Humanity. This theological construct posits the human as a perfect individual who has self-reliance, rationality, and autonomy. These dominant perspectives are missing among the disabled. The image of God in Jesus as individual, male, whole, celibate, no defects of mind or body communicates the theological inconsistency in the nature of God. Therefore, he opines that theology should engage with the brokenness of humanity, which is a mirror to humanity, and this brokenness is not to be eliminated but to be celebrated. He introduces 'mutual vulnerability and inter-subjectivity' which has the potential to confront the inconsistencies. McArdle quotes the relational encounter of Emmanuel Levinas as that for the one who confronts the other as an essential 'other', who pleads not to be rejected and, ultimately, not be killed. He says in the face of the other, one is confronted by one's own vulnerabilities and frailties. John Swanton travels in a different path that says there is a shared experience of oppression and there are no individual impairments. All the experiences are melded together in shared oppression. Therefore there is a collective experience for all the disabled.

Samuel George quotes Nancy Eiesland's view that disability is not to be seen as a distortion of the image of God but rather that human beings reflect the disabled image of God. The image of God is manifested in all humans with dignity and value. It is not dependent on what one accomplishes or contributes but the dignity and value are permanent, the essential attributes bestowed by God. Every human life is sacred and every human is to be treated with honour. There is a distortion of value in understanding the image of God.

ii. *Impaired Christ*

Disability theology is a relatively new discipline, stemming from liberation theologies. Although the Sri Lankan churches are yet to examine this area, there is an ever-expanding body of literature on the subject and practical guides to including people with disabilities in the life of the church. There is far too much literature to review in any depth here but I have chosen a few of the key texts on which my theories are based.

Roy McCloughry and Wayne Morris's book, *Making a World of Difference*, examines the main themes and issues of disability theology. They dedicate their final three chapters to practical solutions for the inclusion of disabled people in the life of the church. This includes a charter for healing and intercession as well as 'ten ways for churches to do something practical' for people with impairments in the church.

*Copious Hosting*, by Jennie Weiss Block, develops a theology of access for people with disabilities. While Eiesland's liberation model focuses on the rights of the impaired person within the church, Block's approach applies to a broader cross-section of the church and is, therefore, more inclusive.

There is a vast wealth of literature examining disability from a biblical perspective such as the collection of articles combined in *This Able Body*, or the collection of essays in *Human Disability and the Service of God*, which focuses on theological and biblical implications of disability in contemporary church life. While these books offer both theological and biblical studies to the subject of disability, as well as, practical suggestions for the inclusion of people with impairments, very few attempt a practical application of their theological theories.

Possibly the most groundbreaking book in disability theology is Nancy Eiesland's *The Disabled God*. Coming from a disability rights



perspective, Eiesland develops a powerful image of God in a 'sip-puff wheelchair'. This image of a broken God is most visibly seen through Jesus' actions on the cross and his visible wounds after the resurrection.

The impaired Christ reveals a new humanity as the 'revelation of true embodied personhood'. In her final chapter, Eiesland attempts to apply her theories to a practical element of worship that speaks of Christ's brokenness and embodiment through the Eucharist. She develops a liturgy that is inclusive for both disabled and non-disabled people.

To date, there has been very little research undertaken into how disability theology can be integrated into church life in practical ways. While practical steps to include disabled people are necessary and important, it must be borne in mind that unless we also address the underlying theology, people with impairments will never feel fully welcomed or included.

### iii. *The Nature of Spirituality*

Human spirituality is that which transfigures and transcends the biology of the human. When we speak of transcending the biological, we refer to those potentials of the human being which enable them to make the biological organism instrumental to non-biological purposes. These potentials include abstract thought, imagination, empathy, the ability to represent biological experiences symbolically, and the capacity to integrate experience and knowledge around a significance or a meaning which goes beyond the pleasure and pain of the individual. Language and money are the two finest achievements of the human tendency towards the spiritual, because being relational in their character, they articulate and facilitate the experience of solidarity with other people. The capacity of the human will to become integrated with others, or to dominate others, as the case may be, is incarnate in money and in language.

When we speak of spirituality as transfiguring the biological, we refer to the fact that the biological is never left behind by transcendence. The body is not the antithesis of the spiritual but its organ. We should not contrast the spiritual with the material, nor should we regard the spiritual and the biological as being on altogether different levels. Rather, we should speak of transfiguration: the material infused with the spiritual, the body becoming the form of inter-subjectivity.

In the Christian faith, the typical representation of spirituality is to be found in the story of the transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:2–8).

The body was not left behind but shone with radiance. This could not occur to an isolated body, but only in the context of others, and of the speech which links person to person. This is why Jesus is seen on the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, and they are speaking with each other (v.4). Even the resurrection does not leave his body behind (Luke 24:39, John 20:6f), and with the ascension, the transfigured body is raised to universality (Acts 1:9). The ascension into heaven of the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), the figure of the resurrected Christ (John 20:27), and the bodily assumption of Mary all indicate that Christian faith confesses a biological spirituality, and believes in the resurrection of the body as the fulfilment of human potential (Romans 8:23, 1 Corinthians 15:42, Philippians 3:21).

Nevertheless, the body is transcended as well as transfigured. This takes place when the body of the other person is valued like my own body, felt like my own body, and even loved as my own body (Ephesians 5:28). The body which is not transcended remains encircled within the membrane of the skin. Egocentricity is the enclosed body. The senses, although they appear to open the body out upon the world, do not do so unless they are met by the answering sense of the other. In the reciprocity of eye contact, or skin contact, or conversational contact, we transcend the biological nature which is transfigured in the process.

iv. *Re-interpreting the hymns in the light of Liberation*

Let us now turn to the more frequent occurrence of visual metaphorical language. When J.M. Neale translates a hymn from the late evening service of the Orthodox Church, there is no hint of a disparaging attitude toward blind people: Songs should encourage the congregation to come closer to God, but through a few songs we move away from the Lord. Words hurt particular people; they are oppressed and hurt through the words.

“Lord, that in death I sleep not  
And lest my foe should say  
“I have prevailed against him”  
Lighten mine eyes I pray.  
O, Jesus, keep me in thy sight  
And guard me through the coming night”

Another ambiguous example comes from the well-known hymn ‘Holy, Holy, and Holy’.

Verse three reads like this:

“Holy! Holy! Holy! Though the darkness hide thee  
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see.”

It is one thing to say that God dwells in darkness but it is another thing to claim that it is because of sin one cannot see. No doubt it is sin that prevents human beings from becoming aware of the divine glory, but as one who on many occasions has been asked about the alleged sin which brought about my blindness, I cannot be comfortable with this line. This is a very famous song and it is sung many times in the worship, but the inner meaning of this song is hurtful and gives a wrong interpretation to the people.

Therefore, re-interpretation is necessary to create an inclusive community where there is peace, harmony, and human dignity.

#### *v. Counter-Cultural Approach*

The Church must confess its role in the systematic exclusion of people with disabilities in society. The Church must take steps to encourage the active participation of people with disabilities in worship and it must allow positive readings of scripture regarding disability to be heard from church pulpits. This will educate the congregation and enable people with impairments to connect their lived bodily experiences to their faith. Within disability studies, the language used to describe people with disabilities has become particularly important. Pejorative terms such as ‘the handicapped’, ‘the crippled’, or ‘the disabled’ generalise and often stigmatise large groups of people. Such terms demean the value of the human being and oppress people socially.

### **Suggestions and Conclusion**

The Church must be aware of and address current stigmatising behaviours. These behaviours can manifest themselves through low expectations of people’s individual abilities or through the use of language that demeans the value of the human being. The Church must also acknowledge that the Bible has often been used to uphold past and present exclusive practices against people with disabilities.

The Bible contains a mixture of messages regarding disability. Some of these readings have been good while others potentially bad. Bad readings of scripture have traditionally contributed to the oppression and exclusion of people with disabilities within the life of the church.

It is high time that new and more positive readings of disability in the Bible are given prominence in the church pulpit. People with impairments should be encouraged to share with the church something of their experience of God from their particular

viewpoint. People with disabilities must be given opportunities to exercise their spiritual gifts within the communities they are a part of, thus revealing something new about the body of Christ and an inclusive God.

Through the disabled Christ, we have a picture of God that bears witness to our weak and vulnerable bodies. Christ, on the cross, experienced impairment and in his resurrected body carried the stigma of disability through the scars on his hands and feet. This is a relatively new and positive reading of the Bible which can bring new insight into disability and the understanding of strength through weakness.

Perhaps some of the greatest imagery of an inclusive church is Paul's description of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27. This passage shows a picture of the church united in difference. The body needs to work together to fulfil its potential. If it rejects any part of the body then it ceases to function as efficiently as it should. Equally the church, in rejecting difference of any kind, becomes weaker and ceases to function to its full potential. To fulfil its purpose, the church must support and encourage those who are perceived to be weaker or less capable as they are necessary to the spiritual health of the church.

What greater symbol or outworking of this theological statement could there be for the inclusion of people with disabilities than the act of Holy Communion. In the sacrament, the church congregation acknowledges their human frailty and brokenness before a God who became frail and broken for us. In this sacrament the church is united in weakness, the stigma of disability is turned on its head and the meaning of strength is redefined. These positive readings of Scripture have been neglected in the past and need to be heard today for the church to become the inclusive place it is called to be.

Christ's message and mission were inclusive; the gospel as a whole is a gospel of access. The Christian calling is to make disciples of all people regardless of ability, race, or gender. Therefore, the Church must take the inclusion of people with disabilities seriously as it is a Christian imperative, not an optional extra.

# **Embracing and Appreciating Diversities and Human Dignity**

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Mingalar Bar.

I am very glad to receive this privilege of sharing on the topic of ‘Embracing and Appreciating Diversities and Human Dignity’ in the thematic session of the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly. Before I came here, I was reading about AEYA when I saw the words ‘Torang Samua Basudara’. The phrase means ‘we are all one family’ and is the slogan of the people of Manado. That slogan inspired me to reflect on the topic of my presentation in AEYA. I am also delighted to meet with the youth around Asia; I strongly believe that the youth are the essential resource of the present and future ecumenical movements, not only in Asia but around the world.

Before we think about diversity, let us reflect upon Asia. Asia is diverse by nature; it is decorated with diversities in terms of race, culture, tradition, language, food, and so on. We can see six zones in Asia—Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, West Asia, North Asia, and Southeast Asia—and in each zone, diversity is found in different forms. Asia has a diverse topography with mountains, deserts, grasslands, forests, wetlands, etc. Asia is also home to several religions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Tribal Religions.

Most Asian countries have more than one native language. We can say that people in Asia are used to living amidst diversity. Embracing and appreciating diversities is not strange for the people of Asia, it is part of our lives. If so, why has this topic ‘Embracing and Appreciating Diversities and Human Dignity’ come up in the thematic session of AEYA? Do we need to refresh or revitalise the Ecumenical Spirit to embrace the diversities? What are the challenging factors to embrace diversities? Living with diversity is a given situation in Asia, so Asians need an ecumenical spirit to embrace these diversities, otherwise social cohesion and peaceful coexistence will be threatened.

Now, let us think together about diversity. Diversity is the wide range of differences among people, families, and communities based on their cultural and ethnic backgrounds as well as physical abilities. Diversity is simply a representation of many different types of people based on gender, belief system, sexual orientation, race, physical

appearance, different opinions, backgrounds, social experience, life experience, heritage, and so on. Diversity itself is neither positive nor negative; diversity is a given situation of all human beings. Somehow, diversity can be seen as 'instinctive identity' because we are born not only with our physical body but also embedded within socio-cultural norms and values given our familial background, social status, sexual identity, ethnic identity, and religious identity. No one can choose their skin colour, sex, family, ethnicity, or birthplace/native land. Even within the same family, we have diversities in terms of sex, appearance, and ability. Similarly, within the same religion too, diversities regarding ethnicity, culture, language, faith, and order and so on can be seen. What I would like to imply is that whether we like it or not, we are born into and with diversity.

Human beings are extraordinarily diverse in many ways yet, at a basic level, we are all of the same species. We experience highs and lows in life and strive to be happy and fulfilled. Our common pains and joys are what bring us together, but our diversity makes us unique. That uniqueness becomes our identity. Interpretation of diversity becomes very important in human society. If we interpret diversity as the beauty and strength of human society, it will promote harmonious living and peaceful coexistence. However, if we interpret diversity as a threatening or competitive factor of one's identity, discrimination will follow. Stereotype and prejudice are the results of misinterpretation of diversity.

Globalisation in our times has accelerated the free flow of goods, services, and technology, as well as the free flow of people; these bring interdependence, but at the same time they make differences or gaps more prominent. Globalisation increases interdependence, whereby events occurring in any part of the world can affect other parts of the global system—either directly or indirectly. Economic globalisation brings economic growth and high technology. Economic growth brings comfortable living, quality of health services, transportation facilities, and other necessities for better living or modern lifestyle.

On the other hand, market-oriented services create huge gaps between rich and poor; the pursuit of a comfortable lifestyle stimulates endless desire which comes with growing social polarization between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. High technology brings advanced communication facilities and social media reduces boundaries, enabling a free flow of social remittances such as cultures, lifestyles, ideologies, and belief systems that make



a complex society. In this place, a new fear has arisen among the diverse constituents of society. People worry about the loss or dilution of their identity: cultural or ethnic or religious identity. This is understandable. Worrying about the dilution of cultural value or dilution of a particular distinctive identity creates the 'we vs the other' condition or attitude. All people have an identity, some through birth and some through personal choice/social construction. Some may be similar while some may be different. This is normal; but because of this fear, the over-protection of the identity becomes one of the root causes of social tension. That tends to make people feel insecure and uneasy with each other. When we feel insecure amid diversity, we cannot embrace and appreciate diversities. We may see diversities as unwanted situations. Again, to avoid insecurity, people construct a solid community with people with whom they share identity, which leads to marginalisation and isolation.

In this place, let us go back to the Bible. In Acts 17:26 (KJV) we read, "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." In the New International Version (NIV) we read, "From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands." It is within this greater context of unity that humanity's diversity rightly appears. For Christians, the acceptance of diversity is motivated by love for God and therefore by love for other human beings. Since God is the Creator of all, God's love rests upon all, even upon those who reject him. He, therefore, calls Christians and Christian communities to imitate God's love in its worldwide embrace.

After thinking about diversity, we shall move to human dignity. The word 'dignity' comes from the Latin words dignitas ('worth') and dignus ('worthy'), suggesting that dignity points to a standard by which people should be viewed and treated. Dignity means that each person is worthy of honour and respect for who they are, not just for what they can do. In other words, human dignity cannot be earned and cannot be taken away. It is an unquestionable gift given to us by God, and every other good thing in life depends on the safeguarding of our fundamental dignity. The most common response people offer is that dignity is about respect. Dignity is our inherent value and worth as human beings; everyone is born with it. Human rights are intimately related to the notion of human dignity. Human rights and human dignity are connected in such a way that one cannot be understood without the other. The importance of human rights and

the requirement to respect everyone's rights are based on the notion of human dignity. In that sense, human dignity is considered to be the foundation of human rights. The effort to reduce poverty, the efforts to eliminate discrimination, oppression, and various forms of violence, and the condemnation of injustice are all grounded in the notion of human dignity. If we cannot respect different identities, the dignity of others will not be valued or recognised. If we do not care about dignity, people's rights to access fundamental human rights will be uncertain, and that leads to discrimination and unjust conditions among diversities.

Regardless of any factors or reasons we can think of, individuals have an inherent, immeasurable worth and dignity because humans were created in the image and likeness of God. In Genesis 1:26 (NIV) we read, "Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." All human beings are equal before God; that leads us to think no less of somebody because they are from a different ethnicity or culture because they believe something different from us, or because of their social status or employment situation. Since all humans have the same dignity, it follows that the same rights and responsibilities apply to all people.

Even though human dignity is an inherent value, human dignity, unfortunately, is often assumed to be an acquired characteristic of the people with high social power; at the same time, the dignity of powerless people is not valued or not counted equally. The intrinsic human dignity of the poor, people with disability, marginalised people, informal workers, sex workers, and sexual minorities is underestimated and their equal access to fundamental human rights is often neglected. Again within a human society full of diversities because of social status and socioeconomic conditions, appreciating the human dignity of all human being is challenged in some particular circumstances.

As mentioned before, diversity is a given situation of the human community and based on these, distinctive identities are formulated. Again, people with distinctive identities create socially and culturally consolidated communities. Embracing and appreciating diversities and human dignity means more than just acknowledging the differences. It also includes:

- understanding and appreciating the interdependence of humanity within the diverse community,

- promoting mutual respect for those of different ethnicity, religion, cultural norms, traditional practices, sex, and sexual orientation,
- recognising that discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some people while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others, and,
- building network across diverse communities to respond to common problems of the human society.

We cannot carry out the above without ecumenical commitment. Embracing and appreciating diversities and human dignity is never a result of a once-and-for-all effort; thousands of daily actions are needed to build the blocks of mutual acceptance and reciprocal obligation to end discrimination and marginalisation. We need enough courage to embrace and appreciate diversity. Our attitude, perspective, and ideologies are somehow internalised with the stereotyping norm. We value our norms. We protect and promote our identity but at the same time, the norms and values of others have been underestimated or neglected intentionally or unintentionally.

