

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics
ERTP Forum E RTP
*The Church, Evangelism,
and the Political in Countries of
the Western Pacific Rim*

Introduction

P.H. Brazier

Papers

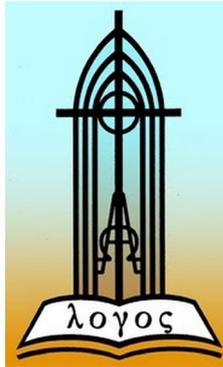
Timothy T. N. Lim

Yuxiao Su

Amos Yong

Henry Kuo

Pascal Bazzell



INTRODUCTION

The Western Pacific Region is a term used by many agencies, including the World Health Organization and includes 37 countries (over 1.5 billion people), some small island nations, other with vast populations. What we have attempted to focus on here is some of those countries on the Western Pacific Rim. The writers are academics and Christians who either lived in these countries or are experts in their field and are deeply familiar with the place of the Church, Evangelism, and the Political in these countries. I believe it is fair to say that most people in the West know very little of what is going on in these countries, apart from the occasional mention in the news if something disastrous happens.

Tim Lim sets the scene in the opening paper – ‘Shifts in Local Missional Evangelism in the Pacific Rim’ – extrapolating across the region. Yuxiao Su (Susan) is a Professor of

English at Xiamen University, Fujian, P.R.China, she is also a ‘mere Christian’ in the sense of the Christian in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Bible-believing, evangelical, with the conviction of the heaven-bound destiny in the daily Christian walk on earth. Amos Yong writes on ‘Evangelism and the Political in Southeast Asia: A Pentecostal Perspective’ focusing on Islamic Malaysia and Indonesia, and the Christian Philippines. Henry Kuo writes on ‘The Church in Singapore: An Ecclesiology on the Way,’ in particular examining the relations between Islam and Christians. Finally Pascal Bazzell writes on ‘The Church and Politics in the Philippines: Mindanao, the “Land of Promise” and the “Moro Problem”’.

Therefore this forum is intended as an introduction to the issues of Evangelism, the churches and the political in this region.

Shifts in Local Missional Evangelism in the Pacific Rim¹

by Timothy T. N. Lim

OVERVIEW

“Churches should not meddle with politics and culture: their sole business is saving souls from eternal hell fires!” While the opening statement would have stirred debates among contemporary Christians particularly in the western hemisphere, until the recent century, churches in the Pacific Rim had treaded cautiously with culture (embracing Niebuhr’s Christ-against culture mentality) and avoided politics in promulgating the faith.² In recent decades, churches in Asia seem more ready to engage with the political, cultural, and societal issues as part of their mission and service to the world.

In this short essay, after locating succinctly a global conversation in shifting missional perspectives, I turn our attention to *some* shifts that churches in the Pacific Rim have understood about politics and evangelism in their ecclesiological and local missional self-understanding. Some of the changes in Indonesia, Malaysia, North Korea, and Singapore occur as a result of geo-political policies on interfaith relations. Other changes emerge as churches in these and other areas mature in their views on public engagement, missional models, and interreligious dialogue, such as evident in

China. I will conclude by asking, what do these data suggest about missional evangelism and theological construction in the Pacific Rim for foreign missionaries and Asian believers.

CHURCHES’ MISSIONAL SHIFTS GLOBALLY AND IN THE PACIFIC RIM

At the centennial celebration of the 1910 World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh, Christians from Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and other major Protestant denominations affirmed *The Common Call* at the Church of Scotland Assembly Hall. The participants agreed that the church witnesses to Christ’s love and functions as a sign and symbol of the reign of God through her missional life.³ The Holy Spirit stirs, guides, and empowers the Christian people of God to live out the gospel through dialoguing and becoming inculturational cum incarnational exemplars of *imago dei*, such as witnessing God’s love, reconciliation, righteousness, and justice in the world.⁴ From the conventional missional view to the World Council of Churches’ multi-dimensional envisioning of *Together Towards Life* (2012), the scope of the gospel mission has

1 My appreciation to Dr. Calvin Smith and Dr. P.H. Brazier of *The Evangelical Review of Theology & Politics* for invitation to contribute at this forum, and my lovely wife, Ms. Sharlene Yeo, and *ERT&P* reviewers for comments on the original draft.

2 For historical account, see Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 2-vols. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1998-2005).

3 See *Ecumenical Missiology*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Jooseop Keum, Kyriaki Avtzi and Roderick R. Hewitt (Oxford: Regnum Books, and Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2016).

4 E.g., Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World* (New York: Orbis, 2007); Timothy Lim, “The Holy Spirit in EG, TTL, and CTC: The Pneumatological Impulse for Christian Mission,” *International Review of Mission* 104.2 (November 2015): 203-216.

slowly expanded from a predominant focus on caring for the soul's eternal state (such as exhibited historically in model, message and method of the father of modern missionary movement William Carey and pursued by American evangelist Ray Comfort) to advocating justice, peace, and care for the whole of creation (and not only the human community). Mission is conceived less as *merely* fulfilling the Great Commission and reaching indigenous people (cf. anthology found in *Perspectives on World Christian Movement*) or the rise of indigenous evangelistic outreach (cf. Samuel Escobar's *The New Global Mission*, 2003) to including political and social activism (e.g., racial inclusion social justice efforts from faculties in the New York Theological Seminary). *Together Towards Life* even urges the re-reception of the marginalized and oppressed as facilitators, teachers and revealers (instead of seeing them only as beneficiaries or recipients who are to be indebted) to the rest of the Christian world.⁵

Christian mission in the Pacific Rim also experiences proposals for revisiting paradigms

...churches in Asia seem more ready to engage with the political, cultural, and societal

and practices in mission. Notably, the joint executive secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, Hope Antone reports in her Edinburgh centenary keynote address at the Asia Mission Conference held in Tainan, Taiwan that "the old paradigm of mission is no longer the best or the most relevant for our context in Asia today."⁶ For Antone, missional language carries caricatures of complicity with colonialism, aggressive stance towards people of other faiths, and poses as a hindrance to dialogue. Expanding on Sri Lankan Wesley Ariarajah's proposal, Antone urges that new paradigms for reaching Asians would want to make several shifts: 1) from liberation to reconciliation, 2) from conversion (or proselytization) to healing, 3) from seeking a majority effect in mission (size of conversion for instance) to becoming comfortable as a minority in culture, and 4) from a narrow missions pursued apologetically and theologically (such as evident in the saving of souls from hell fires) to an expanded mission that cares for the deep spiritual and endemic conditions of the people through genuine partnership and solidarity (the contrast is a narrow view of missions with a program in connivance with capitalistic, exploitative business and/or political enterprises and agendas).⁷

The approaches and scope of Christian mission in Asia are also varied because of contextual factors. Some churches voluntarily or involuntarily adjust to social, geo-political, and

5 E.g., *Together Towards Life*, §33, §35. *TTL*'s broadly inclusive framing would invite criticisms especially from communities that embrace an older, gospel-centric view of mission, salvation, and the work of Christ. Since I have already alluded to the critique in my published review elsewhere, I shall not repeat them here. For examples of contradistinction, compare *TTL*'s missional expression with Ray Comfort, *Hell's Best Kept Secret* (New Kensington, Philadelphia: Whitaker House, 1989); Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2003); *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed., edited by Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2014). See also Daesung Lee and Stephen Bevans, "Culture," *Ecumenical Missiology*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Jooseop Keum, Kyriaki Avtzi and Roderick R. Hewitt (Oxford: Regnum Books, and Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2016), 201-217, and the contemporary missional activism in Peter Goodwin Heltzel, *Jesus and Justice* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos, 2009); idem, *Resurrection City* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2012), and Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel, *Faith Rooted Organizing* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2013) among others.

6 Hope S. Antone, "New Paradigm Concepts of Mission," Keynote presentation at the Asia Mission Conference, held in Tainan, Taiwan on "Beyond Edinburgh 1910 – Asian Reflections on Mission," September 29 to October 3, 2008.

7 S. Wesley Ariarajah, "Wider Ecumenism: Some Theological Perspectives," *Encounters with the Word*, edited by Robert Cruz, Marshal Fernando, Asnga Tilakaratne (Colombo: Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 2004).

economic circumstances. Others change their church missions involvement to reflect their maturing understanding of God, discipleship and Christian mission.

