



• CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE OF ASIA • ASIAN ECUMENICAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY • MANADO, INDONESIA •

Interfaith Dialogue on Light and Truth sheds light on pressing issues in Pluralistic Asia

Christian Conference of Asia ASIAN ECUMENICAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY



"Torang Samua Ciptaan Tuhan" (We are all God's creation)



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RETHINK FAITH: YOUNG CHRISTIANS IDENTIFY ISSUES, AFFIRM ACTIONS

PAGE 7 Beyond Asia: Wider Ecumenical movement



Religious leaders take questions from AEYA participants during the interfaith dialogue (Photo by: Jeba Singh Samuvel)

wo sessions in the afternoon on the third day of the AEYA focused on 'Light and Truth in Pluralistic Asia' for interreligious dialogue among Religious leaders and scholars from the Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu and Taoist, which provided AEYA participants a common ground to discuss relevant issues about religion and their implications to the Asian society.

The panelists — Swami Navananma Jnana Tapaswi (Hinduism); Phramaha Boonchuay Doojai (Buddhism); Prof. Zhang Chongfu (Taoism) and Dr. Media Zainul Bahri (Islam) —made presentations on the theme 'Light and Truth in a Pluralistic Asia' in the perspectives of respective religion. giously. Once we do that, peace will automatically follow," he added.

Dr. Media Zainul Bahri, who represented Islam, said that wrong-doings in the 'name of Islam' were based on wrong interpretation 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 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."



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Christian Conference of Asia's (CCA) General Secretary Dr. Mathews George Chunakara, moderated the session.

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.

Swamy Navananma, said that the only way to learn Dharma, or awareness, was by practicing it.

"Dharma is based on the will of God. It's a natural thing and cannot be learnt from texts and 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 reli-

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.

One of the young attendees raised a question about the future of ecumenical movements in Asia, and whether ecumenical harmony was something that was achievable in his lifetime. Prof. Zhang Chongfu, who was one of the respondents to the question, said things could not be changed overnight.

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DR. MATHEWS GEORGE CHUNAKARA (CCA GENERAL SECRETARY)

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Bibilico Theological Reflection: Young people as prophetic witness to the 'Truth and Light'

peaking from the context of contemporary South Asia particularly in Pakistan, Dr. Farhana A. Nazir from the Gujranwala Theological Seminary in Pakistan, elucidated about the meaning of being prophetic witness to 'Truth and Light' amidst the many issues confronting the church.

In a biblico-theological reflection she delivered at the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly on April 9th, Nazir emphasized the important roles that the young people must take and their capacities being a 'young church' She stressed out four important points on what it means to be a 'prophet'. "Prophets are agents of true 'public declaration'. For example, Jeremiah was concerned with the society's misery. On behalf of the oppressed, he denounced the evil practices of leaders of his time." "Prophet is the one who fulfills. One of the most important responsibilities is to become an ambassador to deliver God's message just as Moses brings message to Pharaoh. He represented a radical break-up with the social reality



people to take an initiative and walk on the true path. The prophetic witness is a legacy that has been left by Jesus who said 'as God as sent me to the world, so I have sent them into the world."

Thus, she encouraged the youth to not stop witnessing even 'under threat'. She cited pertinent social realities in her own country such as the death of Fanish Masih in Sialkot jail who belonged to religious minority in Pakistan. She encouraged the youth to respond to the challenges in their own communities and according to their own context.

in Egypt."

"Prophet is the one who witnesses. "To be a prophet is to be a true witness for social justice and liberation." "Prophet is the one whose prophetic witness empowers "(As young people), it is important for you to not just think about issues but also to seriously deal with them and to help the people in need."

"The young people have bright ideas, who can inspire and can share their skills and can fight against evil and weakness." In the end, she inspired the young people to "respond to the call of witnessing and to take up your own cross like Christ. To be a true witness and the light in the darkness." (ISMAEL FISCO JR)

Rethink Faith: Young Christians identify issues, affirm actions during bible study



God, instead of rejecting his existence. He said we have no control over the matters lamented by Job, but we can cling to faith. To end his reflection, Rev. Margianto noted: "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 about suffering, they forget to help people who are suffering." We must "do real works to help people who are suffering," he said.