In this place, I would like to revisit the essence of ecumenism. The word ecumenism comes from the Greek word: Oikos, meaning a 'house', 'family', 'people', or 'nation'; oikoumenē, 'the whole inhabited world', and oikoumenikos, 'open to or participating in the whole world'. Ecumenism recognises that people from different Christian faiths and traditions can work together towards greater unity while each preserves their own traditional faith and practice. It does not seek to ignore the differences, rather, through understanding and mutual respect, we aim to live in harmony while respecting the diversities in the human community. This kind of 'Ecumenical Spirituality' provides us with enough courage to embrace diversities and accept the dignity of different people with different social power because it is a gift of God; in John 17:21 (NIV) Jesus prays, "...That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."; and again in Galatians 3:28 (NIV), "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Such biblical teachings encourage us to embrace and appreciate the diversity and dignity of all human beings.

'Embracing and Appreciating Diversities and Human Dignity' is not just a physical activity such as holding hands when taking photographs, smiling at each other; it is a theological-ethical frame of mind.

‘Embracing and appreciating’ is a physical-spiritual phenomenon. It demands maturity and responsibility. In 1 Corinthians 8:1 (NIV) we read, “But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.” We Christians have two dimensions of love. The first one, we read in Matthew 22:36-40 (NIV) when Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Also in Matthew 7:12 (NIV), we see, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” These biblical verses lead us on the way of physical-spiritual competence for building the non-discriminatory community. Embracing and appreciating diversities and human dignity requires thinking, feeling, and willingness. Head, heart, and hand should be combined to make this possible. Let me use the words ‘Born Again’—we have to be born again from exclusivism to inclusivism.

I would like to conclude my presentation with the word *symbiosis*; this is a term from biological science that means ‘close association or relationship between two or more living organisms, where at least one receives some sort of benefit from the relationship’. For example, in certain species of birds who sit on buffaloes and eat parasites on their skin, the birds receive what they want and the buffaloes benefit from the birds, reducing itching because of parasites; the weight of the bird is nothing for the buffalo. A bee feeds on the nectar of flowers and in turn spread pollen which allows the flower to reproduce. A bee can survive with nectar and flowers are sustained by the spread of pollen. We are living amidst diversities and we are born with diversities. It is through these diversities that we build our own identity and glorify our dignity. This is a common phenomenon of all human beings. So, why don’t we think about symbiosis? Let us start to embrace and appreciate diversities so that human dignity will be respected, protected, and promoted.

As we read in 1 Corinthians 12:17 (NIV), “If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?”

## Emerging Issues and Concerns of Christian Youth in India

**Ruth Mathen**

*Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India*

I feel so incredibly honoured to be among all you lovely minds on this beautiful day, minds with ideas, with the passion and zeal to change the world around us. I look around me and I see these radiant faces—and one word comes to mind: *enthusiastic*. Did you know that the origin of ‘enthusiastic’ is from the Greek word ‘*enthous*’, meaning ‘possessed by God’ or ‘inspired by God’?

Though we may have our cultural differences, three common factors bind us all: we are Asian, we are Christian, and we are young. Time is on our side and it is us who hold in our hands the maximum potential to inspire and influence the world we live in today. Whatever makes good Christians makes good citizens, too. A Christian should be actively involved in the affairs of the world, not abandon the world, or dissociate ourselves from it. The face of this world tainted with sin will pass away, however, the hope of the new world must increase our efforts to improve and sustain this one. A Christian must always contribute to improving society. Let us look at the world through the eyes of Christ and confront human laws with Gospel messages so that we can more fully assume our duties and obligations towards our fellow people, with whom we are bound in a common destiny.

When we wonder about our role, when we, the youth, require guidance and direction, all we need to do is to look to Christ, so that his light and truth will be revealed. It is only then that we will be able to fulfil our potential as citizens of our countries, as members of the world community. We have responsibilities, and these responsibilities are part of our freedom. Today, I believe that through this ecumenical youth assembly, Christ wants to reinforce them for us and is calling us to become his partners—sharing, serving, and working together to rebuild and uplift our societies. Faithfulness to Christ can never be separated from faithfulness to others.

Today, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, any assertion of our faith stands challenged. It is today that we have to cling to the cross more than ever. The expression of our religion is threatened in multiple ways, of which I will address some. I would like to highlight these issues by sharing some of my personal experiences in the hope that it will resonate with you.

One of the biggest issues that the youth face today in India is the rise of extreme nationalism and religious fundamentalism. Yes, there are fundamental tenets in every religion, and these may have adherents of their own; the problem, my dear friends, is when such fundamentalism becomes fanatical. This is a key distinction that I would like to make here. It is not as if such issues have never existed, it is that we are now witnessing a historic spike in such instances, and its rapid proliferation is now a major cause for concern. The identity of being a Christian in India is getting questioned, challenged, and in some harrowing cases, even threatened.

Now, I refuse to present the Indian Christian minority as ‘victims’—how much longer can we berate those who attack us? The way we define reality is real in its consequences—but hang on to this thought, I will return to it. We know that the situation is far more nuanced, so let us understand ‘why’, that is, the psychological motivation driving these divisive forces.

The manifestation of religious fundamentalism in India, unfortunately, is due to the occurrence of the intersection of religion and politics. Within the constitutionally-mandated democratic set up in India, the expression of Hinduism (the majority religion in India) as a ‘religion’ or as a ‘way of life’ often gets blurred and merges into the other. India, which claims to be the largest democracy in the world, where multiple ethnicities and religions coexist and reconcile with their own definition of being ‘secular’, the Hindu majority struggles with the conflict of being all-encompassing or deeply excluding. On the one hand there exists the theological ‘Hinduism’, and on the other, the more militant and aggressive nationalism masquerading in the guise of ‘Hindutva’ (which can be loosely translated to Hindu-ness). While Hinduism draws upon a wider canvas of assimilation and integration and attempts to be all-inclusive, Hindutva, which was conceived fundamentally to capitalise on differences, is highly exclusive. It crystallised as a response to a threat which was subjectively felt, but not concretely experienced.

The British Empire had wholly invaded the Indian state roughly three hundred years ago. Along with this, the reach or the advance of Christianity increased as well—and this threatened a certain section of upper caste, upper class, orthodox Hindu Brahmins of a particular strand of Hinduism. The revivalist discourse placed Hindus as the autochthonous or ‘original’ inhabitants of India, and any non-Hindu minority was posited as the ‘foreign’, ‘the external’, the



'other'. Hinduism attempted to homogenise religions like Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism by claiming that such religions stemmed from Hinduism itself, and thus their 'pseudo-Hindu' nature lessened the severity of the threat they pose.

Here, my dear friends, lies the root of extreme nationalism and religious fundamentalism. The powerless minorities made for an easy target of hatred. Fundamentalists and conservative nationalists claimed that India was only for Hindus, and thus if any minority "chose" to live here, they were to submit and do so under the dominance of the Hindus. This toxic environment was ripe for the inception of exclusivist nationalism embodied by the This toxic environment was ripe for the inception of exclusivist nationalism embodied by the RSS (the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), the leading organisation of the Hindu right-wing. With the initiation of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) into power in 2014, the RSS has re-emerged from political limbo and has attempted to pervade every aspect of life in ways both covert and overt.

To cite a very recent example, during Christmas season last year, people affiliated with the RSS threatened schools in the city of Aligarh with "dire consequences" if they dared to celebrate Christmas. Another attempt to colour 25 December was by declaring it as National Good Governance Day instead. This is a problem because it invisibilises the Christian minority and normalises the infiltration of the government and its religious aspirations. Through the construction of such a Hindu "normalcy", any assertion of non-hegemonic or non-Hindu groups is made less visible and thus non-challenging. Another unfortunate incident was the arrest of nearly thirty brothers and priests who were visiting homes to sing Christmas carols. Then we also have the phenomenon of 'ghar wapsi' (homecoming) or the return to the Hindu fold through which Christians and Muslims are being "re-converted" back to Hinduism.

Hindutva, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, stands as the biggest and most aggravating threat to the secular nature of the Indian state, eliminating from its ambit not just Christians, Muslims, Parsis, and other religious minorities, but also the lower caste Dalit groups and women as well. But we have come to understand that Hindutva will cease to exist if the differences between various groups will be erased—there will not be a 'them' or an 'other' to combat!

Communalism is seen as a chauvinistic and often violent expression of hostility displayed by one religious or ethnic group toward another, with secularism being its antithesis and antidote. This must

be seen in relation to the tragic events of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan, following which the newborn republic's founders elevated secularism to the status of a guarantor of peace between communities and a necessary condition for a functioning democracy in this multi-confessional society.

Why is understanding the origin and history of such religious fundamentalism important? This is because it will help us extrapolate such similar situations in other countries and enable us to devise an effective strategy to combat such fundamentalism. The church that I belong to, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India, strongly emphasises 'worship, study, and service' as the motto for our youth wing. All of our local units readily and regularly engage with the communities around them and have started several commendable social endeavours, such as visits to orphanages and old age homes, clothes donations, blood donations, health camps, and feeding of the homeless street dwellers. However, we must admit that such work only engages with social issues on a superficial level and hardly makes a dent in the larger social malaise of poverty, urban malnutrition, illiteracy, and social inequality. Thus, our efforts are confined to the periphery as it is most convenient for the Hindu majority to keep us there.

Inspired by Christ, I too wish to serve society. My form of service was through the establishment of my NGO, Youth United Foundation, which I began with my friends. Through our motto 'Educate, Organise, and Liberate', we strive to channel the energies of the youth into various positive and constructive social endeavours. Our core focus lies in education and civic participation. Being a student of economics and sociology, I have closely studied patterns of development and have come to believe that it is education alone which is most important in reforming society; it is vital in illuminating minds and banishing the darkness of ignorance. I also believe Christ to be a great social revolutionary who formed an egalitarian society where the division between the rich and the poor was blurred. Our core team comprises four of us founders—two of us are Christians and two are Buddhist Dalits—and we are trying to make a difference in this Hindu dominated society. However, our path is tough and today standing here in front of you, I admit that we have not been able to scale up as we originally intended to. We see our age and our religion as the double burden that inhibits us in doing the work we want to do. In my case, I feel my gender and identity as a woman—the only woman in the core team—too has a bearing on my work.

Coming to the topic of women within the Indian church, let us zoom in a little on this issue. The dynamics of the relationship between women and the church is at an interesting juncture today. I want to conjure up for you an image—please visualise this with me—at noon, on the mid-day of the mid-month at a place said to be the middle of the Earth, when the history of humankind was divided in two—some women were looking at the cross where the master and the guru hung by three nails. While all of Christ’s disciples (except for John) had run away from the foot of the cross, all those who ‘knew Jesus personally’, including the women who had followed Him from Galilee stood at some distance to watch. Now too, we see women at the cross and at crossroads. Let the Church uplift, respect, and empower them for the ‘kin-dom’ of God.

We know that the essence of the Christian doctrine is totally egalitarian and makes no discrimination on the basis of a person’s gender. This is its main appeal. If you look at Hinduism that makes spiritual salvation contingent upon an individual’s sex and position in the caste hierarchy, Christianity treats all as equal in the sight of God. No caste, no sex, no work, and no man was to be depended upon to get salvation and everlasting life. God gave it freely to anyone and everyone who believed in His Son.

Since the world around us today is acknowledging the full humanity of women, must we not re-orient our Christian practices to include the same? We must attempt to read the Bible through the perspective of women to understand the lived experience of the devout female Christian, and thus comprehend the manifold ways in which the love of God is experienced. The ancient Greco-Roman culture of which our early church fathers were a part was predisposed to misogyny, the tradition in which gender relations are organised by principles of hierarchy and subordination. We can locate this in the teachings of Paul where ‘women should submit to their husbands as to the Lord’ (Ephesians 5) and should ‘not teach or have authority over men’ in the Church because ‘Adam was created first’ and ‘Eve was deceived’ (1 Timothy 2). Then we have the views that women do not fully bear the image of God—we were apparently the means through which Adam was deceived, some even term us as the ‘devil’s gateway’, or as ‘misbegotten men’. However, through the declaration that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither slave nor free, we see a thread, a glimmer of mutuality and partnership. Gender inequality, like all other inequalities, represents a fundamental disregard for the image of God present in every

person and a perversion of the ideals of cooperation and partnership as modelled in the Trinity.

We must recognise those rituals, practices, and teachings that are, firstly, *patriarchal*: valuing males over females, taking the male as the norm of 'human', and defining women as relative, dependent, and inferior; secondly, *sexist*: where the pre-eminence of the male is embodied in interlocking sets of structures which are legal, governmental, economic, scientific, and religious; and thirdly, *misogynistic*: permeating with a deep and ancient mistrust of women and their bodily functions, leading to fear, hatred, and violence against women, coupled with the mythic blaming of women for all evils in the world.

Just like any other corruption of God's design, the patriarchal subordination of women in the church should be opposed, resisted, and transformed. The position of women must not be viewed as marginal any longer. Must the church view feminism as a threat? Certainly not! Just as the church strives to be more accepting and inclusive, women too must be made aware of the potential they have once the boundaries of church structures are broken and a sphere of relative autonomy achieved. What we require is an understanding of theological or Christian feminism not as a set of 'women's issues', but rather as a *new consciousness*, a new perspective on reality. Central to this new consciousness should be the rejection of dualism, hierarchy, domination or 'power over', in favour of wholeness, connectedness, and mutuality, or 'power with, and power among'.

This reaffirms women as rational and responsible persons, as leaders capable of shaping culture and society. Thus, breaking away from stereotypes of men's and women's 'natures' is a step in the right direction—and will also enable the Church to recognise and accommodate the changing dynamics of the institutions of family and marriage, another major issue in Asia.

I would have loved to cover marriage and family within the Indian context, too; but it seems I am nearly out of time.

In conclusion, let me quickly summarise my main arguments—

The two major issues that I believe require urgent attention are (i) the rise of religious fundamentalism and extreme nationalism, which curtails the expression of Christian faith and identity, and (ii) the place and position of women within the church, which places a double burden on those under its ambit.

As young Asian Christians today, we have a great responsibility—to use our *voice*. Rather than scattered approaches or superficial solutions to these issues, it is *vital*, so very important that we redefine our approach, and together shape a *new consciousness*, a *new reality*, and better this world in our hope and faith of the world to come.

I thank the CCA and the AEYA team for selecting me, a humble twenty-year-old to be a part of this esteemed panel; I hope I have done adequate justice to this opportunity.

May the peace of our Lord be with each one of you.

# **Youth in Countering Religious Intolerance**

***Rev. Jimmy Marcos Immanuel Sormin***

*Protestant Church in the Western Part of Indonesia*

## **Religious Intolerance in South Asia**

Through a variety of primary sources, this paper highlights the concept of religious intolerance especially in the context of Asian countries. Our history has recorded that there had been many acts of terrorism and religious conflicts in the world. We might not forget some of the terrorist attacks such as the hijack of aircraft to crash the twin towers of World Trade Centre in the USA (9 September 2001), Bali bombing (12 October 2002), Istanbul bombing (20 November 2003), London bombing (7 July 2005), Karachi bombing (18 October 2007), the mass killing in Peshawar (16 December 2014), and the attacks of ISIS to several countries. We might also remember some religious conflicts in Africa, the Middle East, and in our own countries in the last two decades. Those attacks and conflicts have given negative impacts to many societies in the world. The impacts are not merely about deaths, refugees, physical, and economic losses, but they have also created religious intolerance and/or intolerance of particular identities.

The term 'Religious Intolerance' does not lend itself easily to a definition. As a consequence, many scholars often sidestep the problem of definition. For example, Martha Nussbaum's short essay entitled 'Religious Intolerance' speaks to its prevalence but fails to flesh out the term. Religious tolerance defines religious intolerance as "not respecting the fundamental human right of other people to hold religious beliefs that are different from your own." This intolerance is often shaped by stereotypes, stigma, and hatred. It has caused the appearance of other radical groups and religious conflicts, even in those places where terrorism and those kinds of conflicts never existed before. Some opportunists use such circumstances for their own purposes. The paradigm of some local political parties for instance, by any means, tend to use such circumstances to succeed in their political agendas. They embrace certain fundamentalist and radical groups to work with them. They even expect conflicts (horizontal and vertical) happen in society to weaken the existing government and people's cohesion. Folklorist Barre Toelken wrote, "Different groups of people not only think in different ways but they often 'see' things in different ways."



He explained how our culture trains us to “see things in ‘programmed ways,” or as one of his students put it, “If I hadn’t believed it I never would have seen it.” Therefore, the attitude of intolerance seems to be built and preserved by people’s groups or religious group’s challenges which seek to defend an assumed cultural morality. We can see it from the dissemination of hoaxes, hate spins, acts of xenophobia, primordial perspectives, and persecution in some places. It is like maintaining latent conflicts which could explode anytime like weapons of destruction.