Indonesia

With Muslims making up approximately 80% (some claim 96%) of the Indonesian population, more Muslims live in Indonesia than in the entire Arab world.⁸ The founding president of the republic Sukarno instituted *Pancasila*, known also as five basic principles, to nurture a secularized society as part of Indonesian nationalism. Implementing *Pancasila* later ensured the free practice of religions without discrimination (though the *Pancasilian* ideology has stirred dissension, politically and religiously, on the roles of religion and the state in the nation's history towards civility).⁹

However, the amiability of Christian-Muslim relations is not homogenous across the country or across time periods. Ethnic and religious tensions between Christians and Muslims have been brewing ever since Catholic and Protestant missionary activities (some of which started in 1522) and especially after a number of tribal chiefs and their villages converted to Christ during the Dutch colonial rule.¹⁰ The built-up animosity is notwithstanding that in the Dutch colonial reign, Christian natives fought hand in hand with their Muslim countrymen against

foreign invasions.¹¹

Peaceful co-existence and hostility between Muslims and Christians have occurred periodically. For instance, more recently, especially in Jakarta and Surabaya, the government seems to welcome growth experienced in evangelical-type mega-churches.¹² Yet in other regions, such as West Sulawesi, interreligious violence and the burning of churches have been heightened between the 1990s and 2005 due to some Muslim animosity against the Indonesian Christian minority.¹³ As many as 452 church buildings were destroyed or burnt within a five year period, and the world probably still remembers the Black Sunday on June 9, 1996 when at least ten churches in Surabaya were brutally attacked. Even the former president's attempt to enforce protection for the free practice of religion was contested; for instance, the Bogor city government refused to act on the Supreme Court's order to reinstate and repossess the building belonging to the Christian Church of Indonesia (*Gereja Kristen Indonesia*) in December 2010.¹⁴

How did Christianity grow in such a hostile environment? Nearly seven years prior 2010, political reader Leo Suryadinata observes an annual Christian growth rate of 2.5% and a

8 For statistics, see <http://www.islamicweb.com/begin/population.htm> and CIA Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/id.htm>, accessed September 2, 2016.

9 Benyamin F. Intan, Religious Violence in Indonesia: The Role of State and the Civil Society," *International Journal for Religious Freedom* 5.2 (2012): 63-77.

10 John A. Titale, "From abandonment to blessing: the theological presence of Christianity in Indonesia," *Christian Theology in Asia*, edited by Sebastian C. H. Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 71-88; see also *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, edited by Jan Sihar Aritnang and Karen Steenbarink (Leiden; Brill, 2008), Part 1.

11 Olaf Schumann, "Christian-Muslim Encounter in Indonesia," *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, edited by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1995), 285-299.

12 See video, "Indonesia - Jakarta for Christ 2011": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6XHiKepOvA&feature=related>, accessed September 2, 2016.

13 See video, "Indonesian Christians Jailed for Preaching Gospel to Muslims": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Dmts2OOPu4>; "Muslim Attack Christian Minority in Indonesia - 2 Parts": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhvOUBN2feo&feature=relmfu>; and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3reMUh_n04&feature=related among others (accessed September 2, 2016).

14 See "Indonesian President Sidestep Church Controversy": <http://www.christianpost.com/news/indonesian-president-sidesteps-church-controversy-70282>, accessed August 24, 2016.

diminishing annual Muslim growth rate of 1.9%.¹⁵ Maybe, Indonesia’s quest to become an “Islamic civil society” (which is a contested notion as Islamic ideology does not accept a co-existence/co-op relationship with a civil society ideology)¹⁶ has provided room for the sharing of faiths? And might the experience of religious brutality have provided impetus for Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic mega-churches to engage socio-politically? In the aftermath of interreligious showdown, Pentecostals and Charismatic leaders began to influence the state of civility through their various forms of engagement in business, politics, civic, interfaith, and other public witness.¹⁷

Malaysia.

Though also an Islamic country like Indonesia, Malaysia operates on a parallel legal system: Shari’ah law, and secular law. The Malaysian Prime Minister’s Office regularly consults with Christian bodies (such as National Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Malaysia) and Christian leaders who have been conferred “*Datuks*” (Malay word for someone honored by the state/nation for chivalry). One therefore has to recognize some extent of Christian influence on political, social, and interreligious affairs in the land. Furthermore, because the nation’s constitution grants the freedom of practice of religion (cf. Article 11 of its Constitution), one may reasonably presume that religious freedom

translates to amiable relationship between religions.

Yet, in the land that operates on a parallel legal system, religious peace is not a guarantee, and religious rights of citizens are not necessarily enforceable. Converting a Muslim is not just socially unacceptable, but the convert faces prosecution (and charges of apostasy) in Shari’ah tribunals.¹⁸ Some in the dominant populace have criticized Malaysian Christians as “unethical” or “denigrating the cultures of others” [particularly, other religions] when they evangelize (though many Christians have been respectful of other faiths when they shared their beliefs and practices). Three decades ago, the government detained more than a hundred Malaysian Christians suspected of Christian activities among Malays/Muslims. The operation is known as *Operasi Lallang*. The memory of *Operasi Lallang* in 1987 still grips some Malaysian Christians with fear.¹⁹ Thus, even though Christianity as a faith urges discipleship and sharing the gospel (cf. the Great Commission in Matthew 28 as a biblical imperative) churches struggle to witness to their Muslim neighbors.

How did Christianity grow in such a hostile environment?

In recent decades, Christian social and public involvement has been varied. Pentecostals and Charismatics have stepped up their influence in Malaysian politics. Some exercise mediatory roles between the government and their affiliated network of churches. Others collaborate to

15 Leo Suryadinata, Evi Nurvidya Arifin, and Aris Ananta, *Indonesia’s Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 2003).

16 Robert W. Hefner, *Civic Islam* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).

17 Bambang Budijanto, “Evangelicals and Politics in Indonesia: the Case of Surakarta,” *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Asia*, edited by David H. Lumsdaine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 155-183; and Aritonang and Steenbarink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 750-821, 867-902.

18 See several essays in *Religious Liberty After 50 Years* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Religious Liberty Commission, 2008).

19 Peter Rowan, *Proclaiming the Peacemaker* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf&Stock, 2013; originally, Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2012), 182, ch. 2-4; Min Choon Lee, *Religious Freedom in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Kairos Research Centre, 1999).

express social concerns. The results of such engagements are uneven. In June 2013, at the 23rd Pentecostal World Conference held in Kuala Lumpur, fringe groups bombed the Metro Tabernacle Church because the senior pastor of Metro Tabernacle was the chairman of the conference and general superintendent of the Assemblies of God of Malaysia. In a few other states – such as Selangor, Islamic authorities raided the Bible Society of Malaysia among other incidents.²⁰ Still others like the Christians for Peace and Harmony in Malaysia effectively drew 1200 representatives from 300 churches and non-church groups at its inauguration in June 2015, to promote moderation, goodwill, and love for its nation as their step to overcome interreligious hostility.²¹ Most recently, a Sarawak state High Court Judge, Yew Ken Jie, in Kuching city rules in favor of the plaintiff, Rooney Rebit's conversion to Christianity in March 2016, setting a precedent for a controversial issue.²² However, the matter of state or tribunal rule cannot rest solely on the law but on social demographics. Unlike the rest of West Malaysia, which has a majority of Malays residing there, Kuching is located in East Malaysia, which finds more Chinese, Tamils,

...churches have provided a vital social role and in nation-building...

and Malays, and Christians in the city's population. Thus, one is likely to find a greater degree of interreligious toleration in East Malaysia than in West Malaysia.

The uneven policy and practice of religious liberty in Malaysia's geo-politics have shaped how variedly believers live out their faith.

North Korea.

Compared to the time North Korea was called the Antioch of Christianity in Asia – in part due to the revival and/or indigenous outpouring of the Spirit at the beginning of the twentieth century (1901),²³ Christian gathering or activities, such as evangelism, outside of the official state Christian Federation (comprising of five churches) is not permitted. Open Doors, a para-church missions agency, has consecutively numbered North Korea among the top countries where there is no freedom in the practice of religion/s. North Koreans who possess a Bible or convert to Christianity will face execution (death penalty) or be sent to a political prison camp. Thus, Christian mission, if any, will have to exist in secrecy. Compass Direct News claims that there are as many as four hundred thousand Christians, while other agency statistics report anywhere from thirty thousand onwards, and still, others doubted the statistics because in a society of strict and high surveillance, believers could hardly gather for worship, prayer, bible study, and fellowship, albeit 'underground' in existence and operations.²⁴

23 Allan Anderson, "Pentecostalism in East Asia: Indigenous Oriental Christianity," *Pneuma* 22.1 (2000): 115-132; Young-Hoon Lee, "Korean Pentecost: The Great Revival of 1907," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 4.1 (2001): 73-83; Sung Won Yang, "The Influence of the Revival Movement of 1901-1910 on the Development of Korean Christianity" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002).

24 Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, Nina Shea, *Persecuted* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 1, 52-62.

20 Ong Sek Leang, "responses from Rev. Ong Sek Leang, Senior Pastor of Metro Tabernacle Church," July 1, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yNUnjPG-6c8>; and "Christians Persecuted in Malaysia," January 4, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkjGkeO1OOE>; Krisis and Praxis, "The Beginning of Persecution of Christian Minorities in Malaysia?" January 3, 2014; <http://www.krisispraxis.com/archives/2014/01/the-beginning-of-persecution-of-christian-minorities-in-malaysia> (all accessed Aug 24th, 2016).