immersion and solidarity work must be part of the programs of Churches. He cited Christian groups in the Philippines reaching out to marginalized communities, like the Lumad in southern Philippines whose ancestral lands are taken from them forcibly because of militarization, mining and large-scale monocrop farming. He said these methods would enable Christians "to experience and acknowledge the sufferings of the people, and accompany them out of their sufferings." The participant from Myanmar said many Christians in their country have a "weak understanding" of the Bible, a problem that needs prompt response. Taiwan's lone participant appealed for Churches to respect self-identity and offer night services and more ministries for young people working double-shifts. The participants from Sri Lanka said the Church must play a healing role in the interreligious hate among some groups there, if it truly affirms that Christianity "is a way of life." "Christ has already set an example while he was on earth. Even if he can overcome everything, he instead chose to suffer, to wash away our sins on the cross," explained Moses Lalremruata, from India, of his learnings. "We cannot treat our own sufferings as sufferings all the time. We need a break, to be honest, but if we consider it all as suffering, it will not help us. We must see some of them as blessings that teach us to cling to God." "I raised about the structure of the society; we commit some sins be-

cause of this. The structures make people divided from God and not love our neighbors," said Rhee Han Beet of South Korea. Moreover, the Bible study was a great way of discovering the many issues and perspectives across Asia, she said. "In our groups, we discussed what sin is in our different contexts. We started thinking about how we can change the world, as individuals and as a generation altogether. I was really inspired." Indonesian Fransisco Jacob, from East Nusa Tenggara, also appreciated the diversity: "I have a new perspective. Before this, I had no deep appreciation for Job, but the Bible study encouraged me to read the Bible. I have not experienced something like this yet. We learned from other contexts and also explained our context, where many live in poverty; there's human trafficking." "As young people, we can sit and enjoy our lives; but we have to act now, no matter how big the problem. We have to fight injustices," he further said. "The Bible study gave me great insight into the struggles that Asian countries are facing. Coming from Australia, it's nothing compared to the beautiful and sad stories that I heard. We continue to encourage and pray for everyone here," said Siosiana Tangi. "When I go back home, we're going to start encouraging more, start appreciating more what we have, and start to do stuff to help the countries and youth groups." (KOKO ALVIAR)

he biblical story of Job sparked critical thinking among 350 participants during first Bible study session at the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly, April 9th.

"Job was a victim of robbery, a victim of natural disasters, a victim of illness and a victim of discriminatory acts," noted Rev. Dr. Aris Margianto in his explanatory notes of Job 3.

"Aren't there around us a lot of Jobs?"

The passage, also read during the opening worship, chronicles Job cursing the day of his birth and desiring his own death. The speaker noted that the text was interesting in that Job was the only book in the Old Testament that countered the Book of Psalms in many points – including in "Criticizing the Light God Gives," the title of his exposition.

Group Discussions

After Dr. Margianto delivered his speech, the delegation was subdivided into 15 groups, each composed with prime consideration for diversity. The participants put that to good use as they brought their own contexts to the discussions.

In Group 13, for example, the Indonesian participants noted that "suffering is not from God" but from the people who put their own interests first, at the expense of the others. Explaining further, he cited a man living near his Church who earned a measly \$1 a day to provide for three children in a country where a decent meal is worth half his income.

"We must see Christ as our model," he said. "We must have sympathy and empathy. We must build networks among Churches and go to the suffering people because they are not at all 100 kilometers away, maybe even 500 meters, across the street."

Dr. Margianto clarified that in Chapter 42, Job decided to change his mindset about

A Filipino in the group explained that







ly, respect others. Even though we may not be able to resolve things completely, we can contribute towards 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," he added. CCA General Secretary summarised the whole interfaith dialogue session with challenging words: "I am reminded of an ancient Indian adage. 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. (AJU GEORGE CHRIS)

Reflection: Unity in Diversity

ri Lanka is an island where multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities live together in the midst of diversity. As a church, we have learned to co-exist with the community and to be witnesses of God's truth and light in our complex realities.

When you come to our country, we are also in the midst of economic, political, social and religious darkness. Therefore, the prayer for truth and light written in Psalm 43:3 is very applicable in our context: "O, send out your light and youth truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling."

But, where is the light? And, who is the light? These are the main questions we need to raise. Jesus is telling us that we are the light of the world: "You are the light of the world, a city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to oil in the house" (Matthew 5:14-15).

How then can we become a light of the world? Is it possible to become a light in the midst of poverty and plurality in a country like Sri Lanka?

The truth and light of Jesus is not only applicable but is very relevant in the context of post-war experience, religious tension and political tension. There has been a recent violence between Muslims and Sinhalese, creating a tension among the people; the arrival of the Rohingya Muslims created unpleasant tension, too. In the midst if these realities, there is a need for us to share the truth of God's love with one another. Let us ask God to send his light and truth in order to help us to become the light in the context of darkness and suspicion. "Grace comes to all men freely, as it is the unmerited favor that God holds for all his children. Grace allows light to flow unto human." Thus, light, through grace, is freely manifest unto human. When we reject light, we reject God's favor and cut ourselves off from truth. When we accept grace by choosing light, we are capacitated to receive truth. As we continue from grace to grace by giving grace for grace, we receive more light and truth until we are eventually glorified in truth.