During the Asian Ecumenical Institute 2017, one of the best programmes of the Christian Conference of Asia, some of its participants coming from Indonesia, India, Myanmar, Philippines, and Bangladesh presented the current issues in their countries. They chose religious intolerance as one of their most critical issues. Some presentations spoke about intolerant thinking and movements which worsened in their countries because of politicisation by religious and political personalities and the syndicates of international extremists or terrorists who played ‘smart roles’ behind the curtain before their showtime. Issues of identities, ideological convictions, economic needs, and majority-minority relations became their entrance point.

After mastering certain doctrines the intolerant or radical groups conflicted truth claims of other religions or beliefs (in John Rawls’ terms, ‘comprehensive doctrines’) with theirs resulting in religious intolerance. Their truth claims were coerced to be acknowledged and used as the standard of ethics or politics in public life. This led their members or followers to develop narrow minds and become exclusive persons.

Nowadays, with the development of technology, radical groups including terror groups, find it easier to actuate their missions in spreading a spirit of intolerance and terror. Since they are so dependent on communication, modern technology has helped them to connect extensively using their classified symbols or codes. There also seems to be a shift in their movement through this convenience. Instead of approaching and recruiting followers physically, and using guns and bombs as they conventionally tend to do, they prefer to use technology to fight with words and certain visualisations, and later on to execute their operations. Spreading hoaxes, for instance, has been more effective for them to strengthen their messages and to receive sympathies. There were at least five groups (out of twenty terror groups overall) that are located in South Asia that maintained websites worldwide (cyber warfare).

## **Intolerant Youths**

Based on research from some cases of religious intolerance in South Asia, youths have often been a soft target to be infiltrated or provoked as they are 'good volunteers' to brainwash. As a result, many youths became practitioners and spreaders of intolerance. Some of them were even caught as terrorists and the main actors of conflicts in their places. This generation is seemingly critical to their social environments, but many of them could easily be blinded by radical teachings and/or influences.

Based on surveys by ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, Centre for the Study of Islam and Society, and Alvara, Strait Times reported that one of the factors why youths become easily plunged into religious intolerance is the economic reason. The high growth of the youth population accompanied by a high rate of unemployment would motivate youths to be more intolerant. For the radical and political groups who are mostly anti-state government, and those who have economic and political agendas, they prefer to take advantage of youths' circumstance to achieve their goals. Youths' energy and life have been used to 'enliven' intolerant acts and to create anxieties in society.

Besides the economic reason, youths are also psychologically vulnerable to get influenced by certain ideologies or thoughts. When the Indonesia Institute of Sciences (LIPI) researched radicalism among undergraduate students of some state and private universities in Indonesia, they found that many students had been influenced by radical teachings. LIPI and some researchers also found that students of exact and natural sciences were easier to get influenced/ brainwashed because they have lack of knowledge and experience on social issues. They even created their own cells to spread and develop their beliefs.

## **Countering Religious Intolerance**

Without viewing this reality pessimistically, as many researchers who have studied the phenomena of religious intolerance and radicalism among youths tend to do, we must not forget to look more positively and perceive youths as a millennial generation who have great potential to build peace and initiate other constructive social changes. Millennial youths, with talents, are supposed to be a powerful and innovative engine of social movements to present

*'shalom'* and *'eirene'* in our societies, in local and global contexts. We youths, especially as Christian youths, have to awaken ourselves and others that we are not merely a generation of 'job seekers'. We have to use and manifest our political roles in our respective societies to counter the intolerance movements and other sources of conflicts.

I would like to provide some examples of social movements initiated by Indonesian youths which hopefully might motivate us more to empower our own existence as millennial youth and to make significant contributions in building and preserving peace in our societies. I believe in other countries some youth organisations have started such movements as well, but the following examples could serve as a comparison. For example, allow me to briefly describe the second youth interfaith organisation, namely 'Youth Interfaith Forum on Sexuality' (YIFoS), that I initiated with some friends in 2009. This organisation has been developed and is now known in the national and international networks. With a simple dream to have a peaceful environment or society which respects others' identities, I encouraged some friends to form an interfaith community which deals from an interfaith dialogue perspective with the issue of sexual identity as its common ground to dialogue about. Why sexual identities? In Indonesia, we found some cases that people kept discriminating and persecuting persons with different sexual identities (esp. LGBTIQ) and those who work as prostitutes or commercial sex workers. Most ordinary people in our country still see women as inferior to men. We realised that these kinds of perspectives were derived from a literalist interpretation of religious notions and sacred texts. Therefore, we have been trying to reinterpret and deconstruct discriminatory teachings and/or perspectives by dialoguing with our faiths and even with conservative and radical youths from various religions. Some of our programs are training for teens and youths, creating training modules, improving networks, visiting and initiating dialogues with religious communities, etc. Our movement went through many obstacles but, praise the Lord we have survived and are still in existence. We still have to work hard at widening its circle of influence. We are so glad to see that we have inspired youths to build interfaith relations in their communities and to start social entrepreneurship.

The other organisations that are also concerned with issues of building tolerance and peace are 'Peace-Gen' and 'Sabang-Merauke'.

These two organisations are well-known in Indonesia now. With good resources, they have given education in various forms to children, teens, and youths in Indonesia. With similar visions to build tolerance and peace in our society, they provide opportunities for persons to experience the multiculturalism of Indonesia, and they build awareness about the nature of diversity in human life. Their efforts have been appreciated by our government and other organisations. They encourage others to extend the visions into the midst of segregation that happens in societies. What these organisations have done shows us that notwithstanding the fact that many youths have become religiously intolerant and have caused social problems, there are still hopes and great potencies of youths to be agents of change.

As Christian youths, we have our duty to express Christ's love to all of His creations in this inhabited world (oikoumene). Encountering religious intolerance by building and preserving peace is one of the manifestations of that duty. At the same time, we also need to express our prophetic voice to the others without having to resort to 'emotional fighting' with the intolerants. Therefore, there are several things to be considered and done by us in overcoming this issue:

1. Avoiding apathy and pessimism but being optimistic about ourselves as God's children who are sent to be change-makers wherever God has placed us;
2. Promoting multiculturalism and peace in our society by disseminating Jesus' love (a diffusion of Christian ethic) to others;
3. Anti-hoax campaign by using modern technologies in creative ways;
4. Building interfaith and good relationships with government and other elements in our society to support each other for positive purposes (expressing our faith does not mean we insist the other to follow, but to make them understand our standpoint and to enrich themselves as self-reflection to criticise and/or help develop/reform their own faiths);
5. Creating ecumenical forum and project among Asian youths to build same concerns, to share our opinions and struggles, to support and pray for one another. We have to realise and admit that to do this is not an easy task, because sometimes the reality of various denominations and Christian organisations among us has created another kind of intolerance. It even

exists in programmed meetings or assemblies, and I call it as 'pretended ecumenism';

6. Encouraging youths at our church and our environment to take part in this movement;
7. I believe that if we work together for social changes there will be an accumulation of positive movements that of course will make big impacts in our respective societies, and we can go further beyond mere tolerance to actual love. We do all this as a way of responding to our own spiritual call, and of offering ourselves as living sacrifices to God (cf. Rome 12:1).

# **Korean Society after the Candlelight Movement**

***Kim Minji***

*National Council of Churches in Korea*

Looking back at the actions during the candlelight movement, we need to examine what happened to Korean society. The Sewol ferry disaster is first to be mentioned as one of the factors that resulted in those candlelight actions. The Sewol disaster was a large-scale disaster that occurred on 16 April 2014 in the southeast sea of South Korea. Around 304 children died, and this incident provided a decisive reason for realising how contradictory society has been living in the past. People have seen the Sewol ferry sinking into the sea and said it is like the Korean society sinking. There are many social contradictions such as unfair labour conditions of irregular workers, unjust connections between the government and the mega-corporations, and corruptions in the middle of the incident, but the truth of the case has not been clarified yet. Families of the victims together with the religious civil society are working towards organisation and truth-clarification activities.

From here, the candlelight movement can be explained with more contextuality. This incident could not be discussed in terms of the polarities of the political left or right because it was a tragedy that rendered such positions irrelevant. Because it was an event which involved lives, it could not be judged by any political position or opinion; people came together to sympathise by lighting candles and making their voices heard.

After the incident, the government's inability was revealed to the whole Korean society. While the ferry was sinking in the middle of the sea, the then president was not seen by the people for seven hours because she was concerned with her hair and makeup. The Golden time had passed, and the rescue team was just waiting for presidents' order. In the end, 304 children were killed in the Sewol ferry disaster. They died in the sea without receiving any rescue in the middle of the sea.

Through this incident, the candlelight action began in earnest. Children, adults, and those from every generation poured out onto the streets with candles. This action was started in earnest from November 2016. The rally was held over twenty times, and each time it was held, millions of citizens joined. They cried out for Just Peace on the Peninsula to get rid of the corrupt nexus between the government and the mega-corporations such as Samsung involving



corrupted politicians. It led directly to the impeachment of the president. Citizens shouted out for the resignation of President Park Geun-Hye in one voice. Park is the daughter of one of the most atrocious dictators in Korea. Her father seems to have taught her quite well.

Candlelight action has thus achieved a new history of democracy, and a new world, a desire for a new history, has been passed on to the world. From the conclusion, Korea's candlelight action is not just for the Republic of Korea, but a historical event that shows the greatness of democracy in Asia and the world. After this big mass-movement, Korea had an election for the new president. Mr Moon Jae-In was elected by people power, this is why he is called the candlelight president.

In Korea, candle action is called by many names, such as candlelight movement, candlelight revolution, candlelight vigil, and so on. As each generation participated, the candlelight action was expressed in various ways along with the energy of each generation. I am proud that the Korean people have shown their capabilities as democratic citizens in this way. Those pictures are proving it.

## **Korean Society and the Human Rights of Youth**

Now I will share about how Korean young people, living in the present, live after the candlelight actions and new presidential election. First, I will introduce two words to help understand the story. It is 'Hell Josun'. It means 'Hell Korea'. Chosun is the past name of Korean dynasty. Second, 'Yuljeong-Pei', or 'Passion-Salary', referring to many employers who want young people to devote themselves to their jobs without paying them a reasonable wage. What happened to the Republic of Korea which achieved very rapid economic growth, industrialisation, and democratisation in a short period?

My perspective is focused totally and completely on the marginalised and the suffering. Now I will invite you all to the scene behind the high-rise building forests, colourful neon signs, trendy fashion of Seoul which is the young man who worries about work, the young man who worries about an hour's salary, the young man who works in a harsh environment and dies in an accident because of unfair labour conditions. Seoul looks good sometimes beautiful but it does not mean that there are no issues.

Currently, young people in Korea are not happy despite the propaganda about 'Happy Seoul'. According to the youth consciousness survey

conducted in 2015, young people are losing confidence in all five aspects: love, marriage, childbirth, human relations, and housing. When we think about the future of the Republic of Korea, this is a very dangerous symptom.

There is an invisible hierarchy of status in Korea, which means that the starting line of life depends on the parents' assets and the opportunities for life differ. Poor young people are forced to find low-wage jobs, and it is difficult for poor people to build the skills needed for good jobs, and they cannot afford to prepare them. Poverty is therefore bound to continue to be passed on. Even the energy index of young people has been significantly different according to the parents' economic status. Of course, we believe that Christian youths are overcoming through their faith beyond capital and walking together toward the kingdom of God. However, in general, the youth situation of Korean society is quite bad.

Therefore, it is difficult to deduce fairness in such a social structure. What fairness can be expected in an invisible class society that is already rigidly structured? In other words, trying hard does not provide fair compensation. Korea's college entrance rate is 80 per cent. The gap in education is smaller than ever. This means that people are prepared to learn and prepare to work, but the lack of fairness and the injustice shown to young people makes them stare at the prospect of living horrible lives. It is, so to speak, like 'walking through an invisible tunnel'. The future of a society where the dreams of young people have collapsed this is what we should say, gloomy. Young people are the subjects of today's and tomorrow's dreams. Those lives are directly linked with church matters. Why? Young people are disappearing from the church.

Why are the young people disappearing from the church? My answer is quite simple: The reality is hell, but the church is dreaming. The Church is a community of love and hospitality that dreams of the kingdom of God as a community of hope. I'm not denying this. But in general, the lives of young people suffering and they are being left out of the world, this cannot be denied.

This is directly linked with the human rights of young people, and as we have already mentioned, poverty naturally determines their working conditions. The poor working environment and unreasonable wages are human rights violations in their lives. According to Article 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea, "All citizens have the dignity and value as human beings and have

the right to pursue happiness. The state must identify and guarantee the basic human rights of individuals.”

The Moon Jae-in administration is trying to create jobs by making various attempts to promote employment policy and human rights for young people. The church should once again awaken to the fact that its youth are not only members of the church but also members of society. Churches must be a space where youth can share the pain that young people live with, what their troubles are, and where God wants to lead them. Human rights are everywhere in the values of the Bible. The rights of all human beings are written in the form of God. They should be respected. After the establishment of a democratic government, the life of young people should be the symbol of human rights. When their human rights are guaranteed, Korean society will be able to move into a truly mature society. The church will be healthy when their human rights are upheld!

We should work together toward solidarity and cooperation rather than competition. The church and society should work together to prevent the frustration of young people’s dreams from their economic status. Young people are not objects for a distant future, but the main movers of today. They are the protagonists of today.

### **Youth and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula**

The last issue to share is the unification of the peninsula. It is a subject that can never be missed when discussing issues in Korea. As you all know, Korea is the only divided nation in the world. There is a military demarcation line called the 3.8 line between the two Koreas, which means that the Korean Peninsula is in a truce, at war. However, recently after the candlelight movement, there has been a spring breeze to the Korean Peninsula. A few days ago, Korean artists went into North Korea to perform as a starting point of our upcoming summit talks, and Kim Jong Eun, the leader of North attended and had a good time together with South Korean representatives. Also in May, the two Koreas will hold summit talks at the peace zone where there has been a big tension for the last ten years, and in June, the North and the United States will talk. This is significant in recent living history. It is because it has not been done ever under the ‘wrong regime’ for the last ten years. So it is often expressed in the media and news these days that “the spring breeze is blowing in the Korean peninsula”.

Nevertheless, this is not a simple matter given that the division has not been done by only the will of our own country when it had been

decided. The Korean Peninsula, which is the main point of military action, is an optimised place for war. Therefore, our division can be a great benefit for someone. I will not mention who they are and who want this to be. I will stop saying more about the complicated political background, and I request all of you to pray that the unity of Korean peninsula will be achieved soon by the way of recognising and respecting each other as they are.

Public education in Korean society did not properly inform citizens that social problems from the division of the nation have a direct impact on the lives of citizens who live in hardships today. Therefore, young people need convincing on why it is so important and how it impacts each one of them. However, some young people have been living for peace in this world, remember the sorrow of national division, and take steps toward peaceful unification.

The EYCK (Ecumenical Youth Council in Korea) is composed of four Youth Councils from each denomination. It is a Christian youth group that is moving forward with a passion for peace and unification. NCCK's Reunification and Reconciliation committee mainly focuses on peace work. Among the major programmes held in recent years is the 'Peace Treaty Campaign'. In the first year of this work, they travelled across the United States giving peace messages of the 'Armistice to the Peace treaty' to the people in the United States, and their voice was represented to the Obama administration as well through picketing action in front of the White House. Secondly, the team travelled to several countries in Europe, such as Scotland, Switzerland, and Germany, and delivered messages to the people who are working in various contexts for peace in Asia and the Korean peninsula. This summer, the third campaign will be held in Asia. Young people have also been involved such initiatives as peace messengers from all walks of life.

In this way, Christian youth and NCCK are working together for these causes. Through this process, we desire peaceful reunification, and through this process, we have the belief that the lives of young people will be fundamentally changed. The unification of the South and the North is not just a matter involving Koreans but also all Asians. The lives, human rights, and reunification of Korean society and young people cannot be separated.

## **Conclusion**

My conclusion is quite simple. More communication is the answer. As Asian youth, we should try to be interested in each others' issues

and pain. Through such processes, we may re-establish the dream of the Asian Ecumenical Movement. The Asian Ecumenical Network should be organised in various areas, especially in places where our marginalised neighbours cry out. If we have time to meet deeply in the formation of the Asian Ecumenical Youth Network, we could realise the oneness in Christ, full of abundant diversity. A spring breeze is blowing across the Korean Peninsula. I pray that this spring breeze spreads like wildfire throughout Asia as a whole. Let us meet more often! That is the hope of today and it will be the hope of Asia. Thank you.

# **Changing Family Values and Cultures – Are We Disposable?: Problems Faced by Youth in Japan**

***Dr Sawako Fujiwara***

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## **Introduction**

My heart beats with delight to hear that Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) would be held in Manado, because as is well-known internationally; North Sulawesi is the birth place of our great sister, the first Asian feminist theologian, Marianne Katoppo. She studied at the Jakarta Theological Seminary in 1960s and published a book entitled *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Woman's Theology in 1979*. To show my deep respect for her, I would like to give my panel presentation from the perspective of a younger Asian feminist theologian and Christian educator who struggles to promote the empowerment of youth, especially of women and girls, in Japanese society while sharing a single terrifying question with them: "Are we disposable?"