21 "Hope for a More Peaceful Malaysia," in CPHM's inauguration opening, June 2nd, 2015: <http://www.cphm.org.my/v1/2015/10/01/hope-for-a-more-peaceful-malaysia/> (accessed September 19, 2016).

22 "Malaysia Rules Muslim May Convert to Christianity," *Christianity Today* (March 30th 2016); See <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2016/march/malaysia-rules-muslim-can-convert-to-christianity.html> (accessed September 1st, 2016).

Singapore.

In its unique way, the governmentally inspired, grassroots network of Interreligious Confidence Circle, along with the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (first introduced in March 31, 1992, and revised July 31, 2011), has facilitated both the spread of religions and the respect religious adherents hold with regards to other faiths.²⁵ Also, at the Singapore government's encouragement through her state leaders' public and social addresses over the years (which indirectly have relegated the role of religion in the public square to that of social and personal wellbeing), religious groups in Singapore, and especially the affluent churches have contributed much to society through innumerable social and community outreach programs – either as initiatives of respective local churches, or in collaboration with non-profit social and community outreach organizations that is organized at a national scale, such as the Touch Community.²⁶

To be clear, Singapore churches have provided a vital social role and in nation-building not simply because of the government's invitation. Rather, Singapore churches have perceived that by contributing to individual and social wellbeing, social responsibility, and indirectly to the ongoing development of public policy, they are witnessing for the faith, albeit in a non-evangelistic way.²⁷ Furthermore,

churches rarely retreat completely from sharing the gospel; she has grown to approximately 20% of the population. After some discipline by policymakers, churches, local preachers, and pastors are learning to share their faith vis-à-vis other faiths more sensitively and respectfully over the pulpit.²⁸

While proselytizing (i.e., winning converts from other faiths) may raise some eyebrows, few restrictions (or some would say, no restrictions) have been placed on citizens pursuing and/or deepening their own religion insofar as believers respect other faiths and abide by the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act.²⁹ Revivalism and rationalizing the faith carry much “currency” in the churches' deliberation.³⁰ A social cum political observer Terence Chong claims that Christians in the land seek to “fill the moral void.”³¹ Another sociologist Mathew Mathews suggests that Singapore Christianity sees herself as “the voice of moral conscience to the state.”³²

Roland Chia in *Engaging Society*, edited by Michael Nai-Chiu Poon (Singapore: Trinity Theological College, 2013), chs 6 and 7 respectively.

28 I am thinking here about the inquiry into the message of Rev. Rony Tan, senior pastor of Cornerstone Church as an example, who had to issue a public apology to other religions for his insensitive and pejorative comments about other faiths. The insensitive comments were delivered over a few of his sermons, which have been identified as violations of interreligious harmony and social cohesion. See statements by National Council of Churches in Singapore on a pastor's summon by Internal Security Department Singapore and a four-parts video series of interviews with Rony Tan in 2010.

29 Daniel P. S. Goh, “Pluralist Secularism and the Displacements of Christian Proselytizing in Singapore,” *Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Asia*, edited by Juliana Finucane and R. Michael Feener (Singapore: Springer Science+Business Media, 2014), 125-146.

30 Chee Kiong Tong, *Rationalizing Religion: Religious Conversion, Revivalism and Competition in Singapore Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

31 Terence Chong, “Filling the Moral Void: The Christian Right and the State in Singapore,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 41.4 (2011): 566-583.

32 Mathew Mathews, “The Voice of Moral Conscience to

25 *Religious Diversity in Singapore*, edited by Ah Eng Lai (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008); cf. my published notes, and analysis, which are too much to repeat in this paper. See Timothy Lim, “Pentecostalism in Singapore and Malaysia: Past, Present, and Future,” *Global Renewal Christianity*, vol. 1, edited by Vinson Synan and Amos Yong (Lake Mary, Florida: Charisma House, 2016), 213-232, 442nn54-55.

26 See for instance, Henry Khoo, *Shoes Too Big: Continuing a Legacy of Hope and Transformation* (Singapore: Armour Publishing, 2007); Michael Nai-Chiu Poon, *Religion and Governance for Social Harmony in Singapore* (Singapore: Trinity Theological College, 2012).

27 See for instance, various essays by Daniel Koh and

And as Christian political and social leader Li Ann Thio affirms, Singapore Christians have contributed to the public square not just in the private spheres of their own lives, but also for the ramifications of their lifestyle as disciples in the public sphere. The ramifications have been carefully negotiated and navigated to ensure interreligious cohesion and fidelity to one's religious center (God).³³ Amid the complications of Singapore Christianity's relationship with the State, and state-policy on interreligious relations,³⁴ missions and evangelism have been active components in the discipleship program among Singapore Christians. The accolade of Singapore churches as "an Antioch" of/for Asia – with an active missions outreach to Asia has been noted by missiologists for decades, and the successes in organizing for more than a decade now a national-level missions conference, known as GoForth have demonstrated Singapore churches' evangelistic or gospel-centric frame of being and doing church.³⁵ Along with the mix

the State," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 24.1 (2009), 53-65.

33 Li Ann Thio, "Religion in the Public Sphere of Singapore: Wall of Division or Public Square," *Religious Pluralism and Civil Society*, edited by Wade Roof Clark (Oxford: Bardwell Press, 2008), 73-104.

34 Roland Chia, "Rendering to Caesar: A Theology of Church-State Relations," *Church & Society* 7.2 (2004): 41-63; Mathew Mathews, "Accommodating Relationships: The Church and State in Singapore," *Christianity and the State in Asia: Complicity and Conflict*, edited by Julius Bautista and Francis Khek Gee (New York: Routledge, 2009), 184-200.

35 John S. H. Tay, *A Short History of Indigenous Mission in Singapore with a Special Focus on the Pioneering Role of Dr. Tan Kok Beng* (Singapore: Armour, 2010), 7. N.B., by Western naming convention, Tan Kok Beng ought to be printed as Kok Beng Tan. In other places, where necessary, I have printed Singaporean authors in keeping with western naming convention (of listing last name after the first and middle name). For contests to Singapore as Antioch of Asia, see Robbie B. H. Goh, "Asian Christian Networks: Transnational Structures and Geopolitical Mappings," *Journal of Religion & Society* 6 (2004):1-13, and Jean DeBernardi, "Global Christian Culture and the Antioch of Asia," *Religious Diversity in Singapore*, edited by Ah Eng Lai (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), 116-141.

is what religious sociologists have identified as characteristic of younger mega-churches in Singapore: modernizing, market-driven, and possessive of a commodificative pragmatism.³⁶ To what extent is Singapore churches' focus on mission and evangelism an obedience to the call of the gospel, and to what extent is the drive towards organizing missions and evangelism more or less a pursuit that have emerged from the efficient, effective, and commodified lifestyle of busy Singapore?

China.

Turning to traces of revival, missions, and evangelism in the People's Republic of China and the innumerable missiological data, one can easily lose perspective, no less because many reports repudiate one another, either directly (i.e., outright rejection of others' reports) or indirectly (with information that conflicts with dominant readings and empirical data, and given the immensity of the population, the veracity and verifiability of the data cannot be easily determined). Is Christianity "persecuted and suffering" as the world remembers?³⁷ I still recall disagreements among missiological statisticians at the Lausanne Conference on Missions and Evangelism 2000 held in Changmai on the reliability of the statistics pertaining to what Tony Lambert calls, *China's Million Christians*?³⁸ And has revival fervor and

36 Joy Tong Kooi Chin, "McDonalozation and the Megachurches: A Case Study of City Harvest Church, Singapore," *Religious Commodifications in Asia: Marketing Gods*, edited by Pattana Kitiarsa (New York: Routledge, 2008), 186-204.

37 E.g., Mike Falkenstine, *The Chinese Puzzle: Putting the Pieces Together for a Deeper Understanding of China and Her Church* (Longwood, Fla.: Xulon Press, 2008), 77-93. See a review that contests Falkenstone's claim in Wright Doyle's analysis in <http://www.globalchinacenter.org>.

38 Tony Lambert, *China's Million Christians*, fully revised and updated (New York: Monarch Books, 2006); compare with the missiological field statistician Michael Jaffarian (now coordinator for CBInternational, Richmond, Virginia)

indigenous evangelistic efforts that spread like wild fire in the 1990s to 2000s ceased or has the missionary zeal found other expressions in both the formerly peasant-led house church movement and in what has been labeled as “cultural Christianity” for the intellectually astute and professionals, apart from the official Three-Self Patriotic Movement, which had received negative review by the house churches as China plunged into the era of the Cultural Revolution?³⁹

What is involved in the ever persistent negotiation between *God and Caesar in China*?⁴⁰ How do we evaluate the spread of Christianity since the mid-twentieth century revival in light of the schism and the “tendencies to a very narrow evangelical faith”?⁴¹ And how has persecution among Chinese Christians trained themselves to wrestle with their government, even after Chinese attendants were prohibited from contesting the government’s lack of

support for Christian activities and missionary zeal in the bygone eras now?⁴² One recent lack of support is seen in the Chinese government’s successful attempt in preventing a delegate of 230 Chinese believers from attending the Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization, scheduled for Cape Town on October 25, 2010.

