

**12th GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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D. T. NILES MEMORIAL LECTURES**

“LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF GOD”:

BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF PEACE

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I am deeply honoured to-day to deliver this D. T. Niles Memorial Lecture, in memory of one who not only was one of the international ecumenical giants of his time, but also the embodiment of a great builder of communities of peace throughout the Asian landscape.

The contemporary reality of Asia, as in many parts of the world, is one of deep violence. The irony of the ending of the Cold War is that it has coincided with the unleashing of uncontrollable violence in many parts of the world. The combination of high technology and seemingly medieval tribal conflict has become the pattern of our times. Behind all of this lies the development of a new ideology, particularly in the West, which “legitimizes a culture of violence by invoking God arbitrarily to suit a particular agenda for aggression. As a result, insecurity, fear and anxiety characterize the lives of many people”¹ throughout Asia.

This culture of violence manifests itself in many different ways. There is the negative impact of economic globalisation, which continues to widen the gap between the haves and the have nots. There is also the structural violence of domineering or negligent governments in relation to their populations. Corruption and the abuse of power often manifest themselves in violence. In addition in Asia, there are often structural forms of traditional violence, mainly based in patriarchal societies. These result in gender discrimination, forced labour migration,

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

discrimination against young people and those with disabilities, and discrimination based on race, caste, and class. Surrounding our very life is the violence against the environment.

Against this rather gloomy picture of Asia, positive signs must also be noted. There is a yearning among young people for true manifestations of peace and of peaceful communities. In the aftermath of the Tsunami we have observed remarkable efforts to create communities of peace in various places. Again, the speed of reconciliation after ethnic and communal violence often has been very rapid. Despite violence, there is evidence of a vast amount of resilience among populations who have been deeply wounded.

In 2001 and 2002, I visited Halmahera in the North Moluccas, where I had served for 13 years in the 1970s and 1980s, and saw the results of the Christian – Muslim violence, which had been stimulated by the political situation in Indonesia at that time, and aggravated by elements within the Indonesian military. Events too terrible for words had occurred. Both Muslims and Christians were involved in violence. Let me just give one example. Six of my former students in Indonesia, all ordained pastors, were killed. One of them was the Rev Albert Lahi. He was in the vestry of his parish church when elements of the *Jihad*, aided and abetted by elements of the military, arrived. He knew that his case was hopeless. He asked to be allowed to pray. His wish was granted. He put on his preaching gown and knelt by the communion table. He prayed for his church, for his nation, for his congregation and for those about to kill him. The Sunday School children who observed the whole incident told me what happened. Then he stretched his head forward and was beheaded. His head was carried on a pole around the village. His body was dragged by the feet for all to see. Yet in this same village, and in this whole area, reconciliation has come about. Christians too, were heavily engaged in violence. However, since 2002 both the Muslim and the Christian populations have been slowly but surely working their futures out together, in a quite remarkable display of creating communities of peace.

The Uniting Church in Australia, in co-operation with Churches in Asia and the Pacific, has developed a program entitled *Young Ambassadors for Peace (YAP)*. Here, young people from conflict situations in the Moluccas (Indonesia), Bougainville (Papua New Guinea), the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, North-East India, and Sri Lanka, have developed communities of reconciliation in each of their

regions. These communities have developed across ethnic, religious, caste, and class divisions.

Against the situation in which we find ourselves, in which we find incredible violence in our communities, but also the resilience of the human spirit, we need to find the Christian message related to the theme of “Building Communities of Peace for All”. We need, of course, to be engaged in “Listening to the Voice of God”. That we should investigate this is important, for two reasons. First, as Christianity represents just over one third of the global population, it has a responsibility for the existence of violence in our contemporary world. Second, despite its strong peace traditions, Christianity has been involved in violence in much of its history. Within this, we need to hear the voice of God because that is central to our identity as Christians.

How do we listen to the voice of God? It is not our task primarily to invoke God for our particular view of the world, but rather, in humility, to sit and listen as that divine voice comes to us.