It was not until when I entered the School of Theology at Doshisha University, in Kyoto, Japan, that I came to know about the ecumenical movement and Asian women's theological movement. I learned a lot from the ministries and theological works of feminist theologians in Northern Thailand, where I conducted field research in Chiang Mai for my doctoral dissertation. I admired them and at the same time, I was disappointed because I did not demonstrate similar talent as they had. However, the more theologically trained women I encountered, the more I came to know that our differences are blessings. As described in 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, there are varieties of gifts, services, and activities which the same God has bestowed upon us. After completing my PhD in theology, I asked myself: "What will you do after this?"

In this presentation, I have attempted to do the following: firstly, to outline the controversial process of the empowerment of women in Japan; secondly, to look into the problems of *karo-shi* (death from overwork) of young working women; thirdly, to share my response to such a deadly situation.

## **Women's empowerment?**

In 2017, Japan ranked 114 among 149 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report. In 2015, Japan enacted a law that promotes women's

rights, entitled the Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace. It has a 10-year term time-frame for empowering women. The act is generally called "the temporary legislation for josei (women) katsu-yaku (active participation)". It is important to note that the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has originally adopted a concept of "josei katsu-yo (making full use of women)" which regarded women as nothing more than pieces on their political chessboard.

During the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2011<sup>1</sup>, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe outlined his commitment to women's empowerment in his policy which aims to create "a society in which all women can shine". The policy focused on three areas: (1) encouraging more women to enter the workforce; (2) promoting more women to senior positions in the private sector; and, (3) encouraging more men to take childcare leave. However, all of these must be criticised for being shallow attempts instead of what is absolutely needed: a profound and transformative change.

Concerning the first area, it is crucial to identify who is encouraging more women to enter the workforce under this policy. In the past, men restricted women to the domestic sphere, saying "Stay home, do not go out to work." Now the male political and business leaders command women to not "...stay home, go out to work, but do not forget to give birth." It is more likely a countermeasure to the shrinking labour force and a significant influx of migrant workers from other Asian countries than the empowerment of women.

In terms of the second area, the government set the goal of increasing women's share of leadership roles in the private sector up to 30 per cent by 2020. But in a 2015 report by Japan Times, the government has abandoned this plan due to poor participation of women. In other words, this is the empowerment only for a small number of elite women, such as CEOs of large enterprises who they expect will make a significant contribution to the economic recovery.

With respect to the third area, the rate of women taking childcare leave has increased to 80–89 per cent according to the government's

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1 "A Society in which 'women can shine': is Shinzo Abe's 'Womenomics' a plan for genuine gender quality?" Global Gender Justice (blog). March 15, 2017. <https://globalgenderjustice.wordpress.com/2017/03/15/a-society-in-which-women-can-shine-is-shinzo-abes-womenomics-a-plan-for-genuine-gender-equality/>, accessed on March 12, 2020.



report in 2018. However, the report said, “The rate of men taking childcare leave is still low, although it has increased year by year,” but this was demonstrated by showing a misleading graph. According to the Basic Survey of Gender Equality in Employment Management, only 3 per cent of eligible men took childcare leave, and more than 80 per cent of them took less than one month. Of that, 56.9 per cent took less than five days. A large number of women living in typical nuclear-family households still bear the responsibility for child-rearing and working without any help from their partners as well as taking care of ageing parents.

While promoting *katsu-yaku* (active participation) of women, the government has been slow to respond to issues encountered in the workplaces like harassment against single women, pregnant women, working mothers, and single parents. One of the most urgent problems is the shortage of nursery schools for children of working parents. What initially started as a working mother’s angry blog post, “*Hoikuen Ochita Nihon Shine!*” (Could not get my kid into nursery school, Japan go screw itself!) became the catchphrase of 2016.

It is no exaggeration to say that except for the participants of the WAW! (World Assembly for Women) Conference organised by the Abe Administration, no one could “shine” under such a process of superficial empowerment of women. Monitoring this situation, what I am concerned with is the young working women’s vulnerability. Presently, young women are forced to work long hours. As a result, many of them suffer from depression, insomnia, and suicidal tendencies.

### **What is going on in Japanese society?**

During the students’ final year in the universities, many go through a long, physically and mentally draining process of job-hunting. Students dye their hair dark, wear black suits, and attend job fairs, as well as company briefing sessions and employment seminars. My students also complained about the difficulty of having job offers without completely abandoning their personality along the way.

In 2012, an animated short film had been making waves among young people. ‘*Recruit Rhapsody*’, filmed by students of Tokyo University of the Arts received a large amount of praise. In the

classroom, the main character, a young woman, notices one day that her friends have become quiet and uninterested in being sociable<sup>2</sup>. She starts attending endless amounts of seminar sessions together with a soulless mob of black suited-students. Company recruiters explain how great their firms are. Eager students enthusiastically nod in agreement hoping to impress the employers. She is faced with the depressing reality of not getting a job offer, while everyone else is off partying. Depressed and beaten down by the experience, she finally decides to change and become like one of the others.

Except for job-hunting, students are afraid of becoming *sha-chiku* working at 'black company'. *Sha-chiku* is the word coined from 'company' and 'cattle', describing a person who is exploited, works hard for a low wage, yet loyal to the company. 'Black company' comes from a Japanese idiom, 'his or her stomach is black' (i.e., he or she is evil-minded). It depicts evil, unethical, and exploitative companies where excessive work is normalised. Obviously, the worst consequence of overwork is *karo-shi* (death from overwork) of young working women.

*Karo-shi* entered the vocabulary in the 1980s, and two types are generally recognised. One is death due to cardiovascular illness like a heart attack or a stroke. The other is if the person commits suicide due to work-related mental stress. The labour ministry issued a white paper on the subject of *karo-shi*, saying that under present conditions, one out of every five workers is in danger. *Karo-shi* has become a hot topic ever since the deaths of two young women in recent years.

In April 2015, Matsuri Takahashi graduated from Tokyo University and joined the Dentsu Advertising Agency, at the age of twenty-four. Dentsu Advertising Agency is one of Japan's most prestigious but demanding corporations. Within a few months, Matsuri complained of exhaustion. She confided in social media and tweeted to friends, "I want to die." On Christmas day of 2015, she threw herself from the roof of the company dormitory where she lived. The benchmark for *karo-shi* is more than 80 hours of overtime. Matsuri was forced to work for more than 100 hours of overtime. She reportedly had only 10 hours of sleep a week when she was extremely busy.

A 31-year-old female journalist Miwa Sado of NHK, the only national public broadcasting organisation, was found dead in her bed in July

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2 Scott R Dixon's online article, "Japan's hellish job hunting progress "shuukatsu" gets animated, terrifies netizens," <https://soraneews24.com/2014/06/03/japans-hellish-job-hunting-process-shuukatsu-gets-animated-terrifies-netizens-video/>, accessed on 1 April 2018.

2013 still clutching her mobile phone. She had died of heart failure after logging 159 hours of overtime in a month. She had taken two days off in the month before she died. NHK eventually made the case public in 2017, four years after, bowing to pressure from Miwa's parents to take action to prevent a recurrence. Undoubtedly, the question, "Are we disposable?" still rings true to us.

### **How to respond to the situation?**

The more I reflected upon these tragedies of young working women, the more I felt extreme sadness and absolute powerlessness. But at the same time, the anguish strengthened my desire to uplift, encourage, empower, defend their lives, and to support their survival within this male-dominated social structure in Japan. I have been asking myself what I am supposed to tell my students. I knew what it is like to find no value in my own job-hunting and work experiences. However, those experiences allowed me to realise the vulnerability of young working women who have no option but to ask themselves, "Am I disposable?" If it were true, I could be courageous enough to narrate my story.

Before I started my theological study, I was overworked and suffering from severe depression at the age of twenty-three. Initially, I enjoyed working at the film production company in the advertising industry despite rarely having a day off. It was typical to work until midnight and take the last train or a taxi to get to my apartment. When I attended a meeting starting at twelve midnight, I finally thought something was amiss. In fact, most of my co-workers were more or less physically or mentally broken. On top of that, I was starving. You can hardly imagine a young Japanese worker in the big city of Tokyo suffering from hunger. Whenever I am stressed, I tend to focus on the negative experiences in my life and fail to recall the more positive aspects of it. I felt useless and hopeless.

When I became utterly exhausted, I saw a doctor. He asked a question which I have never been asked before, "Do you ever wish to die?" I answered, "I am a Christian since I was little, so I have never thought of committing suicide. It might sound a little strange though, theologically speaking, my life does not belong to myself. But I admit, I sometimes really want to disappear."

I was baptised at the age of nine but as I grew up, I found it very difficult to live as a religious minority in Japanese society. During my time at a film production company, I kept a distance from the church. It was funny I mentioned my Christian identity at the clinic,

but on the other hand, I was surprised by my faithful response. But I do not think I said this because of my faith. It seemed like a “fruit” which has been nurtured inside me, or a “gift” that had been given by Christian educators. Though I may be unable to fully understand it, I still believe my response was true. Our lives do not belong to us because they are God-given.

At the time of the AEYA, I finally found the answer to my question. What will you do? It took me ten years to realise I have also been called to serve young people, especially younger sisters, like other ecumenical workers and feminist theologians in Asia. I am inexperienced and still new in the field of Christian education. Yet, I also found that ecumenical colleagues in Asia always shed the light of hope in my work. As the South African theologian, Rev. Dr Allan Boesak, once wrote, “We do not bear responsibility for our own lives, but we are called to bear “mutual responsibility” for our lives.” It was mentioned in the speech of Rev. Dr Wesley Ariarajah’s during the Asia Mission Conference in Yangon, Myanmar, on CCA’s 60th anniversary in October 2017. I found a similar concept at the venue of the AEYA in Manado on a banner that says, ‘Torang Samua Ciptaan Tuhan’ (We are all creations of God) in the local language. Thus, we are called to be responsible for each other, and likewise to God.

Brimming with hope, I have been examining various methods of ecumenical Christian education to nurture the sense of God’s family. My students and I had organised a team and joined a charity run for supporting children with disabilities. We also participated in a charity walk for breast cancer awareness. I conducted study tours to Seoul and Taipei with the help of my ecumenical colleagues there. In addition, I delivered lectures on the issues of gender and sexuality to the faculty members. I also visited the LGBTIQ+ friendly “Rainbow Week” of another Christian university hoping to make my university more inclusive. I hope all these small actions would bring something new to my students and help them to really understand that we are all living together and our lives are God-given, not disposable.

## **Reflections**

With the help of solidarity from my sisters and brothers in the ecumenical circle, I believe God made us courageous. We must learn together to say “No” to the denial of everything God-given and say “Yes” to the calling to mutual responsibility. Despite the difficulties in our lives and ministries, let us empower young people to live in the blessings of the God of life.

## **Changing Family Value and Cultures in Asia: Intergenerational Voices**

A thematic panel session on *Changing Family Values and Cultures in Asia: Intergenerational Voices* echoed similar concerns from panellists that traditional family values nurtured over the centuries in Asia have changed, and the nuclear-family system has been disappearing in many cultures in Asian countries.

Lawrence Chong, an active member of the Roman Catholic Church's Focolare Movement in Singapore spoke about the same kind of changes that are happening in families across Asia. He zeroed in on some changes in the family landscape.

Within 10 years, he said, traditional families will make up less than 50 per cent in Asian countries. 2018 is forecasted to see over 50 per cent of Asia-Pacific's population in urban areas; resulting in soaring prices for housing. Health costs will be a burden in Asia because of the increase in cancer, stroke, and dementia in the next decade.

Chong also cited a study saying that between 2015 and 2034, the older population will grow by 22 per cent in East Asia, posing an imminent labour force issue. Politics in these parts also cannot be ignored.

Chong proposed some ways to respond to the changing character and needs of young people of Asia today. Among others, he said, parents must increase their engagement with their kids, find "new ways to love" and appreciate the new way of family. "If you do not engage the child, you lose the child," he said.

"Parents nowadays are under stress, under a lot of pressure," Chong added. "In my case, we have a cell group of new families, where we share new ideas, how we share our time. Given all the problems, we must revive ourselves in faith. Schedule time to create happiness—affirm and share time with one another."

Traditional power structures are also bound to change because of the cultural landscape, said Chong. "Gender equality has to happen. Women are increasingly accessing information and quality education. Some places in Asia are moving. It is a complex situation, but ... Asia is really moving."

Dr Henriette Hutabarat Lebang, General Chairperson of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, said, "The centrality of family

and traditional family values is undeniably changing in Asia. However, the family is still very deep in our culture as Asians.”

Dr Lebang added, “Family is an enduring character of Asian cultures. Asians are also very community-oriented, practice intergenerational cohabitation, value extended families, respect older people, and see a mutual responsibility for the care of parents and children.

“However, the market economy has introduced high competition. There is a shifting of value in Asian society. Thus, people have been increasingly individualistic, exclusivist, and greedy. Face-to-face communication has taken a backseat because of new technology,” Dr Lebang remarked.

Dr Lebang said that problematic realities must be criticised. She cited the case of parents marrying off their children to rich men and sending them off to work abroad.

“Children are treated as an investment,” she said. “I think we shouldn’t close our eyes to that kind of reality, even migrant workers today. Parents do not know the implication of their daughter working at someone else’s homes,” said Dr Lebang.

“Are we still community-oriented or changed?” she then asked, explaining that the impact of globalisation on Asia was a cause to re-examine long-held assumptions on Asian culture.

Dr Lebang opined that amidst all these problems, we must hold on to some of our values. “We still have some positive values and we need to hold on to them: Respecting differences, family ties, for example. If we miss this one, we will repeat the mistakes seen in many parts of the world,” she told the Asian youths.

## Interreligious Dialogue: Religious Leaders and Youth Representatives

Two sessions on the third day of AEYA focused on 'Light and Truth in Pluralistic Asia' for interreligious dialogue among religious leaders and scholars from the Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu, and Taoist religions, thus providing the AEYA participants with a common ground to discuss relevant issues about religion and their implication in contemporary Asian society.

The panellists—Swami Navananma Jnana Tapaswi (Hinduism), Ven. Phramaha Boonchuay Doojai (Buddhism), Prof. Chongfu Zhang (Taoism), and Dr Media Zainul Bahri (Islam)—made presentations on the theme 'Light and Truth in a Pluralistic Asia' from the perspectives of their respective religions.

Swami Navananma, who started his presentation with a brief prayer in Sanskrit, took on questions of religious extremism by saying that regional and geographical interpretations of different holy scriptures were dividing people instead of unifying them.

He said that instead of making people's lives more harmonious, interpretations of religious texts were being used to create more friction and rifts in society. He exhorted the participants of AEYA to change 'internally' so that the change could be reflected in their homes and society.

Swami Navananma said that the only way to learn *dharma* (or awareness) was by practising it. "*Dharma* is based on the will of God. It is a natural thing and cannot be learnt from texts or scriptures. It is like wanting to learn swimming by reading books about it," he said.

"As time passes, the true sense of truth keeps fading. While it should be enriched, it should be done spiritually and not religiously. Once we do that, peace will automatically follow," he added.

Dr Media Zainul Bahri, who represented Islam, said that wrongdoings in the 'name of Islam' were based on wrong interpretations of the holy book.

"Islam is known as a religion of peace, but unfortunately, there are a lot of extremist acts being carried out in Islam's name," he said.

"People talk about *jihad*. But what is *jihad*? There is a great difference between *jihad* and war. *Jihad* simply means 'the struggle for a better life', while war is war. Nothing good ever comes of it. *jihad* is never



Islam's call to fight against others. Nothing connects jihad with war," he explained.

Ven. Phramaha Boonchuay Doojai, a Buddhist monk, opined that conscious steps needed to be taken towards building bridges with other religions and making friends. He spoke about one of his personal experiences.

"A great way to understand others' religions is to visit their places of worship. Go to a church or a mosque if you are allowed to enter. Once, I visited an ancient mosque in Phuket (Thailand). The Imam welcomed me and said I was the first Buddhist monk to have visited the mosque. I feel this is the first step we have to take if we are to see changes happening," he said.

One of the young attendees raised a question about the future of ecumenical movements in Asia, and whether ecumenical harmony was achievable in their lifetime.

Prof. Chongfu Zhang, who was one of the respondents to the question, said that things could not be changed overnight.

"We cannot change things over a few days or a few months. Some problems have developed over many years and generations. In the past, many suggestions were put forward on how to resolve ecumenical issues, but so far none have been successful," he said.

"What could you possibly do to help resolve it? The first thing is to open your eyes. Many people refuse to do so and isolate their religion from the rest of the world. Secondly, respect others. Even though we may not be able to resolve things completely, we can contribute towards making things a little better," elucidated the Taoist scholar.

"The AEYA conference is a good beginning for people from different religions to exchange their views. That is why I think this meeting in Manado is a very important gathering," he added.

The CCA General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, who moderated the session, summarised the whole dialogue with words that challenged the participants. "I am reminded of an ancient Indian adage," he said, "that 'I believe I have the truth; you believe you have the truth; I will respect your truth, so you please respect my truth.'"

"Are we prepared to ask ourselves this question? That is what we need to ask ourselves at this point," he concluded.