Yet, amid all these tensions, and apart from the proliferation also of heterodox teachings, a moment has been stirred for nearly a decade now – for Chinese Christians to send “missionaries” to evangelize the world and especially to “return to Jerusalem,” such as represented by China-born revival group, The Born Again movement, leader Peter Xu (or Xu Yongzhe).⁴³ Another development in recent decade – is the rise of urban, affluent Christians, who are not part of the house church movement, and who are nonetheless “registered” with the Chinese Religious Bureau for their religious activities, but are not part of the official Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Some of these urban groups are more vocal, and have been “going public” in expressing themselves and participating in civic life of society in ways that have been foreign to the persecuted millions in prior decades who kept their faith from public observation.⁴⁴ Chan traces the passive-aggressive initiatives among the younger generations of urbanized Christians in Hebei, Jiangxi, Yunnan and Guangdong provinces, and so, confirms the rise of Chinese Christians in addressing social ills.⁴⁵

and his data compiled previously for David Barrett, et al’s *2000 World Christian Encyclopedia* and his quabble with Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk’s *Operation Mobilization* statistics; see Michael Jaffarian, “The Statistical State of the Missionary Enterprise,” *Missiology* 30.1 (January 2002): 15-32.

39 E.g. of a revival record, Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2010; un-translated monograph in Mandarin); Jonathan Chao and Rosanna Chong, *A Contemporary History of Christianity in Socialist China, 1949-1997*, edited by Amos Wang and Susanna Chen (Taiwan: Chinese Ministries International, 1997); Philip L. Wickery, *Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity and the Three-Self Movement and China’s United Front* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990).

40 Kin-Kwong Chan, “A Chinese Perspective on the Interpretation of the Chinese Government’s Religious Policy,” *All Under Heaven: Chinese Tradition and Christian Life in the People’s Republic of China*, edited by Alan Hunter and Don Rimmington (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J.H. Kok, 1992), 38-44; Anthony C. Yu, *State and Religion in China: Historical and Textual Perspective* (Chicago: Open Court, 2004); Daniel H. Bays, “A Tradition of State Dominance,” *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions*, edited by J. Kindopp and Carol L. Hamrin (Washington DC.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 25-39.

41 Chlöe Starr, *Reading Christian Scriptures in China* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 6.

42 Kin-Kwong Chan, “The Christian Community in China: The Leaven Effect,” *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Asia*, edited by David H. Lumsdaine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 76-78, cf., full essay, 43-86.

43 For the Born-again movement’s network ideology and operations, see Yalin Xin, *Inside China’s House Church* (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2009)

44 Mary Ma and Job Li, “Faith Going Public: Urban Christians and Civic Participation in China,” *ChinaSource*; <http://www.chsource.org/articles/17-church-in-china/12-faith-going-public> (accessed August 24th, 2016).

45 Chan, “The Christian Community in China,” 43-86.

Might these examples illustrate that Chinese Christians today are more apt as intellectuals to engage with faith publicly for the course of the gospel?⁴⁶

IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSIONAL EVANGELISM

While much more can be said about the development of Christianity and Christian mission in response to the geopolitical and social infrastructural developments in these Southeast Asian and East Asian countries, I cannot narrate or analyze their missiological history indefinitely. The preliminary data furnished in this essay will hopefully provide some food for thought, and invite scholars, leaders, and lay-followers in each locale to tease out more fully your own reading of a history you are more familiar with, and to thereby construct your analysis for the rest of us to learn about God's work in your region. I will now explore some implications of the foregoing for missional evangelism, and for theological construction.

Missional Evangelism.

Some missional scholars propose that the term "missional evangelism" expresses more deeply and fully the purpose of the church to proclaim and embody Christ's reconciling work "for the salvation of a broken and alienated world."⁴⁷ Typically in these models, Western churches see themselves as benefactors, no less because their ancestors brought the gospel to Asian soil, but also because they see themselves as having more to give and to teach the Majority World

Christians about the faith, the propagation, and cultivation of the faith. Voices from the margins have for the longest time been cast aside as peripheral at missiological and theological tables. Hill chided western missional conversations for impoverishing global thrust of missions when they marginalize Majority World contributors in Mission conference (p. 271).

Today, a reversal is gradually occurring. Phillip Jenkins and Timothy Tennent's plea for listening to communities represented by the emerging center of Christianity in the Global South have received more attention by Christians in the western hemisphere.⁴⁸ If Christians in the West have learnt anything at all about the modernist-post-modernist debates, all perspectives are subjective, and could benefit from the insights of others. For this and many more profound theological reasons, Pope Francis's Encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2010?), and the Busan Report of the World Council of Churches General Assembly (2015) have made similar observations. World Council of Churches' recent document, *Together Towards Life*, urges among other things that Christians in the West weigh more heavily on listening to Christian thinkers and practitioners from the previously marginalized, non-western world.

From my vantage point, churches in the Pacific Rim have to relearn our paradigms, much like how churches in the West are learning to receive the unparallel voices from the East. Churches in the Pacific Rim can benefit from the unparallel voices of those whom we have esteem less highly. How would the posture of

46 *Chinese Intellectuals and the Gospel*, edited by Samuel Ling and Stacey Bieler (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2000); Fredrik Fällman, *Salvation and Modernity: Intellectuals and Faith in Contemporary China* (Lanham: University Press of America, revised, ed., 2008; originally 2004).

47 Inagrace Dietterich and Lacey Warner, *Missional Evangelism* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf&Stock, 2002).

48 Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007); Phillip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Phillip Jenkins, 'Believing in the Global South,' *First Things* (December 2006): <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2006/12/believing-in-the-global-south> (accessed September 17, 2016).

esteeming the marginalized transform world mission and local mission, and bring new vitality to the thrust of missional evangelism? By the older paradigm, missional evangelism seeks what we have to offer to save the unsaved, improve the quality of life of the down and trodden, and fight for justice especially for those who could not defend themselves. Yet, what if, through our conversation with religious neighbors, they see that we genuinely desire to learn from them reveals not just our openness to them, but a desire to connect more deeply? Could it be that as churches embrace and practice the spirit of mutual learning and re-reception of the other, we will discover how we are also helping each other to grow as we give and receive? Might the result correct older paradigm of missional evangelism so that missional evangelism broadens its scope, which is so much needed for an increasingly violent interreligious world?

More importantly, as the data in foregoing papers have pointed out, churches seeking to be effective as a witness in our milieu may have to lay aside what was once the predominant perspective of separating church and state (or religion and statecraft). To be clear, I am not suggesting that we blur the lines between religion/faith and politics. Rather, the reality of religious nurture is such that discipleship is not merely lived out in the seclusion of one's private piety. Faithful discipleship contains bearings not merely on ethical matters in one's daily decisions, but also faithful discipleship will shape one's vocation and work because all of life ought to be understood as a ministry in the praise and worship of God and a ministry of service unto others. The practice of discipleship

Some missional scholars propose that the term "missional evangelism" expresses more deeply and fully the purpose of the church to proclaim and embody Christ's reconciling work

then is to have major consequences on how one chooses to live, and its impact will be keenly felt in one's workplace, neighborhood, and when life's hurdles are thrown at us. There is no such thing as a private faith for the religiously faithful, for all things private for the faithful is and will be a witness in the public arena. What is unclear is the scope of privacy and public dimension of the faith, especially in today's postmodern world, which have succeeded in relegating religion to only the sphere of either the private or the sphere of one's conscience. Might it be that one implication of recovering Christian mission in the context of discipleship is to recover the extent of missional service in the widest possible and unfragmented sense, so that the church may slowly become God's instrument of healing and reconciliation to a world that has become so fragmented and that has lost her bearings?

Theological Construction.

For the most part in this essay, I have not said much about theological construction, and this is not the place to provide an extensive methodological treatment. However, because I hold that there ought to be no dichotomy between missions and theology despite the divisions of disciplines and sub-fields in theological education, I would find it reasonable to make a sustained case for considering what shifts in mission may have for theological construction. Hwa Yung's *Mangoes or Bananas* (1997) though dated still reflects the preference many Asian churches seem to be bent on doing – preferring the pragmatic work of missions and evangelism over the deep and difficult work of theological retrieval and theological

reflection for engaging the world of cultures in deep ways.⁴⁹ Without deep engagement with the culture we are trying to reach for Christ, we risk making mistakes of proffering shallow connections between the message of Christ and the needs of the world. Failing to consider deeply the interface of faith and culture will also mean that the theology we articulate could not really reach the intended audience, because without the resources of culture and without engaging with culture, one's theology will either be an abstraction or unable to connect with others. As Simon Chan reminds in his plea for nurturing *Grassroots Asian Theology*, genuine theology retrieves, draws on, and builds upon the cultural resources of one's audience. Deep faith, in missiological terms, seeks the transmission of faith. The transmission of faith requires one to ponder the relationship between faith and culture, the degree or extent of correspondence between faith and culture, and the necessary response that one would have to make in the quest for faithful witness and discipleship in culture. What aspects of culture may be redeemed, invigorated, and/or reconstructed for a theology of life and discipleship? The exercise of deep listening, deep understanding, and thoughtful engagement, has to continue, because at no stage can anyone individual or entity (or even collaborative groups) claim to have arrived at a finality: Though a utopian is unrealizable in its full measure in this lifetime, as Christ's disciples, we are the Spirit of Christ's workmanship created for good works even as we bear the marks and calling as followers of Christ, the ministry of reconciliation till the eventual renewal of all creation to the doxological delight of Abba!