Therefore, in looking at how we may build communities of peace, let us, in this paper, take up this task theologically, as we must as Christians. Let us first go to the very heart of our existence as Christians, and as the church. The inexplicable will of God to be for, and with, humanity implies that the church’s life cannot begin to be understood in terms of the structures and events of the world. Equally, God’s inexplicable will to be God with, and for, humanity implies that we should always understand our life as Christians theologically. These simple, yet profound, facts derive from the mystery of the triune God not to be God apart from, or separate from, humanity, but rather to make God’s very life intersect with the unity of the Son of God with us. Our theological basis as Christians and as the church is in the wonder of God’s condescension, in the intentionality of God’s solidarity with sinners, that is, with those who find their self-identity solely within themselves, and find their self-justification and sole solace in themselves alone, without any reference to God. The church is called to exist solely through the solidarity of Jesus Christ with those who are alienated from God, by Christ going to the extremes of alienation for humanity, so that humanity might through Him come close to God. At the heart of our faith is expressed the fact that God does not wish to be alone in celebrating the wonder God’s inexpressible love for humanity. God in Christ calls into existence an earthly Body of His Son who is its heavenly Head, in order that humanity may responsively rejoice with God in the harmony and peace which God has established for creation.

If the being of the church and its life is predicated upon the grace of Jesus Christ as itself defining God's action in the world for the reconciliation of creation, including humanity, then its life of peace is that which it receives from Him, Who is its life. The church's very existence will be shaped by the manner in which it confesses this truth to be its very life.

On the basis of our theological identity in Christ, we take the New Testament writings, on Christian community especially, most seriously. Like our struggle to be faithful disciples of Christ to-day in a world of violence, Christianity was born in a milieu of political and social violence. The evidence which we have both from the New Testament and from non-Christian sources of the First Century C E point to the constant struggle of Christianity to survive in such a climate. Clearly that climate of violence also influenced the language and concept-construction of many parts of the New Testament. Nevertheless, it is also very striking how early Christianity sought to transcend this violent world.

A microcosm of the New Testament understanding of building communities of peace for all can be seen in the ethical sections of Paul's writings, especially in those ethical sections in his *Letter to the Romans*.

It is arguable that no document in Christian history has played a more influential part than Paul's *Letter to the Romans*. One simply has to reflect on the pivotal impact of *Romans* on Augustine and the development of Western Christianity, on Luther and then on Calvin and Cranmer and the political, social, and religious consequences of the Reformation, on Wesley and the emergence of the Evangelical Revival, on Karl Barth and his dominance of Twentieth Century Theology, and on the Second Vatican Council and the Renewal of the Roman Catholic Church. A primary impetus for Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Wesley, Barth, and the Members of Vatican II came from Paul's writings, particularly from *Romans*. This letter is thus central to Christian self-identity and self-understanding. It forms a useful basis for the exploration of the understanding of Christian community based on identification with God in Christ as it challenges the prevailing Graeco-Roman culture of status based on potentially violent concepts through the ethical sections of *Romans*, particularly Chapter 12.

In order to understand this ideal community culture, we need to understand that it both reacts against, and transforms, Graeco-Roman cultures of the First Century C E. We need, first, of course to

look at the results of recent research on First Century C E social organisation, social interaction, and religious organisations.

First, in the world of Early Christianity, social groupings were based on kinship, ethnic issues, power, and politics. Kinship was the central factor of social organisation. The kinship group was the focus of individual loyalty, and had decisive influence over individual identity and self-awareness. The security of each individual was grounded in the community, sharing as they did common interests, values, and activities. Hence, the most basic unit of social awareness was not the individual. Individual consciousness was subordinate to social consciousness.²

Second, religion, like other social factors, was enmeshed in kinship and politics. Membership of a religious community was not necessarily based on religious relationships, but on bonds of kinship that gave structure to religious associations. Membership in religious groups was either involuntary or voluntary. Involuntary members belonged to a religion because, for example, they were born into a particular family. Voluntary membership in early Christianity stood in contrast to family-based religion. In the First Century C E the religion of voluntary members resulted in a newly-created kinship group.³ Although it appeared to be similar to, or to look like, any other kinship group, it was in fact a created or fictive kinship grouping. In Early Christianity, language of the natural kinship group, for example “household (of faith)”, was used for a created kinship group. Indeed, the struggle of the Christian community as a totality, for example in Rome, can be seen in relationship to these two types. It struggled as to which of these two types it in fact belonged.