CELEBRATING







Photos by: Jeba Singh Samuvel

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PLURALITY IN ASIA

























Beyond Asia: Serving in the wider ecumenical movement

"You are a youth who goes to church and works for social justice?" A confused acquaintance asked me on the bus. She added that it is unusual for her to see young people in the church, let alone publicly confessing her faith in responding to social injustices.

This was an unusual scenario I encountered as I joined the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, Switzerland five months ago as a young global missionary of the United Methodist Church to serve in the youth programme of the Fellowship. My main task is to make sure that the voice of youth (up to 35 years old) is included in everything that the WCC does. The task seems easy—or so I thought.

Luke 4: 17-19 is one of the verses that brought me to my active involvement in the ecumenical movement.

the scroll of prophet Isaiah about the coming of the Messiah, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (NIV) Jesus was clear about his mission and he is calling us to do the same.

When I think about the ecumenical movement, I am reminded of this text in Luke. "In modern usage, the word embraces the unity of God's whole creation and recognizes every human pursuit as subject to the healing ministry of Christ's Spirit." This means preserving human dignity and rights, ending any form of violence and conflict, caring for the environment, living in solidarity with those in the margins, calling out people in power who are abusing their privilege to oppress others, among other things. Until today, I keep hearing the phrase, "young people are the future of the movement," yet seldomly "young people are our partners today, who will continue our work in the future." Throughout the history of the ecumenical movement, we know that young people have been a huge part of it, and of what it is today. As young people, it is our task to take ownership of our role and be active partners in the work. We have to continue to dismiss the idea that young people are beneficiaries, rath-

er we are partners, serving in leadership alongside our adult counterparts.

As His Holiness Pope Francis said in his sermon at the Vatican on Palm Sunday. "You (young people) should speak up. If our generation will not listen, then shout. You (young people) have to shout... Don't wait for the rocks to shout for you...".

It fascinates me to know from history how young people created new waves in the ecumenical movement. As young people, it is our desire to be instruments of God's transformation of the world towards peace and justice. We need to take our role seriously and continually invite the church to recognize this— that we are the NOW as much as we are the TOMORROW.

As a young person participating at the Asian Ecumenical Youth Gathering, take advantage of your time to experience the Spirit of God that unites all and be connected with one another. Initiate conversation and get to know one another, especially each other's passion and vocation and how we as young people can all work together. Each of you carry your own realities and struggles. Jesus' prayer in John 17 reminds us that we are not alone. As part of all of God's creation, we are called to carry each other's burdens and be in solidarity with one another—that's what it means to be ecumenical. We are all part of the transformation of the world. Since I started my work at the youth programme of WCC, l have been in several consul-



31 young participants in the Stewards Programme of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism visit YWCA in Arusha, Tanzania held on 1-6 March 2018

tations with young leaders. I have been inspired to know their advocacy work and the different ways they call out their churches to partner with them in addressing different issues of society. I am always inspired to know that when young people gather or when we are present in the spaces, authentic transformation happens. Our desire is for the church to be more responsive. We are passionate about real change and to be a part of the solution—and this is where I see more visibly God's Spirit of unity. An important aspect of being in ecumenical spaces is to reecho your experience back in your home context and continue to be active from where you are. The global ecumenical movement will continue to thrive because of ecumenical youth leaders like you who are committed to working for jus-

The WCC offers opportunities for young people to be a part of the global movement. Here are some of our programmes for this year:

Stewards Programme

Young people are invited to serve in WCC-organized events, such as the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (March 2018) and one of the Governing bodies, Central Committee meeting (June 2018). Stewards work alongside WCC staff, while having the opportunity to connect and network with ecumenical leaders.

Internship Programme (July 2018-2019)

Young people are invited to serve for 12 months with the WCC at our offices in Geneva to work hands-on in some of our programmes: Health and Healing, Communication, Just Communities for Women and Men, and Commission on Churches on International Affairs. The programme includes an additional six months for interns to work on a project back in their home context.

Continuing Formation: Diakonia and Sustainable Development (August 2018)

An ecumenical continuing seminar with a focus on diakonia and sustainable development for young people in Latin America and the Caribbean.



tice and peace.

(Joy Eva Bohol is a youth missionary from the United Methodist Church serving in the Youth Programme of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland. Learn more about WCC program at https://www.oikoumene.org/ or visit their Facebook page or drop an email at youth@wcccoe.org

Joy Eva Bohol from the World Council of Churches gives words of welcome to the young participants in the Stewards Programme of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism

GEM School (August 2018)

This programme aims to build economic literacy within churches by equipping participants with the tools and languages to effectively advocate for urgent transformations in the global financial and economic realm.

Youth Festival in Amsterdam (August 2018) Commemorating the 70th anniversary of the WCC since its first Assembly in Amsterdam, on 23 August 1948. This is in partnership with the churches in the Netherlands.