49 Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? A Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1997).

Further Readings

- Bautista, Julius and Francis Khek Gee. eds. *Christianity and the State in Asia: Complicity and Conflict*. Routledge, 2009.
- Bays, Daniel H. *A New History of Christianity in China*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.
- Finucane, Juliana and R. Michael Feener. eds. *Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Asia*, Springer Science+Business Media, 2014.
- Kindopp, J., and Carol L. Hamrin. eds. *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions*. Brookings Institution Press, 2004
- Lai, Ah Eng. *Religious Diversity in Singapore*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008.
- Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*. Yale University Press, 2010.
- Lee, Min Choon. *Religious Freedom in Malaysia*. Kairos Research Centre, 1999.
- Moffett, Samuel Hugh. *A History of Christianity in Asia, 2-vols.*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1500*, and vol. 2, *1500-1900*. Orbis Books, 1998-2005.
- Mullins, Mark R. ed. *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*. Brill, 2003.
- Paramore, Kiri. *Ideology and Christianity in Japan*. Routledge, 2009.
- Phan, Peter C. ed. *Christianities in Asia*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- Poon, Michael Nai-Chiu. *Religion and Governance for Social Harmony in Singapore*. Trinity Theological College, 2012.
- Ross, Kenneth R., Jooseop Keum, Kyriaki Avtzi and Roderick R. Hewitt, eds. *Ecumenical Missiology*. Regnum Books, and World Council of Churches, 2016.

- Rowan, Peter. *Proclaiming the Peacemaker*. Wipf&Stock, 2013; Regnum Books International, 2012.
- Starr, Chlöe. *Reading Christian Scriptures in China*. T&T Clark, 2008.
- Wilfred, Felix, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*. Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Yang, Huilin. *China Christianity and the Question of Culture*. Baylor University Press, 2014.
- Yu, Anthony C. *State and Religion in China: Historical and Textual Perspective*. Open Court, 2004.
- Yung, Hwa. *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology*. Regnum International Books, 1997.

Timothy T. N. Lim

Rev. Dr. Timothy T. N. Lim, Ph.D. is visiting lecturer for London School of Theology (London), tutor for King's Evangelical Divinity School (Broadstairs, UK), and incoming English congregation pastor of Austin Taiwanese Presbyterian Church (Texas). He serves as board member for the North American Academy of Ecumenists, and is member of the Faith & Order Commission of the Virginia Council of Churches, and editorial board for *One in Christ* (Turvey, UK). He is married and has three boys.



One Super Typhoon, Two Sainly Women

by Yuxiao Su

This week is an eventful week for this city, for our local church, and for myself.

This city where I have lived for more than 30 years, a subtropical seaside resort well-known for its natural scenery and economic advancement received yesterday, the day of China's second most important festival, the full-moon Mid-autumn Festival, a Force 17 Typhoon attack, heaviest since the last mid-century. The whole city has turned into a huge garbage ground overnight. The carcasses of subtropical trees which used to contribute to the charm of this city bow or lean or lie in piles, broken, torn apart, up-rooted, blocking the poshest streets of the city, or moaning in the teasing sea gusts along the stretches of the beach which used to be the favorite spots for tourists' snapshots or young couple's expensive, fancier-than-life wedding photos.

Two of our dear sisters in the Lord, however, did not have to witness this most recent havoc Nature wreaked on our city.

The day before yesterday, while the Typhoon was starting to gain its force on the Pacific Ocean, the oldest sister of our local church, a childless widow, a mother and grandmother of numerous spiritual children, had run to her finish line of her fullest life of 103 years, exactly one day before her birthday.

On the first day of this week, two days before our elderly sister departed to her Lord from her bed at her simple home, a young sister aged 29 was taken up to her Lord after more than one year's battle with rectal cancer. A sweet mother of a lovely two-year-old babe, a beautiful wife

and faithful co-worker of a young pastor with a childlike round face, a godly daughter from a long line of Christian family who have been among the leaders of the Chinese house church for five generations.

I attended the almost joyful funeral of our elder sister this morning. Nearly all the leading workers of the major house churches of our city came to see her off, sharing stories of her unique service to thousands of God's children in her long life simply as a woman staying at home, gifted with the skill of massaging, but no career, no family, no offspring. She served through her intimate daily communicating with her Lord at home as if they were closest friends, and sharing what she had received from the divine presence with those who came to her with their need: either for massaging their sprained muscles, or for intercession and spiritual support. Her days after her 89 years marked the most fruitful stage of her serving life, during which she went through four major operations, two for tongue cancer, and two for the broken hip bones on each side, the last one being done at the age of 100. The life-threatening disease and her survival of it, the broken limbs and the confinement thereof – all seemed to serve only to strengthen her fear of the Almighty in her daily walk on earth, and deepen her yearning to be unclothed of “this tabernacle”, to be translated to that realm above, and to unite for eternity with her Lord.

She lived and shared a life of dying to herself and living to Christ only. The unshakable stability, peace, joy and liveliness coming from such a life almost radiated to whoever came to

see her, chat with her, sing hymns with her, or pray with her. For a number of years I suffered from a chronic disease, and had to take a medical check-up every two or three months at the hospital near her home. Every time when I had to go to the hospital to collect my test report, I found myself tempted to drop by her home first to see her and hear her before summoning up enough courage and peace to face the undesirable arrows on the report. It was Christ's life lived through her that escorted me to confront what I had to confront. It was after those days that I came to understand what for me was the most valuable, most desirable, most independent and most glorified life in this world: a self-denied, Christ-centered, Heaven-yearning life, entirely dependent on the incorruptible and unchangeable resources from above. When I was restlessly gnawed by the energy-sapping imagination and worries about my life and death and health, it was not my respected professors nor my admired academically accomplished colleagues who could be of any help, but this jobless, childless, stay-at-home woman of the Lord, a previous cancer patient with 2/3 of her tongue off in her first two operations who offered me irresistible attraction and indispensable support in my time of crisis. What life can be more glorious and powerful than this one: a life which can pass life to you so that you may be quickened and resurrected, as the dry bones in Ezekiel's valley? This is the legacy this 103-year-old maid-servant of God has left to us, and to His Church – a life with the sureness of Christ incarnated in her daily walk, "as the shining light, going on and brightening until the day be fully come."

Having missed the funeral of our 29-year-old sister, I watched the video of the ceremony and the sermon, the sermon given by her round-faced, young, newly widowed pastor husband.

The message was entitled, "Thy loving-kindness is better than life". As is customary in the evangelical house Church in China, Christians' funerals are never just conducted as a ritual to pay respect to the deceased, but more often serve as a most open, most embracive and most secure occasion to proclaim the Gospel of redemption of sin and the gift of eternal life, the spirit of John Donne's "For whom the bell tolls" being followed, though without their knowing it, faithfully and effectively on such occasions.

Gospel is good news, says the young pastor, and good news is mostly interpreted and received as being "good" for this life: power, fame, wealth, degrees, and what is more pertinent to their family – health, restoration of health from a fatal disease, good doctors and good medicines to cure the disease, to maintain life in this world ... No. He and his wife who has now passed into the glory have both come to the acute realization that, good news is "thy loving-kindness [which] is better than life," the loving-kindness that costs the life of God's only son, who shed blood on the cross for the sin of you and me, so that we can secure the hope of eternal life. Yes, hope! "Hope is the most costly and most precious thing in this world!" said the wife in her battle against her cancer. She knew how costly hope was for a cancer patient! She finally came to see that all kinds of stunning advertisements for effective cancer killers sold hopes only, rather than medicines, and yet almost all those hopes vaporized in the end! Only the hope of eternal life that God has promised to those redeemed by Christ is real and much better than the limited span of this life! Once she had lost all her hopes in those advertisements and came to the reassurance of her eternal hope, she told her husband joyfully, "I am God's beloved!" In this assurance she breathed her last, and in this assurance she

asked her husband to tell her brothers and sisters coming to attend her funeral to wear bright colors for her glorious return to her heavenly home. Of course not many of her church members were able to fully enter into such a victorious feeling and they still wore dark mourning colors to express their sorrow; however, her widowed husband knowing his beloved more deeply, did wear a bright-colored tie with his black suit at the funeral room's pulpit.