## Youths in Dialogues

*Divided into ten groups, AEYA participants discussed, deliberated, and debated on some of the most important issues affecting them and the society they live in through the 'Youths in Dialogues' sessions. They first laid down the premise and shared their unique perspectives on the issues before finally coming up with conclusions.*

### **Are Young Asians becoming 'Digital Nomads'?**

#### **Objectives**

The discussion aimed to understand the implications of being a 'digital nomad' from the Asian Christian youth perspective and to figure out the positive and negative sides of this lifestyle.

#### **Background and Discussion**

Over the past years, young professionals have been deviating from the usual practice of remaining in front of their work stations in offices, where they work for 8 or 9 hours a day on a fixed schedule, for five or six days in a week. With the technological advancement and the tech-driven nature of the working atmosphere in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this has encouraged more people to relocate and build their careers from afar. An increasing number of young people today are becoming 'Digital Nomads'.

The phrase 'Digital Nomads' has two parts; the word 'nomad' which is derived from the Greek word 'nomas' which meant 'roaming in search of pastures, and 'digital' which perfectly sums up the trend of the current day and age. The term was coined in the year 1997 by Tsugio Makimoto and David Manners in a book titled *The Digital Nomad*. The normal connotation of the terminology nomads or nomadic lifestyle involves perpetual movement from one place to another, in search of means of sustenance. In this context, digital nomads indicate a new trend which is being embraced by more and more young people of the day in different parts of the world.

Different Asian countries have been offering safe, affordable, and pleasing environments geared towards overseas tourists for a long time, along with the aid of high-speed WiFi and access to better electronic communication platforms. The wide availability of co-working spaces and coffee shop ambiances provide friendly and convenient spaces for young people to meet, talk, and work. Many cities and towns in various Asian countries also play an important

role to contribute to this trend. The more appealing the facilities and services, the more attractive the proposition becomes for foreigners who are considering to move abroad.

Most youths nowadays see it as almost revolutionary in striking a work-life balance. The absence of a sense of accomplishment and excitement in their routine jobs and standard of living drives people to this lifestyle. There is a need for them to fulfil a sense of adventure of departure from the normal working atmosphere and mindset in exploring uncharted territories. Flexible working practices also mean that in theory, some of these jobs can be extremely lucrative; artists, data analysts, designers, web developers, and writers can all work from a laptop, picking up projects when it suits them along with the perfect background displayed by places far from the cities they come from.

If people have the opportunity to become digital nomads, it means that they have a lot of freedom, to decide what to do, where to live, which kind of people to spend time with, and so on. Somehow, they are right, but it depends on the perspective from which a young person sees life and the world in which he or she moves around or prefers to live. Although such a trend of digital nomadism preferred by young people can bring more economic benefits for them as well as freedom in life, those benefits have many challenges and consequences too.

The instability of this kind of a lifestyle among the new generation has its sense of loss in lives, as young people are ready to leave everything behind when travelling, which includes family, relationships, and traditions that one has been nurtured in. The trend is that young people tend to think that only their lives are changing, but even the people they leave behind- parents, and other family members change, and being away from their homes, the amount of care and love they receive from their support system may be different from what they were used to given the distance. In a world that is becoming more and more global and where borders mean less and less, being a digital nomad means that you have the flexibility to go where the opportunities are. The group discussed that people who tend to shy away from regular jobs and want to go seek adventure are more likely to lean towards this lifestyle.

As the fad becomes a lifestyle, Asian countries provide space for such digital nomads from many parts of the world, especially from the West. People coming from Western culture are independent, being

brought up in a more individualistic society. On the other hand, the Eastern culture is more interdependent as seen in Asian countries. This type of culture encourages people to foster harmonious relationships, seeing themselves connected to others and becoming part of a community. It is because of this fact that Asian youths value family traditions a lot, people live for others and include them in their life choices.

The question before us is whether too many young Asians are also being influenced by such a trend of “digital nomadism”? Based on our discussion, this is not completely true. It is not widely prevalent among Asian youth yet. A majority of the youth still prefer traditional careers within the 9-to-5-hour schedule and a stable source of income to provide for their future, rather than ones that afford them more freedom. While it invigorates those who choose this lifestyle, what about the families they leave behind? We concluded that Asian youth still value close-knit family ties.

### **Issues Identified**

This lifestyle is an upcoming, rising aspect trending in Asia, among the youth who like to practice independence and freedom. Following the influence mainly from Western culture, young Asians tend to make hasty decisions and overlook the effects of their actions.

Support received by them from their family and friends and vice versa: since they are working elsewhere, especially for those travelling to another country, they are not physically there to spend time with their kin.

Stability-wise, unlike having a ‘normal’ job, digital nomads who are freelancers, have to be savvier in dealing with the financial aspect of their careers. They have to be extra careful before accepting a freelance job or gig. There are times people get caught doing the task they were hired for but never get compensated and receive their payments late.

‘Digital Nomadism’ is also something that society might not appreciate currently, as society prefers a 9-to-5 job more than ‘freedom’ or what they consider selfish or self-serving work.

### **Ideas, Proposals, and Suggestions**

Being a ‘Digital Nomad’ is a lifestyle that depends on so many factors like personality, culture, location, and society. Young people must think of this decision thoroughly and weigh the pros and cons before packing their bags and leaving.

‘Digital Nomadism’ is also an aspect through which Christian youths can explore supporting the church and building ecumenical relationships. Young missionaries can go out of their comfort zones and immerse themselves in remote areas to share the Gospel.

Young people want to experiment with digital nomadism as it gives a sense of comfort, luxury, freedom, and seems travel-friendly. However, the group believes that digital nomads should not stray away from the church and should use their capabilities to build community and congregation wherever they find themselves.

## **Artificial Intelligence: Future of Asian Youths**

### **Objectives**

The session aimed to discuss how Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays a role in the lives of Asian youth, to assess how this generation views such trends of the modern world, and to explore the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating this technology in our daily circumstances.

### **Background and Discussion**

In a world that is becoming increasingly digitalised, AI continues to permeate the way we live, work, and play. With today’s youth being the driving force for tomorrow’s economy, it is more pertinent now than ever before for youths to embrace new technological innovations. The young generation makes themselves familiar with the emerging AI trends for them to be able to leverage technology effectively in the future.

In 2016, Microsoft conducted a study titled the *Microsoft Asia Digital Future Survey* with the participation of 1,400 young people aged 18 to 24 from the Asia-Pacific region. They aimed to understand what the young generation foresaw to be the most exciting technological innovation, and the potential impact it could have on their digital future. According to young people across the Asia-Pacific region, the most exciting technologies expected to have the largest impact on their future lives were AI, virtual/mixed/augmented reality (VR/MR/AR), and Internet of Things (IoT).

Nowadays, AI has become a hot topic in all discussions that involve innovation and technological developments, with an increasing

emphasis on data protection and privacy of individuals. Defined as the 'science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programmes' that can imitate human-like intelligence, AI comes in many forms and is mostly known as machine learning. This involves the use of algorithms and interpretation of data to identify patterns and profiles of users. As such, the technology is used to track the online behaviour of users and thus offer them tailor-made information, from advertisements to news sharing. Another famous example is the self-driving cars that take autonomous decisions based on traffic and activity on the streets. AI uses large amounts of data to be able to deliver a service or a product, which poses a great threat to the privacy of the individuals whose data were collected.

With the rapid proliferation of digitalisation globally, all sorts of businesses from banking, insurance, to retail are moving from paper to electronic modes of operation. Different sectors of our society also depend on AI when it comes to task management. The agriculture industry uses AI in analysing plant health, drone imaging for resource planning, and monitoring crop conditions. AI has also greatly aided our health over the years as seen in the medical field; advances in the pharmaceutical industry, accurate diagnosis of common ailments, electronic health records, patient care through automation of data entry, and machinery.

It is evident that the digital age is also transforming the way we work; some would even go as far as to say that artificial intelligence, robots, and automation are destroying it. No one doubts that AI, along with machine learning, advanced robotics, 3D printing, and IoT will disrupt the labour market. It is just a question of to what extent. One influential study coming out of Oxford University estimated that 47 per cent of jobs in the US could be eliminated using existing technologies. Everything from fast-food and retail jobs to legal and medical jobs is in the crosshairs.

The big question before us is whether new, well-paying jobs will come along to replace the old ones. If recent trends are considered for indication, it does not look good for the future of humankind. If the benefits of the new technologies are to be broadly shared, there will have to be big changes ahead. Labour laws and employment standards will have to be rewritten and our social safety nets will have to be strengthened. Governments will have to take a more active role in directing the economy and trade unions will have to find new ways of representing workers.

## **Issues Identified**

The main concern in dealing with AI is the threat to one's safety. While technology today gives us access to an overwhelming amount of collected data at our fingertips, it also exposes large amounts of our personal information online. Security and privacy risks are to be taken into account whenever we share our personal information.

AI technology also is a harbinger of mass unemployment. As the disruption of daily routines continues to occur, processes that were once were handled by humans are now being replaced by computers and machinery. Due to this switch, prices for various products and services as well as the working population's future is affected.

## **Ideas, Proposals, and Suggestions**

We live in a more highly 'connected and digital world' and AI will be one of the most exciting new technologies on the horizon. Asian youth should be responsible while handling and incorporating it in their day-to-day lives.

As the leaders of tomorrow, the young generation should take the initiative and work together with the church to develop a common understanding of how this technology can be of help in spreading the gospel.

With the spread of AI, the youth along with the government need to identify areas where artificial intelligence can be beneficial, such as agriculture, education, and health sectors.

## **Disappearing values of Love and Care amidst "Selfie" Culture?**

### **Objective**

The objective was to explore the popular 'selfie culture' that is seen as an everyday part of modern life for most young people. The discussion explored the personal and communal impacts of the trend and if there was a need for a deeper reflection on how it might be affecting our interactions and relationships.

### **Background and Discussion**

The discussion began with an introduction to 'selfie culture' and exploring the first recorded selfie and where it started. The word



'selfie' has become a well-known term today across the globe. It is a self-portrait photograph, which is typically taken with a smartphone, usually flattering and made to appear casual, is then shared to social media sites. However, during the last few years, a 'selfie culture' has emerged and is pervading the social norms and values of our society. Though it may seem appalling to many, such a culture has become fairly relevant for today's young generation as more and more young people are being lured into such trends.

With the evolution of smartphone cameras, the youth are now joined by adults and children in the quest for daily Instagram posts, hourly Facebook updates, and minute-by-minute Snapchats. Though selfies might be considered as some weird vanity craze or a viral trend amongst the youth, one may consider that young people were born at the start of the digital age and have imbibed in their lifestyle the advantages of the fast-changing communication era: self-expression and documentation.

Selfies are taken for a variety of reasons like capturing memories, documenting travels, posing with family, friends, famous landscapes, and celebrating special occasions. Young people use it as self-expression when they are happy, sad, bored, or whenever they feel like it. Some Asian countries are embracing the selfie culture by building specific installations to take selfies with, like the Crystal High-Heel Wedding Church located in Chiayi County in southern Taiwan. Though the interesting structure has no direct connection to the local culture or traditions in the area, it has been built as a gambit by the local tourism authorities to attract more visitors.

There is a continuous dialogue on how we tend to enhance our appearance and experiences with each shutter click. While the feedback received on posting a selfie can have positive psychological effects through reinforcement of one's self-worth, it can have some negative ones too. People tend to filter their realities, thus not paying heed to their natural looks and pushing themselves to fit in this type of culture. The act and obsession of the 'perfect photo' can lead to certain degrees of narcissism and psychopathy.

The selfie culture trend exhibits extreme self-centeredness, an excessive need to be admired by others, and a lack of empathy towards others. The constant rumination over other's perception of oneself, or the indulgence in grandiose thoughts of one's 'specialness' can lead to a downward spiralling into toxic self-absorption, or to

being preoccupied with oneself or one's state of affairs to the point of completely excluding others.

The constant self-absorption that comes with the selfie culture permeates and influences the traditional and noble values and customs of different Asian societies today. It undermines the capacity and need for understanding the thoughts, feelings, needs, and desires of others, especially the less privileged ones we are living with side by side. It is extremely difficult to appreciate the world that exists outside ourselves when most of the time our focus is directed inwards. Due to unnoticed negligence, relationships are damaged, sometimes irreparably, by a self-preoccupation that weakens closeness or intimacy with others. All relationships require careful attention and responses if they are to be nurtured and resilient.

Selfies have become a rage across the world in recent times. As the youth group tackled the topic with enthusiasm and much insight, all the members shared their thoughts and the feedback was diverse, entertaining, and well-received. We noticed that from a seemingly harmless snapshot leading to a more egotistical manner, the values of love and care are disappearing evidently. As the selfie culture of individualism and ego-centric approach and attitudes influence more and more people in our societies, it becomes a dominant value. We forget the fact that values of love and care are slowly disappearing due to the increasing and influencing selfie trends growing in our midst today.

### **Issues Identified**

Selfies are used for building self-confidence. They are displayed to receive encouragement and positive feedback via 'likes' and to project the perfect image of oneself. Members of the group shared that they often did not take selfies when they felt unattractive or unconfident. Posting the selfie on social media is an important part of the process and the response one receives add worth from the likes and comments, although the opposite can occur when the comments are unkind or no likes or acknowledgements are received.

It is also evident that selfies can be seen as a way of bragging and showing off: a form of self-indulgence and self-promotion. It was identified that people take photos for status; an example was made of people taking photos of high-end products from brands like Gucci and Prada, without buying or owning the product.

Through the sharing, we found out that most members of the group are knowledgeable of places and situations wherein people

had taken selfies that others would deem inappropriate, such as at sacred monuments, traffic accidents, school fights, and other more sensitive occasions. The group concluded that there is no uniform selfie etiquette.

Selfies have both good and bad sides. Sharing them as a means to communicate is a powerful way to make connections with people, to keep in touch and keep each other updated. However, selfies should be taken only at appropriate times and places. In their eagerness to look more beautiful, young people often end up becoming more self-centred and individualistic.

### **Ideas, Proposals, and Suggestions**

There is a need to encourage showing selfie control, an awareness of self-control with what and why we are sharing. We need to be responsible and uplifting towards others for the values of love and care to not disappear, to exemplify humility, and to question or check our motivation, and promote being more authentic in the self we share.

We must remember to be present in the moment. While it is great to capture the moment and immortalise it in a photograph, this causes us to forget experiencing the moment and sharing it with those around us. Simple things like breathing in the smells of the mountain you are on or noticing the awe in the faces of those around you. Becoming more mindful about the addictive nature of “likes” on social media that reward certain circuits of our brain, to remind us that like in most things overuse or indulgence can be unhealthy.

We want to remind ourselves that we are sharing a sanitised version of ourselves that does not always show our deeper emotions, our hurts, struggles, and despair. We cannot always take what we see at face value; behind the facade, we are individual unique people who are journeying through life with others. As Jesus said, we need to cry when our brother cries, and laugh when our sister laughs.

## **Eroding Values of Education System amidst Consumerism**

### **Objective**

Asia is home to more than 56 per cent of the world’s population, many of which are of school-going age. However, the simultaneous

explosion of a consumerist culture adds tremendous pressure to the current educational system, leading to its gradual erosion. The education sector has become commercialised, and access to quality education has become a privilege rather than a right because of this commercialisation. As the disparity between the rich and the poor increases and dictates the quality of education one receives, students in private and public schools receive differential treatment as well.

## **Background and Discussion**

Asia is one of the most densely populated continents and is currently in the midst of a demographic transition. In the most recent decades, Asia has experienced rapid and expansionary economic growth, through industrialisation, technological advancement, and higher mobility. According to academic studies, 1.6 billion people between the ages of 1 and 24 live in Asia. Never before in history has Asia had to support such a large 'school-going and training-needing' age of the population. The quantitative and qualitative challenges are, therefore, immense.

Faced with their respective nations' needs and demands, education systems are experiencing great strain in responding to the challenges of a development trajectory that will demonstrate greater fairness, solidarity, balance, and sustainability. In the sphere of education, certain Asian countries have been ranked at the top in international surveys. As a consequence, Asia is receiving increased global attention.

Pursuing higher education is no longer a trend, but a necessity for today's youth, as they strive to rise up to the demands of the modern industrialised world. Inscribed within their own educational traditions in Asia, though having often been influenced by the West, curricula in many Asian countries are beginning to become influenced by the systems and patterns of the non-Asian world. Such kinds of educational traditions are being combined and promoted with new pedagogical ideas as well as new perspectives on implementation for higher education. The concepts and "values" of consumer-oriented Western systems have crept into Asian educational systems as well.

## **Issues Identified**

As the trends of consumerism make their way into education systems, they are becoming more prevalent in the socio-cultural lives of people as well. As a result, there are gaps in the system of

education, calling into question whether consumerist cultural values are sufficient enough to equip young people with the know-how, attitudes, and skills they require for matters of importance to them. For example, limited financial capabilities hinder or constrain access of students (or consumers) to education in public or private sector universities. According to a survey by the College of Education and Social Services at Scholar Works, the rate at which students attempt to obtain a degree of higher education is directly influenced by the cost of tuition.