Visit WCC website for more details: https://www.oikoumene.org/

The Face of Indonesian Hospitality: Stewards share the joy of serving the assembly



ingly said.

Novia Lambey, who acts as the AEYA's Stewards Coordinator, said that each member of the steward has gone through rigid screening and were carefully selected. "The AEYA is the biggest youth conference North Sulawesi has ever hosted and we wanted to make it special for every participant. I reached out to the Deans of the Sam Ratulangi and Manado Universities, asking them for youngsters who had strong character and fluency in English. Once I made an initial list, I conducted personal interviews with them to choose the best of the best," she said. "I am very happy with my selection of stewards. Their young spirits are tougher than their bodies. As a result, they insist to keep on working despite nearing exhaustion. During the initial period, when we had to collect participants from airport and their flights got delayed, Stewards used to put in almost 20 hours of work a day. But they did it with a smile and I am proud of my team," added Novia.

<image>

n the past few days of AEYA 2018, we have felt and experienced the overwhelming hospitality of Indonesian culture. We have heard about the work the organizing team has undertaken in order to put things together for the assembly.

Yet, nothing much is said about the 47 young people who have been 'liaising' for the assembly who serve as runners, tour guides, intepreters, cleaners or simply the go-to persons for whatever help the delegates need. They are the young stewards from the churches and schools in Indonesia who work so hard to make everyone feel at home in Manado.

Despite having some work days that start early in the morning and goes on well into the night, they remain a cheerful bunch and fully dedicated to serving the assembly. So we asked them to pause for a while to share their thoughts and feelings about being part of the stewardship program and what they gained from the experience. Franky Batunan, who belongs to the neighbouring Indonesian Islands of Talaud, said he enjoyed AEYA and it taught him to be flexible at work: "During the orientation session, we were taught about the importance of being flexible." "Sure enough, at the AEYA conference, I have so far worked as an interpreter, official guide of the CCA General Secretary and helped with requirements for airport transportation as well as accommodation. My biggest gain has been an improvement in my ability to work under pressure," said Franky.

Kezia Ngatung, who finished her undergraduate studies in Psychology, said the event made her a much more responsible person: "I once worked as Liaison Officer at a sports event, but it was much smaller in scope." "At AEYA, you have to be with participants the whole day, taking care of their every needs including transportation and home stays. Personally for me, it was a big step up in terms of handling responsibility. I can say I have now become a much more responsible person," she said.

Kezia feels that AEYA event is a step towards bigger things for her: "I would like to be a part of similar events in the future as well."

Cindy Turang, who is a veteran in the field of organising major events, had a different take on the AEYA experience: "My first major event was the World Ocean Conference in Manado in 2009. Since then, I have worked for several international events and conferences. But this is my first-ever youth conference. One big difference between previous events I worked with and AEYA is that the crowd is much younger. It is so much easier to connect with and blend in with them. They make us all feel young at heart again," she smil-



If you, as an AEYA participant, has found your stay in Manado to be an enjoyable experience, then remember it is because to the hard work of these stewards. So the next time you see them at work, thank them, take a 'selfie' and present them to your friends as the 'real heroes and heroines of AEYA.'(AJU GEORGE CHRIS)

Pocho-pocho: Dancing the Manado way

ou've noticed "Pocho-pocho" on your handbooks, starting each day at the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly – and, we tell you, it deserves its place there.

It's an uncomplicatedly danceable song. The funny, almost chanty vocals will elicit some laughs from the crowd. And, if you learn the meaning and background, you'll probably "dance energetically" with a big, big smile plastered on your face, too.

concluding with a kick). It takes its name from the song titled "Pocho-pocho," by Yopie Latul, a popular local artist whose discography is made up of novelty songs. The segment that's going to give you a Last Song Syndrome goes:

> Balenggang pata pata (Dancing energetically) Ngana pegoyang pica pica (You move so wildly) Ngana pe body, poco poco (Your body is so chubby.)

industries in Southeast Asia began taking a stab at the trend themselves. One of the songs that caught on was "Pocho-pocho." Think Pen Pineapple Apple Pen, in slang Bahasa.

Pocho-pocho and its accompanying steps so swept radio and television in Indonesia that it was elevated into the definitive line dance here, danced by young and old. "Pocho-pocho" competitions have also become common: people add more difficulty and energy to the usual 1-2 step of the LA Walk. People dance it in parties and social gatherings. It has also become an aerobic exercise, like Zumba.

So let's get to it!

Pocho-pocho, also spelled Poco-poco, is a popular line dance in Indonesia. It is basically the "LA Walk" (a go-to footwork involving alternating steps

When novelty songs like "Asereje" (The Ketchup Song) were the fad in the early 2000s, local music

So let's join the fun, shall we?!