At the end of his sermon, the young pastor called on the audience who were mostly professed Christians but with a whole gamut of interpretation of "good news": While Tian (so is called his wife) is lying here, Church, wake up!

True. Nowadays in my home city, my home country and in the nations world wide there are indeed all modes of slumber from which the Church of God needs to be wakened up, even in those countries where the Seed of the Gospel was first sown, and reproduced hundredfold reaching the ends of the earth before the first half of the 20th century. The Church needs to be wakened up, as the young pastor phrased it, from the slumber of the pulpit's transmitting mere words rather than the Word, the slumber of pacifying massages rather than piercing messages, the slumber of success gospels, offering flimsy promises of happiness here and now, the slumber of the congregation's illusionary hopes of big houses, big cars, or big degrees as tokens of God's love, the slumber of engaging with the world's dazzling varieties of life-preserving regimens, the slumber of using church gatherings as arena for associating with the social elites, the slumber of opting for politically correct obeisance in the multi-culture debates, and surprisingly, as what I found from my exposure to the academic circle of a world renown university, the slumber

among Christian academics of justifying their professional ethics to refrain from discussing the Gospel with their students even outside their office hours and even when the students express their pertinent needs, relegating the duty to their local pastors, while evading New Testament's succinct doctrine of priesthood of all believers.

The newly widowed pastor's sermon was perhaps as much for his audience's sake as for his own. While his beloved has departed, he himself still needs to continue his battle, not only against the loss that he could not have endured outside his Redeemer's grace, but also against any future Castle Doubt or Giant Despair. He summoned the Church to fight, and to fight with him.

This past week, one super Typhoon descended upon this city, utterly unwelcome, unreasonably furious, entirely wasteful, demonstrating its devastating power to no purpose; two saintly women ascended from this earth to their eternal abode, to be with their loving Lord and Father in Heaven, where there is no more scorching sun nor beating storm, no more "mourning and crying and pain." Nevertheless, there are elements in all these three cases that transcend human comprehension, just as incomprehensible as Jahovah's questions to Job. Why has there been such a destructive Typhoon unprecedented in the last seven decades? Why did the fatal disease come to such a young, devout life? Why was miraculous healing given to our elderly lady but denied to the young mother?

The value of human dignity lies in that after waiting for the Nature to have fully unleashed its ravaging force upon the world, we do not busy ourselves cracking those unsolvable riddles; we rise up and work hard to put the world back to order. Yet there is a greater God-endowed

dignity of our race: while admitting our life has been ravaged beyond repair by our own sin, for which death is the wage, be it paid at the age of 29 or 103, the timing being unknown to us, we are empowered to put our life back to order again by the real "Good News", by casting our eyes upon the One on the Cross, by claiming the hope of eternal life at the redeeming price of Christ.

Yuxiao Su (Susan)

*Dr. Yuxiao Su, Professor of English Literature, English Department, College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Xiamen University, Xiamen, Fujian, P.R.China was an Academic Visitor at Wycliffe Hall, University of Oxford (Sept. 2014 – Sept. 2015). Her doctoral thesis was on C.S. Lewis's literary criticism, entitled *The Self and the Other: A Study of C.S. Lewis's Aesthetics of Otherness*, published in Chinese by China Social Science Press (2012).*

Evangelism and the Political in Southeast Asia: A Pentecostal Perspective

by Amos Yong

Whither evangelism in Southeast Asia? There is no space in this short piece to discuss all of the challenges from Myanmar through the Thai-Malay peninsula and the Indonesian islands to Borneo and the Filipino archipelago so I will focus very generally on Islamic Malaysia and Indonesia and Christian Philippines. The former two nations are different if only in that Malaysia is officially Islamic with an approximately 60% Muslim population, while Indonesia, the country with the largest number of Muslims in the world with about 220 million or about 87% of its inhabitants, is constitutionally a secular state but guided by the Pancasila doctrine of belief in one God. However, even if in the latter context it is not illegal for Christians to witness to Muslims and for the latter to convert to Christianity (or other religions) – as in Malaysia, where leaving Islam for Christianity or another religion is apostasy, a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment and forced re-conversion back to Islam – the social pressure against both are immense. How might evangelism proceed in such politicized environments?

On the one hand, one response might be for Christians to simply say that their allegiance is to God rather than to human rulers or even governments, here following the earliest Messianic believers who persisted in giving witness despite prohibitions by the authorities (cf. Acts 4:18-21). On the other hand, there are also scriptural injunctions to obey the governing powers (Rom. 13:1-7). To be sure, Christians have been perennially divided over

how to interpret both kinds of biblical texts in tandem and there are examples of those emphasizing either set over the other in Islamic contexts, not least in the Southeast Asian region. Nevertheless, most Christians will not engage in overt proselytizing activities in relationship to Muslims in these countries. If some do bear witness to the gospel, these most often unfold in intimate and interpersonal settings in which Christians share their testimonies with Muslims they have come to befriend.

On those occasions when Muslims turn to Christ, a variety of developments may ensue. On the one end, a very small majority begin to fellowship in Christian congregations, although rarely will they make public their commitments in definitive ways such as through undergoing Christian baptism in water. On the other end of the spectrum, Muslims have become disciples of Jesus without joining Christian churches, instead establishing among themselves what some missiologists call “insider movements,” whereby they remain within their Islamic communities, even participating in and practicing many of the regular activities within their mosques, but doing so as Jesus followers. The point is that it is extremely rare for there to be public declarations of Muslim conversion to Christian faith since there could be legal consequences not only for the individuals involved (not to mention ostracism from their families, etc.) but also for those Christians who facilitate such conversions and then receive such persons into faith and ecclesial life.

Otherwise, evangelism in Malaysia and

Indonesia is directed toward non-Muslim non-Christians. Practically, that means that Malaysian evangelism is focused generally on Chinese and Indian (Tamil, particularly) ethnic groups, while Indonesian efforts are directed toward the Chinese and other minority ethnic groups. Christian churches are generally multicultural, except with few Malays (who are usually Muslim). To be sure there is much work to be done even without intentional engagement with Muslims in these countries.

What about in the Philippines? Here we are talking about more than 85% of the 107+ million population being Christian, with the majority of these Roman Catholic, but there is a 5% minority Muslim population particularly in the southern Moro region islands. The challenge with this relatively small Muslim group is that they remain socially and economically marginalized from the mainstream of Filipino society, and this contributes to the pervasive unrest and insurgency that threaten the stability of this region and have fueled secession efforts over the decades directed toward establishment of an Islamic province. This means that there are less sustained evangelistic efforts directed toward Filipino Muslims, or these are kept "under the radar" in order not to exacerbate existing political, social, and religious turmoil.

In that case, Filipino evangelistic activity oftentimes is indistinguishable from proselytism. In its pejorative sense, proselytization is understood as targeting people who are part of another segment of one's religious tradition and convincing them to leave that community for that of the proselytizer's. Usually this involves evangelical or pentecostal Christians evangelizing Roman Catholics, particularly those who are nominally so and less active or completely inactive in their parishes. An interesting development in the Filipino context

is the emergence of charismatic renewal streams within the Roman Catholic Church that have been embraced by the hierarchy precisely as a strategic means of retention so that the faithful are less compelled to join non-Catholic (read Protestant) congregations. The point is that evangelism remains fraught with complications in the Filipino context even when the Islamic elements are factored out.

How then to think about evangelism in these complex political environments? I suggest that a pentecostal approach would be instructive even for this Southeast Asian region. What I mean is less adopting models from the modern Pentecostal movement than revisiting apostolic evangelistic efforts that flowed out of the Day of Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit recorded in the book of Acts. Three general comments can be highlighted from the Acts narrative as suggestive for a contemporary pentecostal approach to evangelism within these constraints and amidst these realities.

First, note that the earliest apostolic community shared their possessions mutually so that none had need (Acts 2:32-47, 4:32-37). Sometimes, the most effective modes of evangelism are those which are unintentional toward outsiders but which are attractive precisely because they build up community around shared messianic life. In the Southeast Asian situation, Christians might need to focused as much if not more on mutuality and reciprocity within the community and perhaps the evangelistic witness will take care of itself.

Second, observe the many different ways in which apostolic believers operated within the polis and interfaced with the authorities in the book of Acts. There were instances of civil disobedience, but there are also models of compliance. Peter befriended a Roman centurion while Paul exercised his rights as a

Roman citizen even as he also took advantage of opportunities to bear witness to the governing officials. The point is that there is not just one way of evangelistic witness vis-à-vis the state and its mechanisms in the early Christian community. Contemporary believers need to be similarly discerning about evangelization amidst the varying political, social, and other circumstances of contemporary Southeast Asia.