Third, there is considerable evidence in the First Century C E within Graeco-Roman culture of intense expressions of emotion, through outbursts of anger, aggression, pugnacity, and indeed violence. Moreover, these appear to have been socially acceptable.⁴

² MALINA, B J. *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981, 55-66, 60-64; MEEKS, W A. *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, 90-91. Cf. THEISSEN, G. *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics and the World of the New Testament*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1992, 272 – 278.

³ THEISSEN, G. *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (edited and translated by John H Schutz). Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982, 27-40. Cf. ESLER, P. F. *The First Christians in their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific approaches to New Testament interpretation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994, 6 – 12.

⁴ PEARSON, L. *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece*. Stanford: University Press, 1973, 193; WEDDERBURN, A J M. *The Reason for Romans (Studies of the New Testament and its World)*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988, 81-83. Cf. LOADER, W. R. G. *Jesus' Attitude towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels*. Grand Rapids (Michigan) and Cambridge (UK): Eerdmans, 2002, 177.

Fourth, in such an atmosphere, concern for honour and shame was significant. This was because honour determined social standing and was essential for social cooperation. Honour was the outward approval given to a group or an individual by others whose honour was not in question. The honour of an individual normally was dependent upon the outward approval given to one's group. On the other hand, people became shamed when they transgressed group standards or when they sought a social status to which public approval was not given. Honour was ascribed, for example, by birth into an honourable family, or by it being given or bestowed from honourable persons of power. It was acquired by outdoing others in social interchange. A person's sense of self-worth was therefore established by public reputation related to that person's associations rather than by a judgment of conscience.⁵

Over against these four factors of community life in the Graeco-Roman cultures of the First Century C E, Paul summons Christians to a new form of religious organisation, a fictive kinship religious community based on identity in Christ in which membership is voluntary, and also to new social roles. These social roles are based on the twin concepts of peace or harmony, and mercy, in a complex of cultures where expressions of violence seem not only to have been common, but also accepted, as has been noted.

To understand the significance of peace or harmony, and the related concept of mercy, in Paul's writings, it is helpful first to look more widely in the New Testament at the Greek words commonly translated *peace* and *mercy*.

There are strong communal elements in the New Testament uses of *peace* and of *mercy*. There are also strong elements of God's desire for a world which ultimately is to be under God's rule. These factors we see as we look at the two concepts more closely.

The Greek word *eirēnē* means *harmony* and *peace*. The verb *eirēneuō* signifies *to be at peace* or *to live at peace* or *to keep the peace*. *Eirēnē* is also closely associated with the Hebrew term for *peace* and *harmony*, *shalôm*. In the New Testament, *eirēnē* refers to two distinct states of peace.

⁵ MALINA, op.cit., 27-48.

First, it means the final salvation and harmony of the whole community, and thus of the whole of each individual person. Zechariah proclaims this expected state of salvation and harmony of the whole community in Luke 1: 76 – 79. The Angels' Song in Luke 2: 14 refers to this salvation and harmony which has come to the earth. This concept is again referred to in Hebrews 13: 20 – 21. It is this idea of peace which Paul himself uses in II Corinthians 5: 16 – 19. There he speaks about Christian believers, being justified by grace in faith, having peace with God through Christ. These believers, Paul says, will be granted salvation. So the concept has a future orientation, referring to the final end of history.

Second, on the basis of its future orientation, *eirēnē* refers to a condition here and now of peace and harmony, guaranteed by what will occur at the end of time. This divinely-willed state in the here and now includes Christians' well-being, and their harmony with God, with one another and with all human beings. This idea appears in Hebrews 12: 14. Paul uses it in Ephesians 4: 1 – 3. So, again, the concept has also a present orientation. This present orientation refers in the first instance to the state of the whole Christian community, and then to the individual as part of it.

