

**HISTORIC PEACE CHURCHES  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
SOLO, INDONESIA  
DECEMBER 2 – 7, 2007**

Theme:

**“PEACE IN OUR LAND”  
*Historic Peace Churches  
In the Asian Context of Religious Pluralism, Poverty and Injustice  
(Deuteronomy 16: 20)***

Background:

Aloysius Pieris, a Christian theologian from Sri Lanka declared “The Asian reality was described as interplay of Asian religiousness and poverty”<sup>1</sup>. These are the two realities that churches in Asia must deal with in order for them not only to be churches *in* Asia but as well as Churches *from* Asia<sup>2</sup>. Pieris’ call was responded to by Andreas Yewangoe, an Indonesian theologian and the current president of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia. In his book, he summarizes the significance of Pieris’s point of view:

Though poverty and poor people can be found everywhere in the world, not to mention in the First Worlds (West Europe and United States/ North America), the poverty in Asia (as well as in Africa) is nevertheless more apparent. More than three quarters of the poor live in Asia. In addition to that, poverty usually has a strong connection with human religiosity. Case in point, Asian countries are known as very religious nations. Not only because most of the world religions originated in Asia, such as Hinduism and Buddhism in India, Kong Hu Cu and Taoism in China, Shintoism in Japan, Judaism and Christianity in West Asia and Islam in Arabia, but also because Asian people, in their search of comprehending and overcoming their poverty, will generally relate it with their religiosity<sup>3</sup>.

Apparently, poverty and religious pluralism are connected to each other. This connection can be either cumulatively destructive or constructive. While human religiosity should bring liberation and enlightenment for people both personally and socially, careless interpretations of human religiosity may provide fatalistic answers in the lives of the poor, the oppressed and the victims. It has been a fact that religious pluralism can create destructive conflicts for human life. When religious conflicts are exploited by political power that is

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<sup>1</sup> Aloysius Pieris, S. J., *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, (New York: 1988), p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> Aloysius Pieris, “Toward An Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines”, *Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity*, ed. Virginia Fabella (Maryknoll: 1980), p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> A. A. Yewangoe, *Theologia Crucis di Asia*, (Jakarta: 1983), p. 1.

demoralized by fundamentalist jargon, an absolute barrier between one religion and another will be erected. In this context, a religion will exclude various interpretations of truth within its own institution as well as the value of truth of other religions. In Asia, where the implications of religion and poverty are prominent, a clear and deep understanding of these issues is essential so that people will be able to accept and experience them. Churches, especially churches involved in this conference, churches which often declare themselves as agents of the Kingdom of God, must also seek this understanding.

In the global discourse, poverty and religious pluralism are not the only issues in Asia. Countries in Asia are also full of upheaval and other dynamics. Globally, the wide scale upheaval contains both internal and external factors that are interconnected with poverty and religious pluralism. Therefore, the conflict in the Middle East will have a significant impact on the Southeast Asian situation as well as Asia in general. For example, in Indonesia (where the HPC will be held), military friction and social politics in relation to the issues of Israel – Palestine, Iraq - United States, Iraq - The United Nations Security Council, Al Qaeda and Westerns, have an important influence on the internal affairs of Indonesia. When the situation in Middle East is related to Western hegemony, it creates issues of injustice for some social- political powers in Indonesia. This condition becomes more complicated when these issues are related to religious attempts to verify, defend, reject or even to justify individual or group interests and interpretations of truth. These issues may contradict the struggle of a national group when the international group shifts from being a strong to a weak power based on its social-political demography.

Additionally, injustice often victimizes women and children. At times religious principles contradict the common understanding of human rights. For example, Middle Eastern religious concepts often conflict with the Western concept of humanism. Certain patriarchal cultural values in orthodox religions often restrict human freedom especially for women, both culturally and socio-economically. Therefore, multi-dimensional repression and violence against those who are powerless (in terms of number and bargaining position in society) often takes place.

In this 2007 conference, these three issues will be presented creatively and actively as we work toward peace. The problem is complex. As such, it will be an interesting and challenging discussion about a multi-faceted issue. Perry Yoder begins to explore this way of peace:

Biblical peace, shalom, refers first of all to well-being and material prosperity, signified by the presence of physical well-being and the absence of the threat of war, disease, or famine (Jeremiah 33:6, 9). Second, peace refers to just relationships signified by the right relation between people and between nations, as well as to social order and harmony in which there is no oppression or exclusion in any form (Isaiah 54:13, 14). Third, peace also refers to the moral integrity of a person in whom there is straightforwardness or no deceit, fault, or blame (Psalm 34:13, 14). In the New Testament, peace - eirene - receives yet another nuance. It is related to God and the good news from God, Notice the

expression “the God of peace” (Romans 15:33; 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 3:16; Hebrew 13:20)<sup>4</sup>.

Peace is indispensable for all nations in our world; it is something for which we all hunger. Although peace can be interpreted many ways, it can be considered the ultimate goal of human civilization. In other words, there is a calling for people to realize the value of peace in the multi-dimensional human network. In this case, historical peace churches should leverage their historical momentum to share their profound experience, innovation and knowledge as long as they exist in the world. Since peace is both a personal and social issue that includes the cognitive, affective, psychological, physical and even systematic dimensions of life, we should be aware that the calling to bring peace in the Asian context includes addressing issues of poverty, religious plurality and injustice. These issues are vital.

Consequently there is a need for an ongoing dialectic that addresses the relationship between concepts and creativity. The values and practical matters of this dialectic approach should be tested, shared and embodied. Although humanitarian conflicts in various forms and contexts keep taking place, we must remain committed to being the individual and collective conscience of the world through deep, inspiring and continuous empathy and advocacy toward a new and contextual horizon. For this reason, the call to the Church is to be rooted in the world yet oriented to God’s will: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

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<sup>4</sup> Perry Toder, *Shalom: The Bible’s Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press; 1987), p. 10 – 16, as quoted in Alan Kreider, Eleanor Kreider, and Paulus Widjaja, *A Culture of Peace, God’s Vision for the Church* \*Intercourse, PA: 2005), p. 28.