The rapid growth in Asian countries due to technological advancements has generated great competition among consumers to access quality education. Since Asia is becoming the centre of a transformative education system, it is important to realise the effects of such trends and unravel the issues of the educational system amidst consumerism. The trend is that today's educational systems encourage more and more young people to seek ways of quickly making money and turning a profit- thus luring them into an orbit where they can lead a life without any obligations to family, community, and society.

### **Ideas, Proposals, and Suggestions**

Many organisations, both from the government and non-government sector are working to help children and the younger generations have access to education. More projects for building schools are started in rural areas so that residents there would have easier access and would not have to travel far.

Cooperation between organisations and governments have been secured for partnerships that ensure children receive the best education possible.

## **Gender Injustice and Asian Cultural Values**

### **Background and Discussion**

Cultural values have historically always moulded the lives of young Asians. Though notable differences are arising from each tradition, they mostly centre around and emphasise family loyalty, insist on hard work, command respect for political leadership, and suggest thriftiness. These values emphasise the community rather than the individual, privileging order over social freedom, and refuse to segregate religion from the other spheres of life.

However, gender-based discrimination, marginalisation, and violence, coupled with unequal access to opportunity continue to pervade the Asian cultural value system. Despite the attempts to secure a harmonious way of living, the unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender is a deeply-rooted problem in most societies. Gender injustice in Asia is on the rise today, even though the situation in other parts of the world has changed in recent years.

### **Issues Identified**

The culture of gender-based discrimination and the treatment of women as inferior in Asian societies has a great impact on the rights and dignity of Asian women. Recent studies have explained that Asian women face enormous social, economic, and health challenges, including pervasive inequality, violence, political instability, and a high burden of disease, partially because the population is large while incomes are generally low.

Traditional gender roles dominate the Asian cultural landscape. Women are expected to accord primary importance to childbearing and home-caring, while men are expected to be breadwinners. Such patterns of thought encourage discriminatory behaviour among people. The birth of males is celebrated and the birth of females is mourned.

Such unjust practices result in an overwhelmingly higher prevalence of psychological issues among women than in men. In Bangladesh, twice as many women suffer from mental disorders, and three times as many women commit suicide. In Pakistan, women who suffer depression state the causes as 'marital conflict, conflict with in-laws, financial dependency, lack of meaningful employment, and stress of responsibilities at home and work'. In addition to mental health issues, Southeast Asian women suffer from an increased risk of physical health problems as well. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that women and girls face increased vulnerability due to HIV/AIDS in the Asia-Pacific region.

Religion is also a major factor in the discriminatory treatment of women. In Pakistan and India, Muslim women are murdered and this is justified under the barbaric practice of 'honour-killing', when they refuse arranged marriages or choose to be with the persons they love. The behaviour of men in Asia also contributes to ensuring the subservience of women, mainly because they go unpunished for physical and sexual assault. Additionally, due to the economic climate in the region, many women and girl children are trafficked and forced into prostitution, undesired marriages, and bonded

labour. Facilitating change in the diverse cultural norms of Asia would require tackling religious, social, and economic issues, which undoubtedly poses a challenge to the progress of equal rights.

### **Ideas, Proposals, and Suggestions**

Among young people, discussions must be initiated wherein stereotypes supported by age-old systems of patriarchy and the hegemony of masculinities and femininities embedded in social institutions must be broken, be it in the education systems, organised religions, and political or financial systems. The power and inspiration of young people aiming to be the leaders of tomorrow represent a critical driver for accelerating progress on gender equality and sustainable development.

## **HIV, AIDS, and Human Sexuality: Responses of Asian Youth**

### **Objective**

The objective of the session was to measure the level of awareness of Christian Youth towards the basics of HIV and AIDS, to share their Christian perspective, and to know and continually discuss how to break barriers.

### **Background and Discussion**

Based on the UNAIDS 2016 Prevention Gap Report, Asia-Pacific is the region with the second-highest number of people living with HIV in the world- an estimated 5.1 million in 2015. Three countries, namely China, India, and Indonesia, account for around three-quarters of the total number of people living with HIV in the region.

In 2015, there were about 300,000 estimated new infections in the region. Though the period 2010 to 2015 saw an overall decline of 5 per cent in new infections, progress in reducing new infections has slowed in recent years and new HIV infections are on the rise in some countries. The epidemic is largely characterised by concentrated and growing epidemics in a variety of countries, particularly among key affected populations including men who have sex with men (sometimes referred to as MSM), sex workers, people who inject drugs (also referred to as PWID), and transgender people. Low national prevalence masks a much higher prevalence among these groups and in specific locations, particularly urban areas. The HIV epidemic varies widely from country to country and within certain



countries depending on context and the region. This highlights the importance of tailoring responses to each country context.

In Asia and the Pacific, young people accounted for almost one-third of new infections. While the number of young people living with HIV has been on a decline, the HIV prevalence among young key populations in certain countries remains high. Adolescents are particularly underserved as structural barriers, including parental consent, hinders their access to HIV testing, life-saving treatment, and other health services (UNAIDS, HIV and YOUTH).

HIV Infection levels in MSM are very high in many cities in Asia, with levels between 13 per cent and 32 per cent (China, India, Myanmar, and Vietnam). Across the region, it has been found that men who have sex with men are becoming infected by HIV at a young age. HIV prevention and testing services were reaching fewer young men who have sex with men and they reported lower condom use than their older counterparts. In India, particularly high HIV prevalence rates have been found among transgender populations in cities such as Delhi (49 per cent) and Mumbai (42 per cent).

Additionally, because of social discrimination and stigma, most transgender people in India have no opportunity for schooling or access to higher education, eventually leading to poor health literacy. Even though transgender people in India have been given their civic identity, they are still vulnerable to verbal and psychological abuse by others.

The LGBTIQ population experience difficulties communicating with health professionals, apart from the fear of assumptions about their sexual orientation, and embarrassing situations when expressing their homosexuality or bisexuality, due to the homophobia present in professionals' conduct. Being excluded from various health services and programmes has led to a reduction in attendance for healthcare services. It is, therefore, necessary to provide qualified and equipped health services free of discrimination to ensure there is improved access. These should be able to analyse the health status of their clients, taking into consideration the health, social, and cultural context in which they are placed. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons face unique health care risks.

The discussion recognised that there is a need for Christian youth to talk about HIV, AIDS, and Human Sexuality because this age group is the most vulnerable and susceptible to acquiring the disease. Equally importantly, it is up to the younger generation to counter misinformation, stigma, and discrimination against people living with HIV, such that everyone can live productive and dignified lives in an inclusive society.

## **Issues Identified**

Different perspectives arise when discussing the issue of HIV and AIDS. Churches and Christians consider it as a taboo topic, always associating it with sexual behaviour. Some see having HIV and AIDS as a curse from God. This issue is not only a medical problem but also surfaces as a social, economic, and political problem.

Traditional churches tend to have a conservative attitude; some churches still have a negative view on sexuality and see those who are infected as a curse from God. There is a need to address why people acquire the infection, to educate the people, elders, and church as a whole. Human sexuality is part of human identity. Churches should not shy away from these discussions and should be considered as a healing and safe place, not a place of condemnation. We, with more of the efforts coming from the Asian youth, should never be silent in talking about the root cause of these issues.

## **Ideas, Proposals, and Suggestions**

There is a need to increase campaigns on education and awareness for church people. This can be done by stopping the stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV and AIDS by welcoming them in the church communities, and by continuing to journey with them by making churches a safe space that is inclusive to all God's children; promoting the church as a place for acceptance and not condemnation.

Based on research, the Asia-Pacific region has the second largest number of HIV patients in the world—around 5.1 million and a steep rise in new cases every day. Around one-third of these newly infected people are young people. The youth should discuss and raise awareness as they are more likely to contract the disease through sexual promiscuity.

With the age-old conservative views, we should not be silent but rather shed more light and talk about this issue. HIV and AIDS has been a special focus of Christian Conference of Asia, and several skill-building and advocacy programs have been conducted to address the issues, as well as efforts to build an HIV competent church and community. To effectively respond to HIV and AIDS with the member Churches and Councils, CCA is journeying towards building the capacity of its members to become inclusive and relevant for people living with HIV and AIDS through its Action Together to Combat HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA) programme.

# Human Development vs Technological Advancement

## Objective

The discussion intended to focus on how technological advancement, in its rapid pace nowadays, affects human development based on the Asian youth perspective, and identify the benefits and risks of these progressing trends in everyday life.

## Background and Discussion

With the advancement of technology over the years, human existence has become highly dependent on innovations. It has changed the way we are, the way we communicate, the way we learn, the way we travel, and even the consumerism we experience. As people's lifestyles change, so does the demand for advancing the type of technology we use. From smartphones being linked to our social media accounts to products and practical services we access by just tapping screens, almost everything we are using is continuously being innovated to attain better standards. These developments continue to influence us by bringing improvements as well as new risks to our lives.

One major factor discussed in both human lives and business was communication. In this digital age, communication has evolved and gadgets are becoming more intertwined in our everyday lives. In earlier times the challenge that old-fashioned communication tools posed was that they were fixed, so if you were not in the office or at home, people could not communicate with you. Now, we have witnessed new ways that have made communication easier. A good example is mobile phones which are now used for almost everything and are an extension of ourselves. The type of mobile phones we had in the early 1990s are no longer in-demand in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the demands of mobile phone users have changed greatly. With advanced technology, we can even do a live video call and see the people we are communicating with.

Over the past years, people were also provided more access to the internet with the use of innovations and the growing availability of smart devices. Thus, the attraction to social media became more prevalent. Different applications and sites accessed through the internet continue to offer various resources and services. Start-ups

and multinational companies alike are beginning to feel the ripple effects of innovation in the industry. In reality, functionality is a now favoured trend while human interaction gets lessened; manual labour in many cases is now replaced by computers and machinery. Technology has changed through the years and as it continues to progress, it gives us an idea of what the future holds in this field.

Notable changes are also seen in the education sector because of technological advancement. We now learn through mobile gadgets and tablets. Technology has simplified the way teachers reach their students and it has also helped students learn from anywhere, as well as enable them to access academic information at any time from anywhere. Information is power, so both students and teachers can use advanced technologies for education when researching subjects of interest. However, students are becoming more dependent on calculators and computers to solve simple equations; in this case, they cannot train their brains to solve a simple task which makes them complacent in class. Some of the most popular technological advancements which have changed the face of education for the better include the use of smartphones in the classroom, use of tablets and mobile computers in education and classroom, use of smart whiteboards for visual illustration in the classroom, use of the internet for long-distance learning, and the use of social media to connect students with teachers.

Technological advancement in human medicine and health sciences have immensely improved and has helped in saving many innocent lives. Doctors and medical students have embarked on medical technological tools to carry out extensive research on human health problems and challenges. This research has resulted in the development of new drugs and treatments that have helped in curing most challenging human diseases and this has helped in saving so many lives and it has also prolonged the human lifespan.

Technology has been improving at a rapid pace, so much so that it has now far outstripped the rate of human development. There are issues compel us to think about natural human development and potentials one could develop amid technological advancements. Although developed human potential increases technological advancements, humans tend to depend more and more on technologies in all aspects of life which in turn causes one's potentials to shrink. The effects of technological advancement are both positive and negative. Technological advancement has

simplified the way we used to do things in the past; it now saves us more time, increases production, simplifies communication, improves health care, and our educational environment. However, it has also led to humans becoming complacent; technology users are now greatly dependent on new advances and technical tools to an extent that this complacency has resulted in less innovation, it has increased our health risks because technology users exercise less, and it has affected the environment because of the increase in pollution, which ultimately leads to global warming.

Technology extends into every aspect of our lives and forces us to confront core issues previously left to the purview of religion. For some, that change will be challenging. While technology is confined to the physical realm, these material things help us with our day-to-day living—which if we utilise towards the goal of having spiritual benefits such as disseminating the gospel truth, enhancing and extending church services—could be beneficial to our spirituality. On the other hand, we do not discount the cons of this modern technology; as depicted by media, technology could act as a hindrance and hamper our spiritual journeys.

### **Issues Identified**

Technology has been improving at a fast pace and has surpassed human development. While it has made things simpler for humans, it has also made them more physically passive and susceptible to health risks. This development is inevitable; thus, it must become an aid to our day-to-day living keeping in mind its appropriate and responsible use.

Relationships are also becoming impersonal. Among young people, easier connectivity and dependency on the use of gadgets causes us to neglect relating to our family and friends in real life. Miscommunications arise when we are not careful with how we take in and respond to the messages the media or other people give us.

Youths now tend to have shorter attention spans, leading to a drop in performance levels. Though the idea of multitasking is supposedly beneficial, instead of being efficient, our focus on each activity does get diminished. We get complacent and forget to prioritise, leading to subpar results.

### **Ideas, Proposals, and Suggestions**

The youth should be on the frontline while weighing the pros and cons of these technological advancements, highlight the benefits,

and improve areas with noticeable disadvantages. To minimise the likelihood of unwanted side effects of new technologies, humans will have to employ serious risk analyses.

So many changes have been brought about by these continuous technological advancements. We need to use different resources to help us understand how technology influences human existence by examining the benefits and risks of different biotechnological advances.

Human resources and one's capacity to develop natural and God-given potential should also be practised, along with the ability to discern situations and develop solutions that should be sharpened without fully depending on technical and mechanical lifestyle in every aspect of life and work.

## **Poor, Yet Making Many Rich: Poverty vs Asian Development**

### **Objective**

The session aimed to discuss the socioeconomic, political, and psychological aspects of poverty and develop suggestions to overcome such problems.

Poverty is multifaceted. Remarkable economic progress in recent decades has not been able to make much difference in the lives of the people. Our contribution to the marginalised sections should not just be confined to words, but our actions need to portray them. We need to bring awareness among the poor for self-employment and development. This can be done through strong and meaningful advocacy and denouncing corrupt leaders who are pushing people into poverty.

### **Background and Discussion**

Asia has achieved remarkable economic progress in recent decades. The Asia-Pacific region continues to deliver strong growth, even in the face of widespread economic concerns about growing protectionism, a rapidly ageing society, and slow productivity growth, according to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) latest regional assessment. World Bank East Asia and Pacific Economic Update in October 2017 reported that Developing East Asia and the Pacific had continued to perform well in the first half of 2017. The region grew more rapidly

than almost all other developing regions. Furthermore, World Bank stated that stronger growth in advanced economies, a moderate recovery in commodity prices, and a strengthening of global trade growth were also favourable external factors that supported the economies of developing East Asia and Pacific to expand by 6.4 per cent for 2017. Preliminary data revealed that the economy of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) recorded another quarter of robust growth at the end of 2017, although activity slowed from Q3's nearly five-year high.

Despite this, poverty in Asia is still a massive problem. More than two-thirds of the world's poor people live in Asia, and nearly half of them are in Southern Asia. According to World Bank's report in 2016, of the 766 million extremely poor who live below the poverty line of USD 1.9 a day, about 33 per cent live in South Asia and 9 per cent live in East Asia and the Pacific. Moreover, urbanisation in developing Asian countries has also led to increasing urban poverty. About 70 per cent of the developing world's urban poor live in Asia.

Much research has been conducted to find the cause of and evaluate the extent of poverty in Asia. As we all know, Asia is a place of extreme poverty as well as of top business ventures. While all Asian countries or Asians are not poor, the wide gap in the economic condition of the eastern continent's people in its different parts drives one to explore the causes of poverty in Asia. Mahua Mitra mentions eight causes, namely, population, food security, education, health, administration, natural disasters, global recession, and social discrimination.

Being in a poor state does not mean one cannot make one's contributions. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "...as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way... sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything..." (2 Corinthians 6:4,10 NIV). Paul does not teach us to make use of this condition as a reason to beg for other's mercy and help, yet he teaches us a contrary way: making many others rich.

Jesus teaches a similar contradiction, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven..." (Matthew 5:3 NIV). "Blessed are the poor, for now, they have the kingdom of heaven... The kingdom of God refers to righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). Thus, the Holy Spirit empowers us to be His witnesses, to bless others as Peter did. Peter has nothing but Jesus'



name and the power within His name. That is how Peter gave his contribution.

We consider that we are servants of God. We might not have resources; we might come from developing countries or not so economically advanced situations, but we need to be concerned with the less privileged in our societies and communities who live amidst us. Let it be our contemplation: how we give of ourselves to be with the poor and marginalised, the less privileged in our communities and societies.

### **Issues Identified**

The following causes and consequences of poverty were illustrated during the discussion:

- Social: caste system / lack of education / illiteracy / gender inequality
- Economic: accumulation of wealth in the hands of few / exploitation of natural resources / unemployment / globalisation
- Political: corruption / geopolitics / political instability / nepotism
- Psychological: greed / shame / fear / guilt

### **Ideas, Proposals, and Suggestions**

Churches must begin fund-raising endeavours to lift the destitute out of poverty by addressing their immediate and basic concerns. Both short-term and long-term measures must be implemented. Churches must also denounce corrupt leaders and actively indulge in advocacy and awareness, while also allowing empathy to guide their works and actions.