The First Century C E Greek terms for *mercy* are *oiktirmos* and *eleos*. Both refer to *mercy* and *compassion*, while *oiktirmos* additionally means *pity*. The verbs *eleeō* and *eleaō* mean *to show kindness* or *to be merciful*. Human mercy, therefore, denotes the divinely intended attitude of Christians towards each other. It signifies sympathy and loving-kindness, which are to be exhibited in relationships, particularly through acts of help to the needy. This we see in Matthew 9: 13, in relation to Jesus' attitude to eating with outsiders, and in Luke 10: 37, in relation to Jesus defining the neighbour who may be an outsider. The neighbour was the despised outsider who showed mercy to the person on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell among thieves.

Thus, in the definitions of both of these terms as they were used in the New Testament we see sustained communal elements, and also sustained pointers to the ideal of a society which is ultimately to be under God's rule. An example of this is in *Romans*. In Romans 12: 1 Paul describes Christian life against the background of these terms, using metaphors from the sacrificial cult. This cult spoke of the offering of the central parts of a community's life to the power of God. For Christians, this is now to suggest that Christians are to give themselves permanently to the rule of God, as this way has been opened for them through God's self-

sacrifice in Christ. The sacrificial cult continues to point to the rule of God throughout the community. It also points to an individual's relationship with God within the community's relationship with God. This is based on Paul's theological argument in Romans 5: 1 and 9 – 10, where he describes how *peace* (*eirēnē*) and *reconciliation* (*katallagē*) have been given by God to God's community in Christ.

So, if we now return to Paul, and specifically to *Romans*, we can observe how he deals with the four factors of community life in Graeco-Roman culture outlined above.

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

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

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

We thus see the radical way in which Paul took hold of Graeco-Roman categories of group identity, and then applied to them new metaphors, including that of the body of Christ, so as to create in them a totally new identity. Present-day individualism makes it difficult for us to see the significance of the dynamism of Paul's transformation of a received aggressive culture. Moreover, throughout world history Christianity has had both success and failure in being able to present and live out this newly transformed identity in Christ. To this varying success and failure, and the reasons behind it, we now turn.

Let us now look through one particular lens at the processes of the spread and development of world Christianity. Let us see how the category of peace, and the ideal of communities of peace, developed on the one hand, or were restricted on the other, as Christianity expanded. Christianity was born within an immediate Jewish cultural environment, surrounded by an Aramaic and Hebrew vocabulary, and Semitic expectations. However, this integrated Judaism in its strict and official vesture, rejected Jesus of Nazareth and later turned against Paul as he championed freedom from the Law through Jesus Christ. As the New Testament and second and third century C E writings demonstrate, Christianity penetrated much more easily into Hellenistic culture, including Hellenistic Judaism, than into the culture of Judaism itself. From Hellenism Christianity developed into the wider Graeco-Roman culture, and subsequently moved into Northern and Eastern Europe, in addition to its movements into Asia. Why was it that it found its movement into Hellenism much easier than its movement into Judaism? It was because Hellenism was more of a culture in the original sense of that word than Judaism. Hellenism was much more related to primarily agricultural societies whose deepest concern was with being in harmony with nature. The Christ Event spoke of birth, growth, development, maturity, death, resurrection, and new life. This was a cycle. It fitted the cyclic world of agricultural life. It was a cyclic culture. That world spoke of planting, development, maturity, harvest (or death), new life, renewed fertility of the soil, and new growth. The Jesus story fitted the pattern of agricultural life. It had also been similar to the Old Testament dramas of the Prophets and Psalms, where they had spoken of destruction and rebirth.

However, in first and second century C E Judaism, a different world had emerged. There was no longer the drama of the Old Testament Prophets and Psalms. Now first and second century C E Judaism tended to stress the precise following of particular divinely-inspired words, which had

been uttered up until the time of Ezra and the “Men of the Great Synagogue” and thereafter had ceased.⁶

So the gospel lived and flourished in a cyclic and agricultural mode as it was interwoven into agricultural societies. In this way, on the whole, the gospel moved north and west, in addition to its movement east. However, it did not enter the world of Judaism to any large degree. As it moved west and north and east, the transfiguration of agricultural society meant that the gospel was totally interwoven into the fabric of the culture. It also began to mould and to direct the cyclic impulses of the culture. Wholeness, harmony, rhythm, and ritual (in water, and around a thanksgiving meal) were the means by which the gospel was expressed. Baptism was the water ritual; Holy Communion was the thanksgiving ritual. Both were central means of expressing the faith. Many parts of central, northern and western Europe were evangelised in this way. The movement was slow and halting. Yet the interweaving continued. Celtic Christianity developed in this way – deeply cyclic, and deeply agricultural. There were movements also into western Asia, to India and to areas further east where Christianity developed in this way in the first millennium.