Last but not least, note that the evangelization of the Maltese “barbarians” (from the Greek *barbaroi* in Acts 28:2) proceeded not via verbal witness but through the reception of hospitality from these religious others and then from praying for healing for them (and followed by God’s answering such prayers). This suggests that sometimes evangelistic efforts can proceed through other forms of witness than explicit kerygmatic proclamation. Such approaches may be key particularly to bearing witness to the living Christ to Muslim neighbors. What might Christians need to do to be invited as guests to Muslim homes? We probably don’t want to seek intentional shipwrecks (which is what happened to Paul) but we might want to think creatively about how the Holy Spirit may otherwise open up opportunities for us to be guests of such religious others.

For further reading

Robert Day McAmis, *Malay Muslims: The History and Challenge of Resurgent Islam in Southeast Asia* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010).

Amos Yong, *Who is the Holy Spirit? A Walk with the Apostles* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2011).

Amos Yong

Amos Yong is Professor of Theology and Mission and director of the Center for Missiological Research at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. His graduate education includes degrees in theology, history, and religious studies from Western Evangelical Seminary (now George Fox Seminary) and Portland State University, both in Portland, Oregon, and Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, and an undergraduate degree from Bethany University of the Assemblies of God. He has authored or edited over forty volumes



The Church in Singapore: An Ecclesiology on the Way

by Henry Kuo

Perhaps one of the most enduring ecclesiological metaphors is that of the church as a pilgrim community, one that is best associated with St. Augustine of Hippo, particularly in *De Civitate Dei*. The church peregrinates through the *civitas terrena* like a resident alien or perpetual foreigner, interacting, working, and living in the world as best as it could while continually sojourning together with fellow Christians to progress towards its final destination in God. The church in this sense is a community “on the way.” This metaphor is particularly appropriate when discussing the church in Asia, but given the diversity of “Asia,” it is important to limit our scope. In my short reflection, I wish to focus on the church in Singapore, making some observations and providing a short theological reflection with respect to the church in the United States.

Singapore often competes with Hong Kong in aiming to become Asia’s cosmopolitan “world city.” Originally part of the Sultanate of Johor (Malaysia), the British East India Company established Singapore as one of its trading ports along the Malacca Strait. The island-nation’s strategic location and business-friendly economic policies has led to the development of a multi-cultural and multi-religious society in which harmony is promoted (and, if necessary, enforced) by the Government. Like many East Asian countries, Christianity is a minority religion, and even though Christians do serve in Government – the current President is Anglican – churches rarely have the political sway that churches in the United States enjoy.

For instance, when the Government paved the way for the construction of casinos (or, “integrated resorts”) in 2005, Christian and Muslim leaders spoke out vociferously against the legislation. The Government, while agreeing to include public programs dissuading gambling and addressing chronic gamblers to address the dissent, nonetheless went ahead with their plans. Hence, assessing churches in Asia from the West requires us to place ourselves in a context where Christianity has almost never been a majority religion with close access to the halls of power, and where it is one of many different religions. Here in this short reflection on the church in Singapore, I make three observations.

First, the lack of significant ecclesial influence over political and economic structures does not mean that the church is inert. It is perhaps more accurate to say, following Augustine, that the church in Singapore is really *peregrinatur*, continually exploring and reflecting on how the gospel applies in a very dynamic country. A peregrinating church does not enjoy the privilege of imposing its vision of the City of God upon the nation. At best, and perhaps as it should be, the church explores continually how to bring the gospel to bear in such a way that it matters to the people in a local context with or without the use of the State. Such exploration often promotes a generous catholicity in which the gospel touches the hearts of various peoples in different ways, leading to a great diversity of ecclesial expressions. While many Anglican churches use the *Book of Common Prayer* and

conduct “high church” worship styles, for example, there are other Anglican churches that are decidedly “low church” and do not use the *Book of Common Prayer*. Some could even be mistaken to be Pentecostal!

Second, the pilgrimage path occasionally leads to unexpected and even undesirable locations. Large megachurches teaching prosperity-driven or self-help messages each draw thousands of attendees every Sunday. (Ironically, one meets at the convention hall in one of the controversial integrated resorts.) It is, of course, easy to dismiss the megachurches as preaching a false gospel, and indeed, such doctrines are destructive to the church, but an overly-quick assessment prevents us from closer analysis and seeing how it is another example (however disagreeable) of one way some Christians have contextualized the gospel in an environment where health and wealth are very important. Singapore, after all, is a very expensive city that has to import much of the goods and services that it provides. Additionally, in a hustling and bustling nation of immigrants, rigorous theological reflections do not always take priority over the meeting of immediate spiritual needs. Hence, analyses of the many diverse expressions, however legitimate or not, should be done within the framework of catholicity, or, how the gospel is inculturated locally.

This segues into my third point, which is that the Singaporean church is still a Christianity that is finding its way in terms of inhabiting its catholicity such that it really contributes significantly to what it means to be Singaporean. Part of the challenge lies in the uncertainty of Singaporean identity. What constitutes “Singaporean” is a very current question, and it mirrors a lot of similar discussions in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Because it is a young country

of 51 years, Singapore hasn’t had the time to forge a unique indigenous ethnic, religious, or cultural identity. In that sense, it is literally a “world city” in that its identities come from all parts of the globe. The Government has been encouraging the development of various arts in an effort to increase cultural production that can assist in the formation of a uniquely Singaporean identity.

The same is true of Christianity in Singapore. In many respects, the church in Singapore mirrors many church dynamics in other parts of the world. The Presbyterian Church in Singapore was established by Scottish missionaries, but the Bible-Presbyterian Church was a branch of an American offshoot of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. But what makes the Reformed Presbyterian tradition in Singapore uniquely Singaporean is still uncertain. The same can be said, perhaps, of other ecclesial traditions as well. One avenue for the church to contribute both to the construction of a Singaporean and Singaporean-Christian identity is by bringing the gospel to bear, not merely on personal moral questions, but on social and cultural questions and challenges in Singapore. This may enable the church to be a more effective witness to the love and mercy of Jesus Christ while, at the same time, participate significantly in constructive and national conversations. The opposition to the 2005 legislation to legalize gambling is one such example.

I close my reflections by noting that there are lessons the church in Singapore can teach the church in the United States, of which I bring up one. Recent years in the United States have witnessed increasing anxiety among churches of evangelical and mainline stripes about the waning influence or even the “death” of the church in public life and discourse.

But fortunately the church in America is *not* the church catholic. In much of the world, Christianity has always had little public influence. Like Singapore, America is a predominately immigrant nation with considerable diversity among its peoples. But in Singapore, its small landmass forces everybody to recognize and wrestle with changes happening in the country. On the other hand America's large physical size can make it such that Christians in the Plains states are unaware of huge changes in other parts of the country. Such distance often serves as an obstacle to meaningful and compassionate dialogue in important matters such as racism, environmental degradation, the cheapening of peoples of all ages, etc. In fact, that churches can get away with being oblivious to difference is a privilege that churches in Singapore do not enjoy. It has no alternative but to practice

a deep and generous catholicity that learns how to include various diversities within its communities if they wish to survive. The same may very well be true of many churches throughout different parts of Asia. Such a deep and wide catholicity is necessary for churches across the world to walk together and be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church on the way.

Henry Kuo

Henry Kuo is a doctoral candidate in systematic and philosophical theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Born in Taiwan, he lived in Singapore for 13 years before emigrating to the United States. His research focuses on Reformed ecclesiology, theology and economics, as well as the theologies of Augustine of Hippo and Johann Baptist Metz. He is also the founding editor of the Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology.



The Church and Politics in the Philippines: Mindanao, the “Land of Promise” and the “Moro Problem”

by Pascal D. Bazzell

Filipino historian, Renator Constantino, has noted that the Philippines had the great misfortune of being ‘liberated’ a number of times during history.¹ The dehumanizing cultural invasion of the colonizer also brought Christianity. Whereas Filipinos spread out over thousands of islands have embraced Christianity as their religion, the Moro people (predominantly Muslim) of Mindanao have been fighting since the mid-16th century up for their homeland and religion. The Mindanao Muslim nationalists use “Moro” since the late 1960s as their description for themselves and “Bangsamoro” to identify with their homeland. Both are identifications of expressing discontinuity with a pre-colonial ethnic-religious identity. Mindanao is the second largest (approximately twenty-two million people) and southernmost island of the Philippines, which is known for their rich historical, social, and cultural heritage as the “The Land of Promise.” Due to the substantial resources, some estimate that Mindanao generates sixty percent of the Philippines economic revenue. However, persistence of violent conflicts, oppression, and injustice have contributed to unfulfilled promises and broken dreams of the Moro people of Mindanao.

I lived in Davao City, which is the largest city in Mindanao, for almost 15 years. I learned that in order to understand the Church and Politics in the Philippines today, one has to take into consideration how neo-colonial forces still

influence independent Filipino institutions. The “Moro Problem” is one particular incident that sadly, not only reveals deep animosity between two religions, Islam and Christianity, but shows how underlying neo-colonial forces shape interreligious dialog and peace in the nations.