The poor are constrained in terms of monetary aspects; however, the real poor are those who are not open to the needs of the people. Righteousness, peace, and joy make people rich in the kingdom of God.

Although Asia has consistently outperformed other continents in terms of economic growth, poverty remains a stubborn characteristic of several Asian economies. While the rich get richer, the poor get poorer.

# **Religious Intolerance and Politicisation of Religion**

## **Objective**

The discussion aimed to focus on the current situation of Asia, a largely pluralistic region, in the context of increasing religious intolerance and politicisation of religion as witnessed over recent years. Although the region has historically seen relatively lower levels religious violence, a new militant and politicised form of religion is emerging.

## **Background and Discussion**

Asian nations are well known for being pluralistic societies with a high degree of ethnic and religious heterogeneity. Authoritarian political regimes, ideologies, and colonialism have left their imprints (both religious and non-religious), radically influencing the cultural life of many Asian societies in the last century. In many Asian countries, the debates between religious groups, whether majority or minority, have increasingly gained political importance, and the predominance of certain religious traditions has become a burden on others.

For various regimes and ruling elites in those nations, the issues of accommodation of various collective identities to build a common national identity as well as modern nationhood have not always been easy or peaceful. It remains a great challenge today, as witnessed recently in a range of communal violence and anti-minority movements in some Asian countries. Moreover, growing piety and assertive religious activism in civil society since the past few decades have further complicated the process of nation-building in those divided societies. Against the backdrop of traditionally influential religious authorities, we see religion serving or emerging as a collective identity, social movement, and political ideology.

Religious communities relate to the state, other religious communities, and actors in society in various ways. These are shaped by constitutional and legal frameworks, as well as by certain global trends regarding how the relationship between the spiritual and the worldly realms is conceived. Moreover, the mixing of religion with politics is stirring debates as religious extremism and fundamentalism take precedence in civil and political affairs of a country. Religion is often mixed with the narrow political agenda of mass mobilisation, challenging the most fundamental tenets of

religious pluralism and communal harmony. The politicisation of religion has become a hallmark of many societies in the modern world, and this is becoming more evident in more and more Asian countries.

It is in this context that the issue of religious intolerance and politicisation of religion becomes crucial and needs to be addressed with urgent priority as the individual and collective rights of religious minorities and the fair and equal treatment of all religious communities in Asia, be they the majority or the minority, are facing grave threats due to such trends.

### **Issues Identified**

The main objectives of the session were to clarify the issues different countries in Asia are going through and discuss how young people in Asia are trying to solve such issues and prevent inter- and intra-faith religious intolerance and the politicisation of religion. The desired outcomes were defined as promoting peace in society, creating unity between churches and among different religions, developing interfaith and intra-faith relationships, and educating young people to identify those movements that use (and abuse) religion for their own political interests.

Based on the group discussion, it was realised that almost 80 per cent of youth representatives of countries that took part in the session reported the following problems that they faced in their contexts: discrimination, intolerance, terrorism, and intimidation from those who are in the majority towards those who constitute the minority. People from majority religions assume a will to dominate and control the operations of the larger society, and by extension, the country itself. Minority groups who represented the “other” have often been victimised and terrorised, and several participants shared the suffering of being a Christian minority in their countries. Though Asia is expected to be the site of harmony, respect, and tolerance in the world, such was not the case. Tensions appeared not just at the macro-level but also at the grassroots because of differences in doctrine, theology, expression, and practice.

### **Ideas, Proposals, and Suggestions**

Young Christian people in Asia must actively build strong relationships with young people from other religious backgrounds by regularly meeting, holding dialogues, participating in and celebrating

interfaith religious events and other social activities at the local, regional, national, and international levels in Asia.

With the consciousness of harmony and acceptance as enshrined in pluralism and multiculturalism in Asia, Asian Christian youth must commit themselves to consistently campaigning for unity in diversity among all communities in society.

Strong and sustainable channels of communication must be set in place for creating strong relationships among different communities, thus aiding in the building of solidarity and peace.

## **Trafficking in Persons and People on the Move**

### **Objective**

The discussion aims to focus on the current state of Asian migrants, what prompts them to move from their countries of origin, and the factors that affect the rise of illegal trafficking of people.

### **Background and Discussion**

Based on reports from the United Nations, Asian migration represents the largest diaspora residing outside their major area of birth, accounting for about 19 million migrants living in Europe, some 16 million in Northern America and 3 million in Oceania. In comparison to other regions of destination, Asians are the largest groups of international migrants; the region has seen a high level of predominantly intraregional migration since the 1980s.

Asian countries are known to be a significant source of trafficked persons. According to the Global Slavery Index report, around 23.5 million of the world's 36 million victims of human trafficking come from Asia. Human trafficking occurs within the context of people's movement, most of which are particularly undocumented, primarily driven by the desire for greater economic opportunities and a better quality of life. The current trend of globalisation also encourages large migration and movement of people in search of jobs or prospects.

These high levels of people's movement have been driven by various socioeconomic and political 'push and pull' factors operating throughout the region in Asia and across the continents in which the majority of Asians are seen. These 'push' factors are elements that

influence a person, due to different reasons, to leave and move to another place. Such reasons include low productivity, unemployment, and underdevelopment rates, poor economic conditions, lack of opportunities for advancement, exhaustion of natural resources, and natural calamities. 'Pull' factors, on the other hand, are those which attract the migrants to a particular location, such as living amenities, better employment, higher wages, and healthier working conditions. Rapid economic growth in some countries attracts both skilled and unskilled labour from neighbouring economically-disadvantaged countries. However, these movements can be both voluntary and involuntary.

The climate for human trafficking or forced migration as well as internal displacements of people in Asia is more evident in South and Southeast Asia. For example, the majority of displaced people in Asia are victims of the policies of government or militarisation. More people have been displaced by the structural violence inherent in the development policies of state than by violation of human rights by the forces of the state and armed non-state actors. The lives of the displaced victims are threatened by violence and forced to move by the governments in the name of development.

Trafficking of persons was discussed as the 'recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of people for exploitation'. Recruitment happens through promising false job offers, kidnapping, or purchasing a person. Physical transportation usually involves physical or psychological coercion and/or deception involved in the offer. Some cases involve debt bondage imposed on the victim by traffickers to cover their expenses. The final objective of trafficking is the exploitation of the labour of the person. It is extremely difficult for a person to escape and denounce the system that has trapped them. Aspects of migration, labour, gender, and criminality, as well as the very nature of trafficking itself, cannot be ignored.

### **Issues Identified**

People are trafficked for different reasons such as forced labour, sexual exploitation, forced marriages, drug syndicates, selling of organs, and recruitment as child soldiers.

Effective tools now exist to collect, analyse, and apply relevant practical information to counter trafficking responses (both quantitative and qualitative). We know more about what we need

to do to help victims sustainably, to go after perpetrators, to better protect those who are vulnerable (especially women and children).

For some individuals and groups, push and pull factors work together. This is particularly the case when push factors are relatively benign. For example, a young adult who cannot find a lucrative job in her home country may consider immigrating only if the opportunities are significantly better elsewhere.

### **Ideas, Proposals, and Suggestions**

Taking a macro and longer-term perspective, the deep and extensive scale of the problem will affect positive resolutions in the region or the world soon. Based on the report, which primarily assesses the role of state parties in combatting and working against trafficking in persons, still far too little has been done in terms of enactment of laws, criminal penalties, proactive victim identification, and protection.

It is thus hoped that governments, particularly in the region, will address this particular transnational issue with better monitoring and greater international cooperation than what is already in operation.

One potential and relatively simple step forward would be for governments in the region to work more closely with local as well as international NGOs and organisations, which have been proactive on trafficking issues. Better information sharing on known and suspected traffickers and victims between Southeast Asian countries could also go a long way. Lastly, efforts to ensure and guarantee protection, as well as immunity from criminal prosecution for the victims, will have to be institutionalised and well communicated to the masses to tackle this problem from the ground up.

Teachers should do more to educate children about the realities of migration. Christian church denominations should be united to address this important issue. Networks that monitor human trafficking and abuses should be further strengthened.

To maximise the efforts in combatting human trafficking in the region, governments need to continue to pay more attention to the push and pull factors in their own countries. Peoples of ASEAN countries need to feel secure and confident in their governments and of their future. When they do not perceive a desperate need to seek employment opportunities in other countries, their chances of

being trafficked for forced labour decreases. It is also important for ASEAN to persist in its engagement with civil society organisations and enforcement agencies to counter the trans-boundary nature of human trafficking.

More international organisations and their networks must be utilised to provide education and support throughout the region. It is only with concerted efforts and increased transnational communication that trafficking in persons in the Southeast Asian region can be combatted.

# **Bible Studies and Responses of Youth**

## **Criticising the Light God Gives: A Reflection on Job 3**

***Rev. Dr Aris Margianto***

*The Church of Jesus Christ in Indonesia*

### **Bible Portion**

*Job 3*

“After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. 2  
He said:

- 3 “May the day of my birth perish,  
and the night that said, ‘A boy is conceived!’
- 4 That day – may it turn into darkness;  
may God above not care about it;  
may no light shine on it.
- 5 May gloom and utter darkness claim it once more;  
may a cloud settle over it;  
may blackness overwhelm it.
- 6 That night – may thick darkness seize it;  
may it not be included among the days of the year  
nor be entered in any of the months.
- 7 May that night be barren;  
may no shout of joy be heard in it.
- 8 May those who curse days curse that day,  
those who are ready to rouse the Leviathan.
- 9 May its morning stars become dark;  
may it wait for daylight in vain  
and not see the first rays of dawn,
- 10 for it did not shut the doors of the womb on me  
to hide trouble from my eyes.
- 11 “Why did I not perish at birth,  
and die as I came from the womb?
- 12 Why were there knees to receive me  
and breasts that I might be nursed?
- 13 For now I would be lying down in peace;  
I would be asleep and at rest
- 14 with kings and rulers of the earth,  
who built for themselves places now lying in ruins,
- 15 with princes who had gold,  
who filled their houses with silver.
- 16 Or why was I not hidden away in the ground like a stillborn child,  
like an infant who never saw the light of day?



17 There the wicked cease from turmoil,  
and the weary are at rest.  
18 Captives also enjoy their ease;  
they no longer hear the slave driver's shout.  
19 The small and the great are there,  
and the slaves freed from their owners.  
20 "Why is light given to those in misery,  
and life to the bitter of soul,  
21 to those who long for death that does not come,  
who search for it more than for hidden treasure,  
22 who are filled with gladness  
And rejoice when they reach the grave?  
23 Why is life given to man  
whose way is hidden,  
whom God has hedged in?  
24 For sighing has become my daily food;  
my groans pour out like water.  
25 What I feared has come upon me;  
what I dreaded has happened to me.  
26 I have no peace, no quietness;  
I have no rest, but only turmoil."

## Reflection

The theme of AEYA—"Lord, Send Your Light and Truth to Lead Us" (Psalm 43:3) is very interesting. The Psalmist wishes and awaits the light of God. However, I would like to propose a text that essentially calls into question why God gives light to human beings. The text is a part of the words that came out of Job's mouth in Job Chapter 3.

We all know Job; a good man who was blameless, upright, and he feared God. Nevertheless, he suffered a lot. He was robbed, struck by natural disasters, suffered from nasty diseases, and was forsaken by the people around him. At first, Job tried to accept his condition, but the pain he felt was unbearable afterwards. After being silent for seven days and nights, Job finally opened his mouth and spoke as in Job 3. His words here seem to be contrary to his words in Job 1:21 and 2:10, wherein he showed a positive attitude towards his sufferings.

Job 3 can be divided into two parts. The first part, verses 1 to 10, contains Job's curse; meanwhile, the second part, verses 11 to 26, contains Job's mourning and weeping. The first part focuses on Job's

regret over the days of his birth; meanwhile, the second part focuses on Job's implicit desire to die. The mourning came out of Job's mouth in Job 3:20: "Why is light given to those in misery...?" Amidst the circumstances of his suffering, Job accused the 'light' God gave to humanity. This is in contrast with the Psalmist's wish for the light of God, our theme as found in Psalm 43:3.

It is, indeed, interesting when we compare the Psalm to the book of Job since there is no other book in the Old Testament which counters the views of the writings in the Psalm, except the book of Job. The parts of the text in the Psalm and the Book of Job which show the contrast are:

1. Job 6:8–10 and Psalm 55:6–8
2. Job 7:7f. and Psalm 8:4,7,17–18
3. Job 9:5–10 and Psalm 104
4. Job 10:2–12 and Psalm 139
5. Job 12:7–12 and Psalm 98
6. Job 12:13–25 and Psalm 107
7. Job 13:20–22 and Psalm 27:4
8. Job 14:1–12 and Psalm 8
9. Job 16:7–14 and Psalm 94:18–19
10. Job 19:22 and Psalm 10:5–6; 73:3–9
11. Job 23:8–9 and Psalm 23; 139
12. Job 31 and Psalm 46:1. (See K.J. Dell, *The Book*, p. 125–133).

Why did Job criticise or accuse the light that God gave? Job was a very miserable man. He cursed the day of his birth. For him, it would have been better if that day never existed, if it perished from the days in the calendar. When Job accused the light that God gave, it reminds us of the creation of this world. On the first day, God created light. Once the light was created, then, not only the world—completely with everything that was in it including humans—was created, but also the days were created: the second day, the third day, and so forth, until the seventh day. The seven days of creation then continuously recur in the days of man. If the light never existed, the following days of creation, as well as the days of man, including the day of Job's birth, would never have existed. If the birthday of Job never existed, the suffering of Job would never happen.

The world God created, in the beginning, was all good. Likewise, human life in the Garden of Eden was full of peace and happiness. Now, for Job, a man living in suffering, the world and human life turned into chaos and full of suffering. If there was no light, that is, if

the creation of this universe could be repeated from the beginning, if there was a 'reset button' in life—like in our smartphone/notebook—which were able to erase the days of difficulties, problems, and suffering, and take us back to the first day of creation wherein everything was all good and back to the peaceful and happy days in the garden of Eden, the life of Job would be great back then.

However, that is not possible! There is no time machine which can restore humankind to the first day of their creation, nor the days that have passed by. It is impossible for a human being to come back to the time before they were born, back to the starting point, to the start line. Then, how?

As there was no 'reset button', Job considered an 'off button', something to end his life. In the second part of Job 3, Job implicitly wished for his death. For him, the grave and the world of the dead (in Hebrew, *sheol*), which is full of darkness, are better places than the earthly world which had been given the light of God. In the world of the dead, everything was so calm and peaceful. Everyone fell asleep and there was no trouble caused by the wicked. For Job, the grave and the world of the dead (*sheol*) were the last refuges of all the sufferings and tribulations in his life on the earth.

It seems so wonderful to imagine death; however, it is also impossible! As a man who was blameless, upright, and feared God, Job should have known that human beings have no rights to take either the lives of their neighbours or their own life. The breath of life comes from God, and only God has the authority to decide to whom God will give, and from whom God will take it.

Coming this far, I would like to ask you to use your imagination a little bit. Imagine you were born as Jews who experienced Holocaust, or as residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki which were completely bombed out, or as Rakhine ethnics who were persecuted and expelled from their residence, or as East Ghouta residents who are currently experiencing a violent attack, the civil war of Syria, or as the Acehese people, the western part of Indonesia, hit by the tsunami waves, or was born for a parent infected with HIV and AIDS, making you have to live with the virus for the rest of your life. When we imagine these things, we realise that they are just a speck of small dust in a whole portrait of human sufferings on the earth. It is right, isn't it?

If there were many sufferings in the world, would it be better if God never created this world? Alternatively, would it be better if God

immediately put an end to human history on earth, instead of seeing more people become victims, and have to live in severe sufferings?

Job was a man who was blameless, upright, and feared God. He should have known that it is impossible if the history of human beings, including the history of his life, which had already been underway, to be reset to the beginning before the creation. If we consider Job's last words in chapter 42, we can understand that Job's mindset about God has changed. Therefore, we can also understand that it is not the days of creation and the days of the human being which are to be reset to improve the state of creation and human life, but instead, it is the human mindset, your mindset and my mindset which are needed to be reset.

If we want our lives on earth to be better, we should reset our mindset. Since human fell into sin, the human mindset is a mindset of sin. The 'reset button' for our mindset is on the cross of Christ. Psalmist wishes for the light and truth. Christ comes as the light of the world and He is the way, the truth, and the life.

As a man who was blameless, upright, and feared God, Job should have known it as well. Humans have no rights to end their own life, nor the life of their neighbours. Life must go on, with the reality of suffering which will also continue. Being human is to be in between the starting point and the endpoint, between the day of birth and the day of death, where suffering becomes an unavoidable reality between those two points.

The Book of Job offers a difficult case to solve and attracts experts to discuss it. Here lies the danger we must be aware of. People are so busy discussing suffering, but they forget to help people who are suffering. Certainly, there is nothing wrong for us to reflect theoretically, philosophically, or theologically about suffering from all aspects associated within. However, do not forget, our important task is not only to talk about suffering. What is more important of all is to do real works to help people who are suffering.