There was, of course, from time to time, resistance to the gospel, but on the whole the development of Christianity was communal. Christianity thrived in this cyclic world, and expressed itself communally. There were internal communities of peace, and frequently relations of peace with surrounding faiths. However, another world existed in which Christianity had not been able to develop so well. This was the world of a trading- and word-culture. It was the world of first and second century C E Judaism into which Christianity had not been able to develop in the first millennium. However, with the rise of travel and trade, Christianity began to develop into a trading- and word-culture, that is, into a culture in which wholeness, community, harmony, and ritual received less attention, and more attention was given to common standards to guide diverse peoples as they sought to live together. The development of trading- and word-cultures occurred largely in the period from the fourteenth century C E, often referred to as the Modern Period, taking in as it did the European expansion in trade and commerce, the Renaissance and the Reformation, and industrial modernisation.

⁶ As in the first words of the *Pirqê Abôth*. See DANBY, H. *The Mishnah* (translated from the Hebrew by H. Danby), “The Fathers” (“Pirqê Abôth”). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933, 446 – 461.

This was a world quite different from that of the agricultural world. Journeying individuals and communities needed clear-cut ordinances in warding off their dangers and temptations, far from the cyclic life of the soil which they had left behind. That cyclic world had been so clearly transfigured by the Christ Event, and celebrated in ritual as a means of expression and teaching. The trade- and word-culture was different. Guidelines were needed to bind communities together. Doctrine, ethics, church polity, and management were all important. The emphasis was to be on the Book (the Bible), the Guide to the Book (Confessions and Catechisms), and the Interpreter of the Book (the Preacher).

Parallel cultural emphases occurred in other trade and word religions, specifically Judaism and Islam. In Christianity, in this word and trade form, there is emphasis on the Bible, the Confession and Catechism, and the Preacher. In Judaism, there is a parallel emphasis on the Torah, the Mishnah and Talmud, and the Rabbi. In Islam, there is a parallel emphasis on the Koran (Qūran), the Sharī'ah, and the Faqīh.

So now Christianity succeeded in operating in two cultural modes, the cyclic- and agricultural-mode on the one hand, and the word- and trade-mode on the other. However, the critical issue arose during the period of evangelisation, from the late 18th century C E onwards. Could Christianity, which largely existed in a word and trade cultural mode in the mission-active nations, translate itself again into the cyclic and agricultural cultural modes of the receptor cultures? If the mission-active cultures had been those that were still in the original cyclic and agricultural mode moving into new cyclic and agricultural receptor cultures, then the spread of the gospel would have been relatively simple. However, mainly they were not. They were trade- and word-cultures. In the process of evangelisation a variety of reactions occurred. In some situations, the spread of the gospel was highly successful, as, for example, in many parts of the Outer Islands of Indonesia, in North-East India, in much of the Pacific, and in parts of the African continent. In other situations, it was extremely difficult, as, for example, in Japan, in parts of India, and in parts of China.

In the development of Christianity in the cyclic and agricultural mode, great emphasis was placed on the baptising of communities and cultures into the faith. Once whole Christian communities had been established, then there tended to be harmony and peace both within those communities and in relation to the surrounding societies. However, although trade- and word-culture communities encouraged peace *within* their community, they did not necessarily

encourage community with those *outside* the faith-group. Often colonial Protestant communities were internally cohesive, but aggressive towards the world around them, including toward indigenous religions. So in the West Indies and in the Southern States of the United States, the local population was enslaved, or slaves imported, and the slaves simply acquiesced in the colonists' religion. There was little attempt to translate the gospel into the indigenous community. In Australia, minimal attempt was made to translate the gospel into indigenous cultural terms. In China, Japan, and India, parts of the population was antagonised by Christianity.⁷

This stands in stark contrast to the teachings of the New Testament, epitomised in Paul as we have seen, where Paul's ethics for *internal* Christian life are exactly the same as his ethics for those *outside*. You treat the outsider in exactly the same way as you treat your Christian sister or brother.