The main motivation of the colonizers was not to bring religion but more economic exploitation of the country. Yet, the century conflict is often played out in the media as being between two religious traditions. For the Moro people, their ancestral land (or traditional lands) were taken away from them and given over to Christian Filipinos and foreign-owned corporations. This meant that they not only experienced economical injustice but also touched their deep Moro Islamic belief about poverty, which upholds that ancestral domain is *waqaf* (property of trust). Lualhati Abreu explains that for the Moro people it was devastating to lose their ancestral land as their social existence directly revolves around those lands.²

I have often heard that the Moro people would not like to be called Filipinos, but rather, affirm their Moro identity. They see the Filipino identity associated with the colonizers producing a Christian nation, which opposes their ancestral claims of an Islamic (Moro) country. Clearly, Christian belief and praxis have little to do with the early colonizing strategy. Yet, this association is deeply burned

1 Renator Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* (Manila, Philippines: Renator Constantino, 1975), p. 15.

2 Lualhati Abreu, ‘Ancestral Domain – the Core Issue,’ in *The Moro Reader: History and the Contemporary Struggles of the Bangsamoro People*, ed. Bobby M. Tuazon (Quezon City, Philippines: CenPEG, 2008), p. 51.

into the memory of the Moro people, and a simple theological disassociation would do little to the badly needed healing process – on both sides.

Any true peace and justice process in Mindanao would need to incorporate how the locals, in this case including the Moro people, can benefit from their resources. Although local Muslims occupied the land for generations, the colonizer gave the land in Mindanao to Christian settlers, government or military reservations. For the Church to have a creditably prophetic voice in Mindanao and address aspects of the Moro problem is to ensure to be on the side of the marginalized. To stand for the rights of those whose land were taken away, even if it would mean they share their own recourses and land. It is in this sacrificial giving that hopefully contributes to the healing of memories resulting to a peaceful and just land, truly being Mindanao – “The land of the promises.”

The “Moro Problem” in the Philippines is a story of deep historical injustice. Hence, it is important that the Church takes solidarity with those experiencing oppressions and injustice. The economical and political solitary of the Moro people may take various forms. For example, a beautiful example of economical solidarity with Muslims in Mindanao happened during the September 2013 siege of Zamboanga City. My good friend, a Filipino OMF missionary, was at the airport ready to fly to Davao to bury his brother as the Misuari Faction of the Moro Natonal Liberation Front (MNLF) laid siege of Zamboanga City, displacing thousands of Muslims, killing hundreds of Muslims and Christian alike, as well razing approximately a 10’000 houses, mostly Muslims communities. My friends’ Muslim communities where he served was totally devastated, leaving all his Muslim friends loosing all their belongings.

With no possibility to leave the city anymore, he welcomed his Muslim friends into his house for the next months. He moved his family into a small room of the house and let the rest be used by his friends, which they remarked after months of exile that they have experienced more love and embrace from this Christian family than from their own families, relatives and Muslim friends. This Christian family has become truly a light as they gave up their rights; their right to burry a family member; their right of their own economical prosperity for the sake of the Bangsomoro people.

Filipino Church history reveals that there are circumstances that are of great importance for the Church to engage in providing the voices to the political climate. For example, when Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972, heralding a time of great suppression, murder and injustice, it was the Church’s prophetic voices for a Revolution in 1986 that mobilized the masses to influences the elite and the political affair. At the same time, when the long issue of the problem of the landless exploitation in 1987, initially with the Church’s leadership helping, nonetheless, they removed their support of advocacy that ended up in the failure of distribute justice. Yet, as studies have shown, if the Church leadership would have continued to engage with the issue of justice for the landless, national legislature probably would have changed that would prohibit the elite and politician from exploiting the laws and oppressing the poor. It was a crucial moment in history for the Filipino Church to be a prophetic voice to give truly justice to the landless and contribute in changing the often corrupt and dysfunctional Philippines political systems. Nonetheless, it is widely known that not only the Political institutions are corrupt but many Church leaders have received personal

contributions from the administration to uphold the elite political agenda.

Walden Bello has pointed out that one of the main issues of the social ill problems of the Philippines is because the leaders are corrupt. Even though the Philippines does not officially have a caste system, to ensure the colonizer's interest, the colonizer separated the Filipinos by empowering a few elites to run country. A hearsay one keeps hearing in the Philippines is that it is run and owned by five families. As kinship shapes the Filipino social world and order, the elite often still ensure that their family clan interest are secured, at least during their time of power at the expenses of the masses. There is a weakened democratic process in the Filipino political cultures, yet, the Church has yet to figure out how to speak to those gaps, or at least not what it has done to be enlarging them.³ Elsewhere I have argued that the Church as the family of God, if truly embraced, as an alternative kinship vision could provide crucial insights into more proper Filipino internal structures, governance, and ethos in a postcolonial Filipino context.⁴

For the first time in history the Filipino people elected a President from Mindanao, Rordigue Duterte. It is easy to immediately judge Duterte's presidency. The western news has primarily focused on Duterte's coarse language and compulsive outburst directed at the Pope, the US ambassador, and the US president as well as on the spurge of extra-judicial killings.

3 Aloysius Lopez Cartagenas, "Religion and Politics in the Philippines: The Public Role of the Roman Catholic Church in the Democratization of the Filipino Polity," in *Political Theology* 11.6 (2010): 863.

4 See Pascal D. Bazzell, 'A Postcolonial Theological Reading of the Philippines: Church-State Relation and a Familia Dei Response,' in *Religion, Authority and the State*, eds. L.D. Lefebure (Palgrave, 2016), pp. 55-73; and Pascal D. Bazzell, *Urban Ecclesiology: Gospel of Mark, Familia Dei and a Filipino Community facing Homelessness* (Ecclesiological Investigation Series, New York and London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

Having lived in Davao City under Duterte's rule for many years, I have experienced both the good and the dark side of his reign. In those times extra-judicial killings were a regular occurrence. I was there when several of the youth I disciplined were killed for petty thefts by the so-called Davao Death Squad. On the other hand, I have been astonished at the growth and overall good development of the city in the 15 years I lived there. Prior to Duterte's rule, I would not have been safe as a foreigner roaming the city. Duterte's strict rules made Davao city a prosperous place where he incorporated changes throughout different sectors. It is for this reason that I believe the political future of the Philippines looks brighter with having somebody in power who understands Mindanao and does not belong to the oligarchy families that have systematically exploited and oppressed the Filipino people. A man who has proven himself in how he cares for the people in Mindanao, including the Moro people and not merely his or his own family's interest. One who has pointed out the hypocrisy of the political institutions as well as the Church institutions, and rightly called forth for appropriate changes. He is not afraid to address the neo-colonial powers still operating within his own land and standing up against those powers like, for example seen in his demeaning remarks to Obama to look first at his own injustice with the police shooting of the blacks before judging the Philippines. It is easy to address injustice in the other, while blinded by injustices taking different shapes in our own nations. Like the human rights and dignities violated at the shores and lands of Europe through the refugee crisis or on the streets in America from law enforcers. We could be quick to see the injustice in the other while paying no attention to our own contexts (Matthew 7:1-5). Human rights

and dignity is always to be protected, yet, the process of justice might take different shapes in other contexts.

The church and politics are in a *kairos* moment in the Philippines. The church needs to continue to work closely with the new administration in addressing injustice, oppression and poverty in the nation. This not only being prophetic to the ill and corruption of the government, but also, being open to be transformed through repentance of their own ill, corruption, and selfishness. There might be new church buildings, prospering pastors, expensive short term trips abroad, membership retreats, etc. that have been more important than engaging with the grassroots issues of great injustice, oppression and poverty, especially also for the Moro people. This is a crucial moment for the church and the current political atmosphere to work towards the overall good of the Philippines. It seems to me that Duterte's presidency has so far brought many good impulses of justice for an overall corrupt and oppressive structure. Yet, the overall good of the

Philippines is paid by a steep price of those living at the margins. The Filipino church should not forget that God is a God of the least. His heart is for marginalized, the rejected, the drug addicts, the prostitutes, the criminals. It is in this places where Duterte's presidency is harsh, demeaning and unjust that the Church of the Philippines is called to express compassion and justice. God's justice is imperative for every man, woman, and child because they are human, made in God's image.

Pascal Bazzell

Pascal D. Bazzell is Affiliate Assistant Professor of Intercultural Theology and Mission Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary (USA) and the Representative for the “Church in Dialog” (mission, ecumenical, interreligious dialog and international development) of the Evangelical-Reformed Church, St. Gallen in Switzerland. He served with YWAM (1998-2004) and then OMF (2004-2014) in Davao City, Philippines. He was mainly involved in training, church planting and community development. He is married to Karina ‘Kaye’ R. Bazzell, and they have three children.