Job was a victim of a robbery, a victim of natural disasters, a victim of illness, and a victim of discriminatory acts. Are there not many Jobs around us, namely, those who are victims of the dispossession of their human rights, victims of natural disasters, victims of disease and viruses, as well as victims of racial and discriminative acts? It is not enough to just talk about and discuss it. We must act to help them.

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. What are your points of view about the contradiction between the mindset of sin and the mindset of Christ? How can we change the mindset of sin into the mindset of Christ?
2. What do you think about the reality of sufferings around you? What can you do as young people?

# Living Together in Peace

**Rev. Seo Young Kim**

*Presbyterian Church in Korea*

## **Bible Portion**

*Isaiah 11:6–9*

“6 The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion will feed together, and a little child will lead them. 7 The cow and the bear will graze. Their young will lie down together, and a lion will eat straw like an ox. 8 A nursing child will play over the snake’s hole; toddlers will reach right over the serpent’s den. 9 They will not harm or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain. The earth will surely be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, just as the water covers the sea.”

## **The Text and Its Context**

Isaiah 11:6–9 describes the liberty and harmony of all creatures in the world with the coming of Messiah. The coming of Messiah contributes to universal peace, like the Garden of Eden in which humans, animals, and living beings lived in harmony. It is an ambitious hope within traumatic years, the period of domination by the Assyrian Empire which resulted in the devastation of the land of Judah as well as the end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

During the period of the text, the power of the Assyrian Empire was tremendous by its well-trained army and organized bureaucracy. The Assyrian Empire granted heavy taxation to the occupied territories, plundered them, and acted cruelly to frighten the inhabitants of the occupied territories. They also sent the conquered people to other countries, mixing them and destroying their national spirit.

The Israelites, who were in a crisis caused by the Assyrian Empire, hoped for the release of the occupied people in Assyria, along with the reunification of Israel. They desired for the revival of the Davidic line. This means that the Messiah would come out from the descendants of David and revive Israel again.

The text is specially placed in continuation to chapter 10, which confirms the fall of the Assyrian Empire. It introduces the kingdom of Messiah to be accepted as an alternative world, not the Assyrian Empire. The Israelites, who had been scattered by the Assyrian Empire, in the meantime, want to be able to unify the Israelite families into the kingdom of Messiah as well as to reconcile them.

The kingdom of Messiah will be filled with peace, unlike the Assyrian Empire. The peaceful world describes an amicable living between strong (wolf, leopard, lion, bear, snake) and weak (lamb, young goat, calf, cow, little child, nursing child, ox). Here antagonisms, either systemic or natural, should undergo redemption. The peaceful world is not a world where the weak and strong just live together, but hereafter the weak no longer becomes the prey of the strong. This means that the weak will be liberated from the violence of the strong.

In Isaiah 11:9, it is mentioned that the knowledge of the Lord will 'surely fill the earth like water covers the sea'. The knowledge of the Lord relates to the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20—the Lord, who brought Israelites out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, is the only God. It reminds people to believe in the living God, the most important faith of Christians. In short, the knowledge of the Lord should be formed fully in person, in the Israelite community, as well as in the contemporary Christian.

### **The Text in Our Context**

As Christians who believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, we confess that Isaiah's prophecy has been revealed through the life of Jesus, the descendant of David. Jesus Christ as the Messiah showed us how to actualise justice and how to love others. However, current society is still faced with numerous struggles of human right abuses, economic disparity, and irresponsible development of the environment. In this Bible study, it will be attempted to examine the text considering the contemporary environmental challenge to achieve peace. We will do this by exploring three themes: Belief in Jesus Christ, Togetherness in Living, and Towards Peace.

#### *i. Belief in Jesus Christ*

The life of Jesus Christ, incarnated Messiah, was not antagonism or atrocity but compassion, healing, and redemption. He feeds the hungry, heals the sick, frees the demon-possessed, as well as preaches messages about the Kingdom of God so that people can learn what the true love is and how to practice the true love to the others.

Jesus Christ invites us to reimagine the world and undo the atrocity, arrogance, technocracy, and aggressive consumerism, which are only capable of killing and consuming, never nurturing or growing. Faith in Jesus Christ is the vision of life, the message to affirm life and

living, the philosophy to redeem the creation. Such faith will bring a new rhythm in relations.

ii. *Togetherness in Living*

The practice of justice and love leads to coexistence. In the creation, the world was in harmony without any greed. Isaiah 11:6–9 refers to the recovery of the original spirit of the created world, in which humans, animals and all living beings have an equal and harmonious relationship. This is an impact of Messiah or this is the Messiah in effect. Christ's salvation ministry is not limited only to the nation of Israel or to humankind, but also to the ecosystem that has been destroyed after the fall of Adam.

All relations of arrogance and antagonism should turn to amicability. Such a peace persuades us that the violence of the strong will disappear. When the violence of the strong and the fear of the weak are altered by Messiah, then peace can be achieved on this land in a variety of relationships: man and woman, adult and child, rich and poor, employer and employee, industrialised country and developing country, as well as human and nature.

iii. *Towards Peace*

In an attempt to redeem creation for the amicability of justice and love, we need to travel beyond technocracy and industrialism. For us, God is the truth, from which every creation derives its relative significance. In the Asian context, it is important to consider our contexts as well as the necessity of seeking peace in daily life.

Environmental hazards could be considered one aspect of God's judgment. Living in the neo-capitalistic era, we stand in a social structure and an economic situation where it is quite easy to lose the knowledge of the Lord: money and power are given priority, corruption is severe, gender inequalities and injustice against elderly people exist in the Asian context. In turn, we should cooperate, recognising the social structural crisis and realising true peace, in truth and light of the Lord, so that justice can be realised in our life.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What do the terms 'harmony' and 'peace' evoke in your personal life?
2. How can our Christian community help to seek peace in the Asian contemporary context?



# Light and Truth in our Deep Pain

**Rev. Hui Young Han**

*Methodist Church of New Zealand*

## **Bible Portion**

*Psalm 43*

- 1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people;  
from those who are deceitful and unjust, deliver me!
- 2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge;  
why have you cast me off?  
Why must I walk about mournfully because of the  
oppression of the enemy?
- 3 O send out your light and truth; let them lead me;  
let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.
- 4 Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy;  
and praise you with the harp, O God, my God.
- 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted  
within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my  
God.

## **Introduction**

We live in a broken world where people suffer injustice, oppression, and human-made tragedies. When we experience the magnitude of the problems, difficult emotions arise in us unbidden; we get hurt, angry, anxious, and depressed. However, our culture tells us that these difficult emotions fall into the 'negative' category, which somehow threatens our life's tranquillity. In this culture, we learn to kill our feelings or deny the reality of our troubled emotions. As Walter Brueggemann (in *Psalmist's Cry: Scripts for Embracing Lament*) rightly puts it, "...the wounded in our society are everywhere, but we are schooled in denial."

However, Psalm 43 enlightens us that we need to penetrate denial so that we can get in touch with our own pain in the presence of God's light and truth. Let us explore Psalm 43 as a guide to learn how we can move past denial, to engage honestly with our difficult emotions and difficult situations, and arrive at genuine praise and hope.

## Exploration of Psalm 43

### i. *Acknowledging the real pain in the threats of injustice (v.1–2, 5a)*

Psalm 43 is an active prayer in the conversational language of a lament. The real pain of human experience is expressed in the psalmist's accusation, complaint, anger, petition, depression, and anxiety. Everything hurtful and urgent the psalmist has experienced has been said in the trust-based relationship that they have with God. The psalmist regards God as the refuge of his people which shows their confidence that God is able and willing to hear and to deal with the core issue of injustice which is done by the ungodly, deceitful enemies who are out of their relationship with God.

### ii. *Asking for God's Light and Truth in the dark and difficult journey (v.3)*

Light and Truth are interrelated here. Light illumines truth about the path the traveller has been taking. On the way, it also reveals the reality of the darkness. It reveals the hidden dangers and the actual roots of the problems that are covered by darkness. The light causes darkness to lose its power and conveys creative energy to the traveller allowing continued walking in the light. It is parallel to Jesus' explanation about light and truth in John 3:16 and 21. God's light enables people to do what is true, and in doing so, people come to the light. In this sense, walking in God's light does not only mean knowing what is true but also doing and living what is right and true. The psalmist asks that this dynamic interaction of the light and truth continue to accompany their journey towards God's holy dwelling—the altar of God.

### iii. *Arriving at Genuine Praise and Hope at the Altar of God (v.4–5)*

For the Old Testament Hebrews, their Temple was the place where God had promised to dwell. The Temple was located on God's holy hill, and there was the altar where the blood from animal sacrifices was sprinkled to make atonement for the people. It was the place where God's covenant people are forgiven, healed, and reconciled with God through the death of innocent animals. For New Testament Christians, this altar of God is symbolised by Jesus' death on the cross where God experienced our human vulnerability and suffering, where he defeated death, the ultimate power of the darkness, and where he has restored his creation to the right relationship with Him and with one another.

At this altar, the psalmist finds the real joy in knowing that their difficult journey was not the end of the story. In the holistic view

of God's bigger picture, the psalmist offers genuine praise to God. Then, they channel their difficult emotions by putting their hope in God and expecting God's mysterious help in a higher reality, a reality beyond what people can see.

## **Reflection in Asians' Contexts**

We (Asian young people) live in a world where diverse forms of injustice prevail. Distorted views of success and happiness create problems. There is unnecessary competitiveness among younger generations in their education and careers. Hedonism and consumerism have facilitated human trafficking and the pornography and sex industry. The low view of women and gender discrimination underpins a hierarchal society in Asia and can result in dysfunctional family life and limit women's efficiency in their workplaces and society. The greed of the rich creates income disparities in our economic system so that the poor and the children of the poor are locked up in an unbreakable cycle of poverty. Denominational divisions, doctrinal disputes, corruption of church leadership, and interreligious conflicts drain our energy to act as a light amid this chaotic darkness. Instead, we suffer from difficult emotions such as anger, anxiety, and depression so that either we get involved in non-constructive fighting or freeze our interest in dealing with any injustice issues in our attempts to mute our pain from the hurt.

However, Psalm 43 shows us that emotions are a form of our internal energy. Instead of muting our painful emotions, we can channel such energy toward the creative energy which will enable us to know (analyse) and act (problem-solve) for what is right and true in our journey with God's Light and Truth.

Psalm 43 concludes with the hope that we can put in God—not because our difficult emotions are transformed or because all the darkness of injustice has gone, but because we can see the bigger story of God at the altar which symbolises God's ultimate victory, where we can find meaning and value in the small chapters of our difficult journey. Living in hope does not mean that we expect God to do everything for us according to our will. Rather, it is our trusting in God's mysterious way of doing things and our commitment to act on our hope to change the world and us.

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. What have been the most difficult emotions for you when you experience injustice and suffering in your personal life or the

wider world? How have they created barriers between you and God or between you and others? How would you like your emotions to serve you differently in the future?

2. Choose one of the issues of the injustice and the suffering that we have been discussing for the past few days here in AEYA. Share within the group:
  - what your main concerns are;
  - what the roots of the problems are in your understanding;
  - how you would want to commit yourself in action to contribute to the problem-solving process.

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34. Bansan Thomas George (Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church in India)
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82. Fransiskus Saperius Rumere (Gereja Kristen Injili di Tanah Papua in Indonesia)
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136. Kim Minji (National Council of Churches in Korea)
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164. Nant Aye Pwint (Church of the Province of Myanmar)
165. Nant Hanny Zin (Church of the Province of Myanmar)
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171. Naw Kree Moo (Myanmar Council of Churches)
172. Neethu Mary Mammen (Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India)
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176. Nguyen Quoc Thanh Binh (Justified Baptist Church in Vietnam)
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188. Piula Perenise Deborah Lasi (Methodist Church of New Zealand)
189. Piyawat Tangsuksan (Church of Christ in Thailand)
190. Pradeep Kumar Samuel Victor (Church of South India)

191. Pranita Sandela (Church of North India)
192. Prapakorn Sukkho (Suntonpin Church in Thailand)
193. Pressy Amanda (Gereja Protestan di Indonesia Bagian)
194. Pricilia Suoth (Gereja Protestan Indonesia di Buol Toli-Toli)
195. Prom Sereyroth (Kampuchea Christian Council in Cambodia)
196. Pudi Jaya Jesudas (Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church in India)
197. Puia (Myanmar Council of Churches)
198. Puri Lestari (Gereja Protestan di Indonesia Bagian Barat)
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201. Rafael Simanjuntak (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan in Indonesia)
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276. Wittawat Thamma (Church of Christ in Thailand)
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- 344. Dr. S.A.E Nababan, ( first Youth Secretary of CCA and former President of CCA)

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- 345. Archbishop ( Euphorus) Dr. Willem T.P. Simmarmata, Moderator, CCA
- 346. Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary, CCA

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- 1. Abdiel Fortunatus Tania (Religious Intolerance and Politicisation of Religion)
- 2. Jec Dan Silencino Borlado (Trafficking in Persons and People on the Move)
- 3. Simi Thambi (Artificial Intelligence: Future of Asian Youths)
- 4. Jay Roy Tipayan (HIV and AIDS, and Human Sexuality: Responses of Asian Youths)
- 5. K. Logeswary a/p Kathamuthu (Gender Injustice and Asian Cultural Values)
- 6. Pranita Sandela (Are Young Asians becoming Digital Nomads?)

7. Win Htut Thar Kyi (Eroding Values of Educational System amidst Consumerism)
8. Siosiana Tangi (Human Development Vs. Technological Advancement)
9. Alam Sharaz Sharif (Poor, Yet Making Many Rich: Poverty Vs. Asian Development)
10. Huang Li-Ho (Disappearing Values of Love and Care amidst “Selfie” Culture?)

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35. Pdt. Rita Dalos
36. Lefina Pangkey, S.Si Teol, MA
37. Netty Pantouw
38. Pdt. Debby Taroreh
39. Pdt. Jein Woy
40. Ansye Lumentut
41. Pdt. Ivone Awuy – lantu
42. Gbl. Joppie Laloan
43. Pdt. Honny Supit Sirapanji
44. Cicilia Tiwa
45. Rahel Daulay

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47. Pdt. David Tulaar

- 48. Pdt. Fitriasia Aling
- 49. Dr Willy Kumurur
- 50. Pdt. Rut Wangkay
- 51. Pdt. Daud Kaunang
- 52. Dr Tommy Sumakul
- 53. Pdt. Teddy Kansil
- 54. Dr Olfie Malo – Beno
- 55. Rio Dondokambey
- 56. Vivi Lambey
- 57. Ivan Pangkey M.T.
- 58. Ir. Reiny Tumbol

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- 60. Ir. Marly E. Gumalag
- 61. Ir. Jenny Karouw, M.Si
- 62. Drs. Roy H. Mewoh, DEA
- 63. Ir. Sandra Moniaga, M.Si
- 64. Ir. Happy T. R. Korah, M.Si
- 65. Ketty S. Sondakh, SE, MAP
- 66. Pdt. Deitje Mongkau
- 67. Sym. Lembong- Keintjem

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- 68. Dr Debby K. R. Kalalo, MSc.PH, Coordinator
- 69. Dr Robby J. Pontoh
- 70. Adrian R. Rantung, SE

### **Accommodation/Home Stay**

- 71. Clay Dondokambey, SSTP, MAP, Coordinator
- 72. Ir. Jeffry V. Senduk
- 73. Ir. Ronald T. H. Sorongan, M.Si
- 74. Refly Ngantung, SP
- 75. Drs. Edwin L. Kindangen, Msi
- 76. Widya P. Mea, SS.AJ.Ak
- 77. Pdt. Ferry Kawengian
- 78. Pdt. Dina Mawara Werat
- 79. Pdt. Grace Winerungan

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- 81. Daniel A. Mewengkang

- 82. Fery R. J. Sangian, S.Sos, MAP
- 83. Marlone M. Sendoh, SH, M.Si
- 84. Everhard Kamasih, S.Sos
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- 95. Ir. Novly G. Wowiling, M.Si
- 96. Ir. Herry Rotinsulu
- 97. Ir. Bach Adrianus Tinungki, M.Eng
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- 104. Olvie Atteng, SE, M.Si
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- 108. Drs. Denny F. Makisanti, M.Si

### **Protocol and local arrangements**

- 109. Evans Steven Liow, S.Sos
- 110. Drs. Meiki M. Onibala, M.Si
- 111. Kombes Pol Surya Kumara
- 112. AKBP Christ R. Pusung
- 113. Xaverius Runtuwene
- 114. Hanny Sumolang

## Easter Sunday Celebrations





## Easter Sunday Celebrations



## AEYA Cultural Night





## AEYA Cultural Night



## Youths in Dialogue





## Youths in Dialogue





“The Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) organised by the Christian Conference of Asia aimed at strengthening the Asian ecumenical movement with active youth participation and ecumenical leadership development for the future. The AEYA was an attempt to ensure that young Asian Christians are brought together at a regional level to address some of the most pertinent issues and wider Asian realities, and evolve ecumenical responses for effective Christian witness.”

**Mathews George Chunakara**  
General Secretary, CCA



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