Now we come again to the issue of communities of peace. In ecumenical and evangelical terms, we need the gospel in both cyclic and word cultures. Where the church has been primarily related to an agricultural- or cyclic-culture, it needs the struggle with the divine graceful criticism of that transfiguration in order to be *semper reformanda*. It needs to hear the voice in word form to be constantly reformed. Equally, a church which is primarily related to the gospel in a word- or trade-culture, needs always the struggle with the divine fact of incarnation, that God has placed God's church in the world.

However, we need to be aware that the existence of the church in word- and trade-cultures has a tendency to work against building communities of peace.

This is frequently so across religious divides. Thus it is especially so where there is a meeting between two word- or trading-culture religions. There are four poignant examples of this. First, it is seen in the struggle between particularly the strident word-culture form of Judaism and the word-culture form of Islam in the Middle East. Second, it was observed in the violence of the past between Muslims and Christians in urban areas of Indonesia. Third, it is seen in the attack of word-culture Christianity

⁷ See, for example, BOYD, R. H. S. *India and the Latin Captivity of the Church: The Cultural Context of the Gospel* (Monograph Supplement to the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, No. 3). London: Cambridge University Press, 1974, 117 -119; HAIRE, J. *The Character and Theological Struggle of the Church in Halmahera, Indonesia, 1941 – 1979* (*Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums*, Band 26). Frankfurt am Main und Bern: Lang, 1981, 322 - 323.

against the word- and trading-culture Judaism in Nazi Germany. Fourth, it is observed in the antagonism between specific traditions of Islam and certain traditions of Christianity in the United States.

Therefore, a number of things are incumbent upon us.

First, we need to be aware that creating communities of peace from the Pauline tradition means creating attitudes of peace and harmony towards those *outside* which are the same as to those *within* the faith-community.

Second, we need to be aware that Christianity needs both its cyclic- or agricultural-culture forms on the one hand, and its word- and trade-culture forms on the other. However, we need to be aware that its word- and trade-culture forms have a tendency to go against the New Testament, and specifically Pauline, teaching, in that they can tend to an aggressive attitude to those *outside the community*, while fostering cohesiveness within the faith-group.

Third, we need to stress the importance of cyclic- and agricultural-culture forms within the Asian expression of Christianity, and to see how word- and trade-culture expressions of Christianity can in our time be translated into cyclic forms.

Fourth, Asian theology, therefore, is not simply a matter of engaging in word-culture exercises (in, for example, doctrine, ethics and polity). It is as much an expression of faith through liturgy, drama, dance, music, and communal living.

Fifth, the communal nature of expressing theology in Asia calls Asian Christians in particular to advance, at all opportunities, the eight goals of the Millennial Declaration (MDG) of the United Nations, that is, to

1. eradicate poverty and hunger;
2. achieve universal primary education;
3. promote gender equality and empower women;
4. reduce child mortality;
5. improve maternal health;
6. combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
7. ensure environmental sustainability; and
8. develop a global partnership for development ⁸.

⁸ See http://www.un.org/millennium_goals/

These are indeed expressions of Asian *theologiae in locō*.

Sixth, this way of communal harmony is necessary in the ways in which the Churches in Asia live their lives. Consensus decision-making, mutual celebration, the interest in others' rituals and festivities are important in the Asian way of being Christian.

Seventh, truth can be communicated without aggression. Therefore, the ecumenical movement in Asia, in and of itself, as it brings the Churches together, is central to the creation of peaceful communities for all in Asia.

We in our time live in a deeply ambivalent age, an age of high technology and of medieval conflict, and an age as strangely confident of the saving powers of the market-place as a previous age was strangely confident of the saving powers of collectivism. Yet both these ages have reflected inbuilt cultures of violence. In this age, Christians are called to follow Paul in speaking of, and living out, the wonder of God's mercy, peaceful harmony and reconciliation with humanity. Christians are thus called to a life of praise, which embraces all of our personal and social life, in all its practical, ethical, religious, political and intellectual aspects. That praise will be both culture-transforming and culture-renewing, over against the self-worship of individuals and nations in our time. As we seek models to overcome violence around the globe, Paul's picture of the Christian community as a vehicle of transformation to overcome violence is a powerful and liberating word.

This Pauline vision of Christian community is eschatological in nature. It pictures the end of time as now already beginning to be operative. One of the great leaders of the ecumenical movement, Archbishop William Temple, served as Archbishop of Canterbury for only two years from 1942 to 1944. When he arrived in Canterbury, he was already ill. One of his lasting images to the ecumenical movement was that of the Christian with bi-focal lenses. In his writing he says that we should look through the top part of our glasses to see the church as God intends it to be, fully united. With the bottom of our lenses we see the church as it actually is, divided. Although we look at the church day by day with the bottom part of our spectacles, we should also always live as if the top part were reality, as if the church was already completely united.

So it is with communities of peace. With the top part of our spectacles, as it were, we see a world community of peace and

harmony. With the lower part of our spectacles, we observe the world as it is. Although we daily look at reality through the lower part, we must live as if the upper part is reality too. In the church, we have to model what fully harmonious and peaceful communities are. For that reason we need to use consensus models of discussion. We need in this General Assembly to model peaceful debate. We need in our Churches to celebrate peace. For Christians, it is not just *what* we do, but *how* we do *what* we do that is important. Just for a moment think of the violence of language structures and procedures in your Church. How can we speak of peace in Asia unless we model it? Perhaps the greatest enculturation or *theologia in locō* which we need in Asia is to express the style of our theological existence through Asian forms of communities of peace. Our western inheritances in Asia have not always helped us in this. Nor indeed have some of the inheritances of Asian cultures. The way we express theology, the way in which we preach, the ways in which we engage in the worship of God, the ways in which we engage in community services, the ways we live need to express this *shalôm*.

One Saturday afternoon in the city of Belfast, a bank was robbed by a terrorist group. During a car chase, the car in which the terrorists were involved and the police car following were both engaged in an accident. A mother was pushing a pram along the road, holding her toddler in her hand, with her baby in the pram. One of the cars slammed into them, and the two children were killed instantly. The mother's name was Betty Williams, and she had a friend, a social worker named Miréad Corrigan. The two of them, as a result of this appalling accident, formed a group called the Peace People. Subsequently both of them went on to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

I was involved on my leave from Indonesia with this group, trying to build a community of peace in Ireland. Although within Christianity, it tragically represented all the elements of inter-faith and ethnic violence. To overcome this, we sought to live out a single community of peace. When a Protestant was killed, Catholic clergymen would carry the person's coffin into the Protestant church for the funeral service. When a Catholic was killed, Protestant clergy would carry that person's coffin into the Catholic Church for the funeral service. One Saturday afternoon we were engaged in the regular marches which became a pattern of those times, walking through Protestant and Catholic areas, so as to show our unity in Christ. I had a friend who had been teaching Scholastic Philosophy at the University in Belfast and had recently become a Bishop. His name was Cahal Daly. He subsequently became Cardinal Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

He was not a natural hero. He was a small, scholarly, introverted man, a large leprechaun, as he once referred to himself. On that Saturday afternoon we locked arms and walked at the head of a procession through a joint Catholic / Protestant area. Protestant young people were jeering at me because I dared to walk with a friend, now a Catholic bishop. We were at that time both doing a bit of teaching at the university.

A person came charging out of a Catholic church, flailing a great crucifix above her head. The person hit Cahal on the back of the head with it, at the same time questioning whether his parents had been married at the time of his birth. She was able to express this idea with a single word. Cahal fell to the ground, blood coming from the back of his head. I asked him if he would like to sit in a shop doorway until we sorted things out. He looked at me with steely eyes, which I shall never forget, and he said "James, put your hand into my pocket, get out a handkerchief, wipe the back of my head, clean me up, and up we get and on we go." He was over seventy at the time. He said to me, "If at this point we fail, if at this point we do not go on, than all those words that we spout from the pulpit will be shown up for the hypocrisy that they are. **Community and peace will, under God, come by what we do now.**"